

# Discourses of Language and Nation in Britain and France 1870-1914

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## Abstract

The period between 1870 and 1914 can be seen in many ways as the dawn of modern linguistics. It was also during this era that many of the features of British and French society as we know it today begin to emerge. This thesis explores the relationship between these two sets of developments. In fact, it is argued that these developments are so closely intertwined that it is more accurate to see them as two parts of the same process: to borrow a famous analogy, ideas about language and their wider social context are as inseparable as the two sides of a sheet of paper.

The scale and pace of change in Britain and France during this era is truly breathtaking. Few periods have produced as many advances in language study. Even leaving to one side the pathbreaking work of Saussure, dialectology, semantics and modern phonetics were all effectively founded during this era. This was also the era of Murray's New English Dictionary, Littré's Dictionnaire de la langue française, and Brunot's Histoire de la langue française. Twentieth-century research into the history of English and French continues to build on the foundations set down by these monumental works of linguistic scholarship.

Moving beyond language study, we can again see how the years between 1870 and 1914 laid the foundations on which the twentieth century would build. It was an era of democratisation, urbanisation, and of mass education and literacy. It was an age of globalisation and imperial expansion: this was the era of the scramble for Africa, when European powers carved up a whole continent between them. But the extent to which this period can be seen as the birth of modern society is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that this was the era which produced the motor car, the telephone, the aeroplane, the cinema, the radio and a host of other innovations which were to dominate life in the twentieth century.

This thesis examines four areas in which discourses of language, in Britain and France, interact with these wider developments, specifically with the growth of the material and ideological framework of the nation. Chapter one takes as its starting point attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm in language study. Chapter two focuses on dialect study, examining its links with discourses of nation. Chapter three moves to the global and imperial dimension, focusing on the ways in which ideas about language were bound up with wider concerns about empire and about national status in the world. Finally, chapter four focuses on the work carried out on the history of English and French, relating this work to some of the impassioned contemporary debates about national history and identity.



No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Kevin Sullivan obtained a degree in English and French in 1990 from the University of Southampton. In 1991 he obtained a Masters, with distinction, in the School of Modern Languages at Southampton. The Masters course was entitled "Culture and Society in Contemporary Europe" and involved research into topics as diverse as Language in the Maghreb, Definitions of European Culture, French Foreign Policy in the Middle East, and Nation and Religion in post-1789 France.

From 1992 to 1993 he worked in the Research Unit at Oxfam, carrying out research into a wide range of development issues, especially Third World debt. Research for the PhD began in autumn 1993. In addition to the work conducted for this thesis, he has given several conference papers and research presentations and has taught widely in English and Modern Languages at the Universities of Southampton and Manchester.

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K.S.  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ideas about language are rarely just about language. Such ideas frequently overlap with questions of wider significance. One obvious example is the way in which language is often inextricably linked to questions of identity, whether in personal, regional, class, national or any other terms. Another example, related to the first, is attitudes to accents. In his preface to Pygmalion Shaw wrote that 'it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him'(1912:195). This may have been something of an exaggeration, even in Shaw's day; nevertheless, debates about accent can still arouse strong passions (and not merely among English men). The same applies to the written language, especially in the case of spelling. The point is that in all these examples, much more is felt to be at stake than language. In extreme cases, as one group of observers has put it, a split infinitive can look like the end of civilisation as we know it (McCrum et al 1989:15).

This project emerges from a longstanding interest in the way in which ideas about language relate to much wider issues. Examples of this complex and varying relationship will be provided in the pages that follow. It is the aim of this thesis to examine links between discourses of language and other cultural, political and social developments, specifically discourses of nation, within Britain and France between 1870 and 1914.

It is important at the outset to attempt to clarify some of the key terms which will feature in this discussion. One such term is "discourse". This is not a thesis on language and nation; it is a thesis about discourses of language and nation. The distinction is crucial. In examining "discourses" we shall be focusing attention on what a given culture or society says about itself, and on the ways in which reality is constructed and represented. It is this focus on what is thought and

expressed, and on representations rather than reality, which, broadly speaking, characterises “discourse”. Whether or not this “discourse” matches what we, as later observers, perceive to be the reality is of lesser importance. To take an obvious example, which we shall explore at length in chapter two, late-nineteenth-century Britain was represented in its dominant discourse of nation as overwhelmingly rural. Indeed this way of imagining the nation remains popular in our own day. In both eras, of course, the rural image of nation can hardly be seen as an accurate reflection of reality: the romanticised image of thatched cottages around the village green was the product of an urban world. Where appropriate, as in this most extreme of examples, we shall examine the gap between discourse and reality. In general, however, it is the world of discourse which will form the basis of our discussion: our concern will be with what was thought and written about language and nation, rather than with language and nation in themselves.

In the case of language it is particularly important to draw attention to the emphasis on “discourses”. Our central thesis is that discourses of language overlap in many ways with questions of wider significance. To say this is merely to point out that ideas relating to language cannot be examined as though they existed in a vacuum, uncontaminated by external influences. This is not to say, however, that language cannot or should not be analysed independently of its social context, or that the only valid approach in linguistics is sociolinguistics. The views of universal grammarians such as Chomsky on this matter have generated an enduring and healthy controversy within linguistic scholarship. That controversy is not our concern here. What would be of interest about Chomsky’s work, from the standpoint of this analysis, is not the linguistic debate about whether or not he is right to view language independently of its context, but the ways in which his work on language relates to other factors, such as contemporary ideas about the human mind, or assumptions about the existence of a universal human condition. Again, the emphasis is on discourses of language.

A second point about the term “discourses” in relation to language is that it has been deliberately chosen because of its breadth. Throughout the thesis we examine developments within the field of what was coming to be called “linguistics”. However, our attention is by no means restricted to scholarly ideas about language. What makes language such a powerful touchstone for wider debates is the fact that views about its nature, use and abuse are not confined to those who study it. “Discourses of language” therefore encompasses popular as well as scholarly ideas.

Given that this thesis grew from an interest in the relationship between ideas about language and their wider social context, the period from 1870 to 1914 was chosen as the focus because it was an era in which those ideas, and that context, were undergoing such fundamental and wide-ranging change. Beginning with the context, in many ways it was during this period that some of the principal features of British and French society as we know it today were beginning to emerge. A brief sketch of some of the changes and advances which occurred within the period will confirm the extent to which it can be seen as the dawn of the modern world.

Many of the technological trappings of modernity were pioneered during this period. Daimler and Benz were putting together the world’s first motor cars, and Dunlop began mass-production of the bicycle. Marconi produced the first radio in 1896; in the same year the world’s first cinema opened in London. From the 1880s onwards the North American railroad and refrigerated ships meant that even perishable food could be transported to Europe from distant continents; the price paid for cheaper food was fewer jobs in agriculture, with the result that the flight from the land in Britain and France accelerated still further. Across the Atlantic, another kind of flight was occurring for the first time, as the Wright brothers were laying the foundations of modern aviation. And the way in which much of the energy, talent and money which spurred the process of innovation was increasingly gravitating towards America is symbolised in the fact that it

was in Boston, on 7 March 1876, that the Scottish émigré Graham Bell was applying for the patent for his revolutionary new invention, the telephone.

In political and social terms the changes were no less fundamental. In Britain, this was the era which saw the rise of the Labour movement and the decline of the Liberals. In France, 1870 marked the beginnings of the Third Republic in place of the Second Empire. More significantly still, in both countries this period can be seen as the dawn of democratic society. In Britain successive Reform Acts (1867, 1884, 1918) meant that the electorate grew from 1.4 million in 1866 to over 20 million in 1918. In France, universal male suffrage had been re-introduced in 1871. These extensions of the franchise were made necessary by the accelerating pace of social change. In both countries, urbanisation continued to increase. Though this process was far more advanced in Britain than in France, both were, by the end of the period, nations of towns and cities. They were also, increasingly, nations of factories rather than farms. Between 1870 and 1914, the manufacturing output of Europe as a whole increased by 400% (Anderson 1972:32). A modernising economy needed a more highly-trained workforce; this was one of the reasons for the introduction of universal educational provision in Britain and France during this period.

One further feature of this period, which prompted, or at least hastened, some of the other changes we have described, needs to be highlighted. This was the emergence of Germany as the dominant power on the European continent after it was unified under Bismarck in 1871. This seismic shift at international level exerted an enormous influence over a range of social, political and cultural developments in Britain and France. Educational provision is one example; in both countries, part of the impetus for this came from a widespread desire to keep up with the Germans. More significantly given the focus of this discussion, for Britain and France, the emergence of Germany (and, in the British case in particular, the parallel rise of the United States), was arguably the single most important factor contributing to a widespread sense of insecurity about national status and influence.



If the developments outlined above contributed to forging the modern, integrated national units that we know today, they also generated powerful ideologies of nationhood. Colls and Dodd (1986) have highlighted the ways in which the visions of “Englishness” still dominant today derive largely from the late nineteenth century. The same could be said to some extent of ideas of Britishness. In France, Weber (1977) has argued that this era sees the national dimension becoming increasingly important, turning ‘peasants into Frenchmen’. The advent of mass education, together with the accelerating decline in the importance of religion as a focus of identity, helped to ensure that these ideas of nationhood became diffused far more widely throughout the population. In short, in many ways, this era saw the foundation of the nation as we experience it, and as we imagine it, in the late twentieth century.

The foundations on which the twentieth century would build were also being laid within language study. Modern linguistics is often held to have begun at the end of the period, with Saussure’s Cours de Linguistique Générale (1916). Yet, without denying the enormous contribution made by Saussure, it is important to recognise, as Saussure himself did, that in many ways he built on what had gone before. The importance of Bréal’s work in particular deserves to be given greater emphasis. As we shall see, some of the key theoretical precepts underpinning the work of Saussure were first mapped out by Bréal: the notion that language was not an organism but a social institution is one example which, as we shall see in chapter one, is of particular significance for our purposes.

Another vital development in linguistic scholarship during this period, which again exerted a major influence over Saussure, was the pathbreaking work of the Neogrammarians at Leipzig from the late 1860s onwards. Although their work is not explored in detail, it forms the backdrop to much of the other work in Britain and France which we shall be examining: the shift in focus from the written to the spoken word, especially significant in British language study, is one development which owes much to Neogrammarian principles. When we recall

that this was also the period which saw the founding of modern dialectology and lexicography, together with an unprecedented amount of work on the history of English and French, we can see that there have been few periods which have generated as much productive activity within language study as the years between 1870 and 1914.

This period can therefore be seen in many ways as both the dawn of modern British and French society, and as the founding era of modern linguistics. Consequently, a project which examined the way in which discourses of language shaped and were shaped by the wider social and ideological changes of the period seemed especially relevant and important. As ever, this project builds on what has gone before. Aarsleff (1983) has charted the development of linguistic ideas in England between 1780 and 1860. In this thesis, however, not only is the period under discussion slightly later, but there is also a far greater emphasis on relating linguistic scholarship to its historical context. Koerner has underlined the importance of context, arguing that 'linguistics, especially during the nineteenth century when scholars tried to establish the study of language as an autonomous discipline, has....been influenced by the particular intellectual climate of a given period' (1989:205). One of the aims underlying this project is to go one step further than Koerner, and to analyse the ways in which 'the intellectual climate of a given period' is itself related to concrete developments in the social and political domain. As such, we shall be dealing as much with intellectual, cultural, and social and political history as with ideas about language; this is a thesis which moves between as well as within areas of academic interest.

This wide-ranging interdisciplinary approach has already been usefully applied to ideas of nation in France and Britain during the period by Weber (1977) and Colls and Dodd (1986) respectively. Such an approach has also been used in examining discourses of language; for example, Crowley (1989) gives a historical account of the way in which notions of standard English have been deployed in British cultural debates. In one sense, this project emerges from a

combination of these influences, taking the focus on late-nineteenth-century discourses of nation from Weber and Colls and Dodd, and sharing Crowley's emphasis on the importance of discourses of language. But it is more than a synthesis of past work. In focusing on the overlap of discourses of language and nation in areas such as dialect study and attitudes to language and global status, this thesis aims to explore in detail territory which has hitherto received little attention. Moreover, its twin focus on Britain and France is a novel and particularly useful way of highlighting the specificities and the similarities which can be observed within the linguistic traditions and cultural histories of these two nations. At a time when the European dimension is taking on ever greater importance in our politics and culture, a project which crosses geographical as well as disciplinary boundaries seems especially appropriate.

Finally, some details about the methodology and structure should be mentioned. Each of the four chapters takes as its starting point a particular area in which ideas about language can be related to broader discourses of nation. Britain and France are examined separately in each chapter, although comparisons and contrasts between the two countries are made throughout the thesis.

Chapter one serves partly as a general overview of some of the major themes in contemporary language study which we shall be addressing in later chapters. However, it also has a theme of its own, namely, attitudes within Britain and France to what will be called the naturalistic paradigm. This was a prominent feature of linguistic scholarship throughout the nineteenth century. We shall focus on the very different attitudes to this paradigm in each country, suggesting that the differences can only be explained with reference to broader cultural values and to developments in the political context.

Chapter two deals with discourses relating to dialect. We consider the process of linguistic standardisation, highlighting the paradox that dialect was simultaneously being studied and stigmatised on an unprecedented scale. We also examine the discourses of nation which were dominant in Britain and

France respectively. In France, the dominant ideology of nation under the Third Republic was bound up with the legacy of 1789. One of its central features was an emphasis on the inviolable unity of the Republic. The trend towards standardisation could be portrayed as bringing the reality of nation into line with the well-established rhetoric. In Britain, in contrast, the dominant discourse of nation at the end of the nineteenth century was becoming ever further removed from the reality. A nation which was ever more urbanised and standardised began to see itself as ever more rural and diverse. Against this backdrop, and recognising that neither discourses of nation nor trends within language study are monolithic, we suggest that, broadly speaking, dialect study in each country served to reinforce and reflect these very different discourses of national identity.

In chapter three we broaden our discussion beyond the geographical boundaries of Britain and France, and focus on attitudes to the global role and status of English and French respectively. We shall argue that fears about the fate of the language throughout the world can be detected in both countries, and that such fears were closely bound up with wider concerns about their position in the world. The key point which will be demonstrated, however, is that the nature of those fears about the language was very different. British concern centred around the prospect of losing control over a language that was spreading at astonishing speed; in France, in contrast, the principal worry was that the language was not spreading quickly enough, mainly due to a decline in the relative number of French-speakers throughout the world.

In chapter four, in one sense, we shall be crossing historical boundaries, focusing on work carried out on the history of English and French respectively. In Britain and France, one of the most striking aspects of linguistic scholarship in the last third of the nineteenth century is the proportion of work devoted to charting the development of what was seen as the national language. In both countries, this formed part of a much more general resurgence of interest in the past which can be identified in the cultural values of the period. We shall look at the narratives of language, ancestry and identity which were being promoted within each

country and at the ways in which contemporary work on the history of the language was related to different accounts of the history of the nation.

Before turning to chapter one, there is one brief task which remains. This is to underline that working on this project, at a personal level, has been a fascinating and extremely rewarding experience. From the outset I was determined to adopt a wide-ranging interdisciplinary perspective, drawing together work from various academic fields. Maintaining this perspective over the past three years has often been extremely demanding. However, moving back and forth between Britain and France and between subjects such as cultural history, linguistics and historiography has also been an exhilarating and fruitful intellectual exercise. Proof of this is in the fact that my interest in the period and issues examined in this thesis remains undimmed, even after three years of research. My hope is that I have been able to communicate this interest and fascination, and that my thesis proves as enjoyable and stimulating to read as it has been, over the past three years, to research and write.

## **Chapter One**

### **Discourses of Language and Nature**

This opening chapter has two main objectives. It is both a first chapter and an introduction. In common with the other chapters it is focused on a particular theme within language study, and is aimed at illustrating how that theme relates to developments within the wider social and political context. The only respect in which the first chapter differs from the others is that the shifts in focus between language study and its context have been made deliberately explicit. This has been done in order to clarify at the outset the methodological framework which underpins the whole thesis.

The theme examined in this chapter encompasses several important developments within late-nineteenth-century language study. These include the shift from the written to the spoken word as the basis of linguistic investigation, and the emergence of an influential group of Francophone scholars, notably Bréal, who effectively laid the foundations on which Saussure was later to build. Without ignoring the specificity of such developments, they are examined as parts of the same chapter on the grounds that they are all related in some way to what will be called the naturalistic paradigm. This is used as an umbrella term to describe any framework of ideas and assumptions within language study which is in any way related to a discourse of nature or to notions of the natural. For example, the term naturalistic paradigm is applied to linguistic scholarship which borrows terminology or a methodology from the natural sciences. But it is also applied to the view widespread within and beyond language study that certain linguistic varieties are more natural than others. The ways in which attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm within language study reflect wider cultural and political debates is thus the specific theme of this chapter.

Given the breadth of this theme, our analysis in this chapter will also serve to introduce many other issues to which we shall have cause to return in later chapters. For example, the emphasis on the supposedly natural spoken word also plays a key role in accounting for the extraordinary growth in dialect study, a phenomenon which is examined in detail in chapter two. Thus, in addition to discussing attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm, this chapter will also provide a general overview of the linguistic developments taking place within the period, locating them firmly within their social and cultural context.

We shall proceed to examine reactions to the naturalistic paradigm, and examples of its use, in Britain and France respectively. We shall argue that this paradigm was broadly embraced in Britain, where its most usual expression is in the widespread view, imported from Neogrammarian work, that the spoken word was natural in a way which the written word was not. We suggest that this privileging of the natural within language study reflects a much wider turn towards the rural within the dominant cultural values of the era, and that this in turn is prompted by changes in the social context, specifically the growing trend towards democratisation and urbanisation. In France, despite the existence of some similarities with Britain, the situation is quite different. The most significant difference is that in comparison with Britain, use of the naturalistic paradigm was comparatively rare. We shall suggest that this can only be explained with reference to wider debates and concerns in post-1870 France. We shall endeavour to show that the written legacy of Latin, together with the recent and traumatic experience of defeat at the hands of Germany in 1870, made many French language scholars, especially theorists, highly skeptical about the validity and value of the naturalistic paradigm.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, when this paradigm was used by French scholars, it was used differently. The view that the spoken word was natural, widespread in Britain, was rare in France. But some key French writers on language nevertheless drew on the naturalistic paradigm in their methodological assumptions, following Schleicher's view that language was a living

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<sup>1</sup> Although France had been at war, strictly speaking, with Prussia, "Germany" is used for the sake of consistency. As Joll (1978:1) notes, all the German states had been involved in the conflict. German unification officially occurred in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on 18 January 1871, when the King of Prussia was proclaimed Emperor of Germany.

organism which should be studied using the framework and procedures of the natural sciences. We shall demonstrate these claims in the course of our analysis of each country. But before we look at the ways in which the naturalistic paradigm was viewed in Britain and France, it is important that we should provide a brief overview of its development and its principal characteristics.

### **The Naturalistic Paradigm**

The naturalistic paradigm has a long history within language study. In addition, as Nerlich (1990) has argued, it has taken many forms throughout that history. Indeed, it should be emphasised that the term is not intended to denote a single coherent approach, but a collection of approaches which, however different in other respects, share the assumption that nature can be used as a legitimate frame of reference within language study. Although it is undoubtedly possible to find earlier examples of references to nature in ideas about language, it was in the nineteenth century that the naturalistic paradigm became institutionalised as a familiar feature of linguistic scholarship. It was in this century that the pioneering work of scholars such as Rask, Bopp and Grimm effectively laid the foundations of comparative philology, making the study of language into a subject in its own right. But the comparative method which was so central to the establishment of language study as an autonomous subject was itself adapted from the natural sciences. As Lehmann (1992:28) shows, Schlegel's pioneering work of 1808 is heavily indebted to Cuvier's advances in comparative anatomy. Similarly, when the early comparative philologists were searching for terminology to describe the linguistic material they were examining, they frequently turned to the natural sciences; the notions of "root" and "stem", still fundamental within linguistics, serve as a reminder of the way in which language study, at its very inception, borrowed a vocabulary and a methodology drawn from observation of the natural world.

If the naturalistic paradigm was a feature of comparative philology even in its earliest phase at the start of the nineteenth century, its apogee occurred in the middle



of the century, most obviously in the work of Schleicher. His predecessors had borrowed from natural science; but for Schleicher, who was an accomplished botanist as well as a linguistic scholar, language study was itself a natural science:

Languages are organisms of nature; they have never been directed by the will of man; they rose and developed themselves according to definite laws; they grew old, and died out. They too are subject to that series of phenomena which we embrace under the name of "life". The science of language is consequently a natural science; its method is generally altogether the same as that of any other natural science.

cited in Koerner 1983: 20

The extent to which Schleicher freely associated language study and natural science can also be seen in the fact that the essay from which the above extract is taken was aimed at using linguistic evidence to verify Darwin's theory of evolution. As Koerner argues, 'Schleicher pushed the analogy between linguistics and the natural sciences to its extreme' (1989:251). But Schleicher was by no means the last to make use of the naturalistic paradigm. In fact, it was largely thanks to his influence that it remained central within the work of those scholars who broke with so many of the other assumptions which had underpinned earlier periods of language study: the Neogrammarians.

In their emphasis on the psychological rather than the purely formal properties of language, and in their rejection of the notion of growth and decay in favour of a vision of change as constant and uniform, the Neogrammarians represent a clear break with Schleicher and with the vast majority of linguistic scholarship which preceded them. It is for these reasons that they were seen in many quarters as iconoclasts, and given the label of "Junggrammatiker".<sup>2</sup> However, as Koerner (1989) has demonstrated, the work of the Neogrammarians displays continuity as well as innovations. For our purposes, the most significant example is their faithful adherence to the naturalistic paradigm.<sup>3</sup> This can be seen in their insistence that sound laws are as fixed and inexorable as any found in the physical sciences; as we

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<sup>2</sup> This label was applied to them by their opponents.

<sup>3</sup> This point is made by Nerlich (1990:14).

shall see below, this deterministic view of language change was to be rejected for a variety of reasons by French theorists such as Bréal. Another example is the view that certain linguistic varieties represented language in its natural state. The belief that some varieties could legitimately be described as natural, and that they should be distinguished from others which had become contaminated by artificial external influences, can clearly be seen in the words of Paul; 'we must draw a distinction between the natural development of language and the artificial which is brought about by means of a conscious directing interference'(1891:xliv). The fact that the naturalistic paradigm represents a clear continuity between what were and are otherwise seen as two very different traditions within language study suggests that it can justifiably be described as a central feature of linguistic scholarship throughout the nineteenth century.

It is worth highlighting two important points about this paradigm, both of which will play a significant part in explaining its reception and use in the two countries. The first point is that it is closely identified with German scholarship. This is not to claim that all its exponents were German; as we shall see below, it was embraced, though in different ways and to varying degrees, by British and French scholars. Nor is it to claim that the naturalistic paradigm was used in all German work on language; as Leopold (1984:417) points out, it was clearly rejected by Pott for example. However, as the cases of Schlegel, Schleicher and the Neogrammarians demonstrate, it remained closely linked to German linguistic scholarship. As we shall see below, this significantly influenced the way it was perceived within French language study in particular. The second point about the naturalistic paradigm is that by definition its assumptions and terminology extend beyond the field of language study. Contrasts between the "natural" and the "artificial", or notions of "growth" and "decay", clearly have a much more general application. Although this point appears self-evident, it is important that it should nevertheless be highlighted; for it was the wider assumptions underpinning the naturalistic paradigm which help explain the dominant attitudes to it in Britain and France. In other words, attitudes to language were rarely just about language: it is a point which will emerge repeatedly throughout our discussion.

Thus we have given a brief overview of the development and use of the naturalistic paradigm within linguistic scholarship during the nineteenth century. We shall shortly shift the focus towards language study within late-nineteenth-century Britain. This will be accompanied by a second narrowing of focus. For in examining the British context we shall also be dealing with one specific aspect and use of the naturalistic paradigm: the view that certain forms of language can be seen as natural, and others as artificial. For our purposes, what is most significant about this distinction between natural and artificial is that, in Britain in particular, it was widely felt to correspond to the distinction between speech and writing. In other words, speech was seen as being natural in a way which writing was not. This assumption underlay much of the work carried out within language study in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. Before examining the British context, however, it should first be underlined that the shift towards the spoken word on the grounds that it corresponded to a more natural state of language was by no means confined to Britain. Indeed, the shift towards speech is most closely associated with the Neogrammarians. It was they who, believing that the spoken word represented language in what Paul had called its 'natural development', gave the shift towards the spoken word a solid theoretical foundation.<sup>4</sup> From its inception, the new science of comparative philology had been based squarely on the notion that the workings of language should be investigated with reference to the written word. Even though their aim was often to discover "sound-laws", the method used in the pioneering work of early comparative philologists such as Rask, Bopp and Grimm had involved a new systematic focus on manuscripts and other written records. But the drawbacks of this method are clearly identified by the two principal Neogrammarian linguists, Osthoff and Brugman, in the 1878 preface to their Morphological Investigations:

The older linguistics, as no-one can deny, approached its object of investigation, the Indo-European languages, without first having formed a clear idea of how human speech really lives and develops, which factors are active in

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<sup>4</sup> "No philologist should ever disregard the fact that what is written is not language itself" (Paul 1891:433).

speaking...Languages were indeed investigated most eagerly, but the man who speaks, much too little.

cited in Lehmann 1967: 204

In short, the shift in focus away from the written text and towards the supposedly natural spoken word was by no means an exclusively British phenomenon. However, it is the British context which concerns us here; highlighting the prevalence within British language study of this particular use of the naturalistic paradigm, and examining its links with wider cultural and social developments, is the task to which we now turn.

## **Britain**

### **Nature Embraced**

#### **The Spoken Word as Natural**

The belief that the spoken word was more natural than the written word was not the only manifestation of the naturalistic paradigm within British language study. Some British figures used it in other ways. For example, as Nerlich (1990:12) illustrates, Müller frequently drew on Schleicher's methodology, although in this, as in other respects, he was somewhat inconsistent. The influence of Schleicher can also be seen in the belief held by Montmorency and Mackay that linguistic change was a process of birth, growth and decay.<sup>5</sup> However, far more frequent than examples of Schleicher's naturalistic methodology are cases where the discourse of nature was used as a means of bolstering the legitimacy of speech. Within late-nineteenth-century British language study, it became a central axiom that the spoken word was superior to the written on the grounds that it was more natural. We saw above that the theoretical basis for this view was established by the Neogrammarians. We shall

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<sup>5</sup> "Every language has a life history. It passes through the pains of growth, the activities of fuller life, the pangs of decay" (Montmorency 1911: 276). "Language, being a living thing, must...pass through its infancy, maturity and decay" (Mackay 1888: 690).

now examine the way in which British language study during the nineteenth century clearly reflects the general shift within linguistic scholarship from the written to the seemingly more natural spoken word.

What the Neogrammarians had called 'the older linguistics', with its emphasis on the written word, had been imported into Britain from Germany by Kemble and Thorpe in the 1830s. At that time it was seen by supporters and opponents alike as a radical new development, triggering a dispute between advocates of the new comparative philology and defenders of the established antiquarian tradition. This dispute became known as the Anglo-Saxon controversy. What is most significant for our purposes about this controversy is the fact that it revolved around the most appropriate way of transcribing Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. The centrality of the written word as the starting point for linguistic investigation remained unquestioned. The Anglo-Saxon controversy thus provides one example of the continued primacy of the written word within British linguistic scholarship for much of the nineteenth century, even after the arrival of the new philology from Germany. Another example of the esteem for the written word and for the stability which it supposedly embodied is provided by the figure who stands out as one of the most influential British linguistic scholars of the middle of the nineteenth century:

At present in all languages it is the written word which is the conservative element in them. It is the abiding witness against the mutilations or other capricious changes in their shape which affectation, folly, ignorance, and half knowledge would introduce.

Trench 1855: 173-4

Essentially a populariser rather than an original thinker, Trench played a key role in consolidating some of the findings of the new philology. By the time he was at the height of his influence in the 1850s, the battles of the Anglo-Saxon controversy were over, and it was clear that comparative philology was here to stay. Trench was by no means a whole-hearted believer in the comparative method as practised by Thorpe, Kemble and their German mentors. As Crowley (1989) has argued, the new philology did not take the same path in Britain as it had done on the Continent, and Trench certainly differed markedly in his methodology and perspectives from

mainstream comparative philology, most obviously in his insistence on viewing language study as a means to acquiring other knowledge rather than as an end in itself. There were some aspects of the new philology, however, which Trench was happy to endorse. One of these was its continued emphasis on the written word. This emphasis can be seen throughout the work of Trench (nowhere more clearly than in his definition of language as 'fossil poetry'). In a revealing passage in his book, On the Study of Words, he reiterates the value of the written word:

A word exists as truly for the eye as for the ear, and in an highly advanced state of society, where reading is almost as universal as speaking, as much perhaps for the first as for the last. That in the *written* word moreover is the permanence and continuity of language and of learning, and that the connexion is most intimate of a true orthography with all this, is affirmed in our words, 'letters', 'literature', 'unlettered', even as in other languages by words entirely corresponding to these.

Trench 1853: 180-1

What is most revealing about this extract is the fact that Trench feels compelled to defend the primacy of the written word with such vigour. It suggests that his views were increasingly coming under attack. As Trench indicates in his insistence on the importance of 'a true orthography', one of the most powerful lobbies to question the primacy of the written word were the spelling reformers; as we shall see below, theirs was a cause which was to attract a growing number of adherents throughout the nineteenth century. The key point here, however, is to underline the way in which growing enthusiasm for spelling reform formed only one part of a wider shift away from the established assumption that language represented what Trench had called 'permanence and continuity'. Trench was not the only observer to be fighting a rearguard action in the face of increasing attack. In his Lectures on the English Language, published a few years after Trench's major works, Marsh reiterates the central role played by the written word:

The importance of a permanent literature, of authoritative standards of expression, and, especially, of those great, lasting works of the imagination, which, in all highly-cultivated nations, constitute the "volumes paramount" of

their literature, has been too generally appreciated to require here argument or illustration. Suffice it to say, they are amongst the most potent agencies in the cultivation of the national mind and heart, the strongest bond of union in a homogeneous people, the surest holding ground against the shifting currents, the ebb and flow, of opinion and of taste.

Marsh 1860: 17

Despite - or perhaps because of - the confident tone with which Marsh asserts the importance of these 'volumes paramount', we can detect a subtle undercurrent of fear bubbling beneath the surface of this extract, a fear that the 'holding ground' will not hold, and that the 'shifting currents' are moving in what he considers to be the wrong direction. In fact, Marsh's metaphors are deeply significant, as they indicate the nature of the threat which he and Trench perceived and feared. For what most disturbs a writer who sees language in terms of its fixity and stability is the recognition that it also represents fluidity and dynamism. This dichotomy can be traced back to Humboldt's definition of language as at once a stable finished product ('*ergon*'), and an incessant creative process ('*energeia*'). However, as Marsh suggests, the full implications of this view of language as vital and dynamic were only slowly being recognised:

There is a fact of immense moral significance, which seems to have been only in modern, indeed in comparatively recent times, brought into notice ... The fact to which I allude is that language is not a dead, unelastic, passive implement, but a POWER, which, like all natural powers, reacts on that which it calls into exercise.

Marsh 1860: 233-4 [original emphasis]

In other words, far from representing 'permanence and continuity', language was being seen, increasingly, as a 'power', or what Marsh describes elsewhere as an 'informing vital agency' (1860: 647). Language, in short, was dynamic; its supposed stability was merely a temporary illusion.

The most celebrated and influential advocate of the new view of language as dynamic and spoken was the German philologist who held a Chair at Oxford: Max

Müller. Like Trench, Müller's fame rested on his ability to popularise ideas about language. Müller's most famous work, Lectures on the Science of Language, illustrates his ability to convey the finer points of linguistic scholarship to a broad cross-section of the educated Victorian public. But the view of language popularised by Müller was very different from that proposed by Trench. In the first place, Müller drew on theoretical developments, especially the work of Schleicher, to a far greater degree than Trench. The most significant and unbridgeable difference between Trench and Müller, however, revolved around the question as to whether language was a fundamentally written or spoken phenomenon. To make his views on this question graphically clear, Müller drew on apocalyptic imagery and deployed stirring rhetoric which would have been all the more dramatic in its original spoken form:

Literary dialects, or what are commonly called classical languages, pay for their temporary greatness by inevitable decay. They are like stagnant lakes at the side of great rivers. They form reservoirs of what was once living and running speech, but they are no longer carried on by the main current.

Müller 1864: 61

Where Trench had seen permanence, Müller sees only stagnation; though they were more or less contemporaries, the contrast in their views of the written word could hardly be more extreme. And the ground was shifting very markedly in Müller's direction. For at the heart of the new developments in language study lay this emphasis on language as first and foremost a spoken phenomenon. Müller gives the clearest exposition of the new centrality of speech:

Language exists in man, it lives in being spoken, it dies with each word that is pronounced, and is no longer heard. It is a mere accident that language should ever have been reduced to writing, and have been made the vehicle of a written literature.

Müller 1864: 49



This attack on the written word was all the more threatening because it was by no means confined to Müller. Giving the presidential address to the Philological Society in May 1872, six years before Osthoff and Brugmann were to write their preface, Ellis had used markedly similar terms to describe the shift towards the spoken word within language study; 'and thus by degrees the thought grew up in me, that the whole of language was also a thing to be studied in the living speaker, and not in fossil books' (1872:5). The breach with the axioms of an earlier generation is almost deliberate; Trench after all had described language as 'fossil poetry'. As early as 1867, Ellis was beginning to equate language with the spoken word: 'a word is not known till its sound is known' (1867:1).

The new prestige and primacy of the spoken word within British language study can also be seen in the work of another of its major figures, Murray. Speaking to a conference of spelling reformers in his capacity as Vice-President of the Philological Society, Murray outlines what he calls 'things to be aimed at in spelling':

The first is to represent the living word, because that, after all, we are apt to forget, is the language: the marks upon paper are nothing, except as they refer to the living word. Language is sound.

Conference 1878: 16

Murray was to enshrine such views in the single most influential work to have emerged from British language study throughout the late nineteenth century, the New English Dictionary (NED), to which Murray was to devote most of his remaining years.<sup>6</sup> In the preface to volume one of the dictionary, Murray again underlines his belief that 'language is sound': 'the pronunciation is the actual living form or forms of a word, that is, the word itself, of which the current spelling is only a symbolisation' (NED 1888:xxiv). In short, a word did not have to be written in order to count as a word. As Moore expressed it:

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<sup>6</sup> The NED would gradually become known as the Oxford English Dictionary. The first use of the latter was on the title page of the section from 'Deceit' to 'Deject', published in 1895. It became increasingly common, especially once the complete NED plus supplements was published for the first time under the title of OED in 1933.

The word is that which is heard and spoken, not that which is seen and written or printed...the spoken word is the only true subject of etymological inquiry or research; the written word ought, in all cases, humbly to follow it through all its wanderings, to reflect faithfully all its changes.

Moore 1877: 4

Further examples of this privileging of the spoken word will be encountered in other chapters, especially chapter two when we focus on dialect study, the growth of which cannot be properly explained without reference to this new validation of the spoken over the written language. But one obvious sign of the change can be discussed in brief at this point, in order to illustrate the way in which the growing prestige of the spoken word was to exert an influence far beyond theoretical debates in philological journals. Indeed, we have already alluded to this sign of the new primacy of speech: spelling reform.

Spelling reform was a cause which had attracted interest and support long before figures such as Müller, Ellis and the Neogrammarians had begun to shift the focus within language study towards the spoken word.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1844, that crusader against the established orthography, Pitman, had launched the Phonotypic Journal. In 1878, selected articles from this journal, together with other miscellaneous tracts and speeches calling for spelling reform, were gathered into a single volume and published by Pitman's own Phonetic Institute. It is noticeable that many of the earlier articles make little reference to the primacy of speech, preferring to base their calls for reform on the grounds that it would improve efficiency of communication. It was in this sense that one contributor compares spelling reform to the railway network: 'Whatever railways and the facilities for locomotion promise to effect in the material world, it is the object of the Phonetic Society to bring about in the spiritual or mental world' (W.H. 1844:2). A similar emphasis on spelling reform as a modernising step, in keeping with the forward-looking perspective of the mid-Victorian era, can be seen in the words of Pitman himself, speaking at Newcastle in 1859: 'A reform of our spelling and the facilitation of the operation of writing, are as

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<sup>7</sup> Spelling was a major issue as far back as the sixteenth century. Jones (1953) gives a useful overview.

much necessities of the age as are gas, railways, the telegraph and photography' (Pitman 1859:2). In other words, the primacy of speech was not the only argument that could be advanced in favour of spelling reform.

As the shift from writing to speech within language study gathered pace from the 1860s onwards, it was seen as providing additional and welcome support for a change in the established orthography. Indeed, the whole issue of spelling reform was to become more prominent now that the fabled stability of the written word was being undermined. As early as 1867, Ellis recognised that the new primacy given to the spoken word exposed the limitations of the existing orthography. He called for an alternative system which would more faithfully reproduce the sounds of speech:

If philology studies especially the alterations of words as they have passed through the mouths of men in time and place, and endeavours to classify and systematize these alterations by such means as Grimm's Law, or the comparisons in the work of Bopp, Diez etc., it certainly requires an instrument by which they can be expressed.

Ellis 1867: 2

Ellis was not proposing that the existing orthography be replaced, merely that a new system or 'instrument' should be invented for use in language study. His own attempt was called "Palaeotype" and was just one amongst a series of systems devised with the aim of representing sounds more accurately. The name of Melville Bell's system indicates the objective which all were striving to achieve: "Visible Speech".

Yet there were also calls to take the much more radical step of modifying the existing orthography, rather than just devising an alternative to it. In his 'Plea for Spelling Reform', Evans argues that the written alphabet has become alienated from the sounds on which it was originally based: 'people are coming to recognise the truth that alphabetical written language was intended to be a reflex of spoken sounds; that it has no vigor, or even life, when dissociated from these sounds'

(1877:21). The extent to which the existing alphabet was removed from the sounds it expressed was also underlined by Shaw, who famously exposed what he saw as the absurdities of current spelling by pointing out that “fish” could be written as “ghoti”.<sup>8</sup> There was nothing particularly novel about the observation that a gulf existed between written and spoken language; what was new was the fact that this gulf was increasingly seen as a problem. Hoops believed that the gulf between written and spoken English was one of the main features which had been illuminated by the NED: ‘A comparison of the catchword with the phonetic transcription will disclose even to a novice in philology the enormous difference between the written and spoken word in English’(1914:318). The solution to this problem, in Hoops’s view, was the adoption of what he describes as ‘rational spelling’, based on pronunciation. Indeed, a Simplified Spelling Society was set up in 1908, with the objective of implementing such a change.

Despite the many calls for spelling reform, none was forthcoming. One major reason for this was the fact that the NED used established spelling. Given that reformers such as Hoops had believed that the NED had actually served to strengthen the case for spelling reform, this was a major disappointment; interestingly, as we shall see in chapter three, the disappointment was felt even more acutely in the United States, where enthusiasm for spelling reform was widespread.<sup>9</sup> But if the NED helped seal the fate of spelling reform, it nevertheless gave a ringing endorsement of the principle which lay at the heart of the reform movement and of the latest developments in linguistics: the primacy of speech. Ironically, this archetypal canonical work served in some ways to undermine the primacy of written texts in favour of what Murray had called ‘the living word’ of speech. As we have seen, in this respect the NED was perfectly in keeping with the latest philological trends. For Murray’s belief that ‘language is sound’ can be seen as merely one expression of a widespread and far-reaching shift from the written to the spoken word within British language study in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>8</sup> “gh” as in “cough”; “o” as in “women”; and “ti” as in “nation”.

<sup>9</sup> Murray was in favour of limited spelling reforms, but no single alternative system struck him as sufficiently scientific and rigorous to be used in the dictionary.

Returning to our principal theme in this chapter, what is striking about the shift to the spoken word is the extent to which it was portrayed as a shift towards the natural. If we return to the writers whose emphasis on the spoken word was noted above, we can see how they frequently drew on the naturalistic paradigm to support their view. For example, naturalistic metaphors abound in the descriptions of spoken language given by Müller; in the extract quoted above he contrasts the 'stagnant lakes' of the literary dialect with 'living and running speech'. In a similar vein, Ellis turned to the natural sciences to find an analogy for the new focus on the spoken word, describing it as a shift from palaeontology to zoology, starting with the living specimen rather than the fossilised relic. Later in the same address, Ellis called for the 'bookman...to be converted into a natureman', arguing that language should be studied 'in its present life, and not, as hitherto almost exclusively, in its past death' (1872:25-31). Murray also viewed the spoken word as being closer to nature than the written word. In his preface to the NED, he refers to 'the natural order of language, in which speech comes first, and writing is only its symbolization' (NED 1888:xi). The logical conclusion of such a view was that the most natural forms of language were those which were completely unwritten, such as slang and dialect:

The unwritten dialects, and, to some extent, even slang and colloquial speech, approach in character to language in its natural state, aiming only at being expressive, and treating memory and precedent as ministers, not as masters.

NED 1888: viii

In a society which, as we shall see below, placed growing prestige on the natural, this belief that slang and dialect, by virtue of being unwritten, represented the most natural forms of speech, served in no small measure to enhance their status. But leaving to one side for the moment its social and cultural ramifications, the key point to be reiterated here is the way in which the shift from the written to the spoken word was seen by many British observers as a shift from the artificial to the natural, from fossil books to living speech. Already we can begin to see how a development within language study is related to the wider framework of cultural values.

So far we have kept the focus firmly on language study, as though it was isolated from the wider social context in which it takes place. Undoubtedly it would be possible to examine the new emphasis on the spoken word, and the concomitant privileging of the natural, without moving beyond the field of language study. However, as mentioned above, the naturalistic paradigm by definition is not confined to linguistic scholarship. Analysing its impact and use as though it bore little or no relation to wider issues would avoid as many questions as it answers. For example, such an analysis cannot really explain why the shift towards the natural was embraced so wholeheartedly in Britain, especially in comparison to France. To answer questions such as this it is imperative to move beyond the field of language study and examine the wider social, political and cultural context. We have already encountered one issue, spelling reform, where changing ideas about language clearly have much wider ramifications, intersecting with crucial debates about education for example. There are many other such examples of linkage between the shift to the spoken word within language study and the wider context of late-nineteenth-century British society; examining some of those links, and putting language study into history, is the task to which we now turn.

### **The prestige of "the natural" in British cultural values**

When analysed in its wider cultural context, the new emphasis on the spoken word within late-nineteenth-century language study can be seen as one of many examples of a general shift away from the dominant ideas and values of the preceding generation. Writing in 1901, Morris points to a fundamental change in cultural values when he claims that the century in which the foundations of modern industrial society were laid was widely viewed, at its close, as a failure.

The uneasy feeling is abroad that the Nineteenth Century, which has done such wonderful things, and from which things so much more wonderful were hoped, has been on the whole a failure. Fifty years ago men's minds were full of ideals. Some of them

seem to have come to nothing. Others have received a strangely disenchanting fulfilment. Cinder-heaps smoulder where once there were beacon fires. Reaction is everywhere triumphant.

cited in Masterman 1973: xxv

In Morris's account, the world of fifty years before seems as distant as the echoes of a long-lost civilisation. He was by no means the only observer to express reservations about what had been achieved in the course of the nineteenth century. Such misgivings were expressed by many of Morris's contemporaries. At the very time when Britain was being unified and standardised as a modern industrial nation, reaction was everywhere triumphant.<sup>10</sup>

What was this reaction against? Looking back from 1901 Morris compares the situation with the Britain of fifty years previously, 1851. The comparison is significant, for the Great Exhibition of that year was the finest hour of the free-trading, confident Britain which showed off its unquestioned industrial supremacy to the world in the futuristic and definitively modern surroundings of the Crystal Palace. Clearly then, as Morris suggests, in the space of fifty years, a major social and cultural shift had come over the workshop of the world. Such shifts can never be dated with exact precision, but we shall follow Wiener in arguing that it is from the 1860s onwards that we see the beginnings of what he describes as a 'counter-revolution of values' (1985:27).

This counter-revolution can be traced within a wide range of cultural ideas and values. One particularly graphic example is the shift in dominant representations of the city. Mid-Victorian Britain had been proudly defined by Vaughan as 'pre-eminently, an age of great cities' (in Coleman 1973: 87).<sup>11</sup> In stark contrast, in the last third of the century, especially from the 1880s onwards, the city was increasingly seen not so much as a beacon of human civilisation but as a symbol of the corrupting influences of modernity. Concern about the deleterious effects of

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<sup>10</sup> Toynbee's lectures at Oxford in the 1880s played a key part in spreading a negative image of the "industrial revolution", a phrase which he popularised (the OED gives one earlier use of the phrase from Mill in 1848).

<sup>11</sup> Roughly following Burn (1964), I apply "mid-Victorian" to the years between 1850 and 1867.

city life and the “degeneracy” of city dwellers became a stock theme in many fields, prompting the pioneering research into “darkest England” conducted by social explorers such as Booth, Rowntree and Masterman. This turn away from the city can be traced across a whole range of fields, and it provides just one example of the scale of the reaction against the dominant cultural values of mid-Victorian Britain. To give a full analysis of this reaction and to suggest all the possible reasons why it should have occurred would be beyond the scope of this discussion. We can just note in passing, however, that it coincides with an increasing sense that the mid-Victorian age of equipoise and of unbridled national confidence was beginning to slip away. Two factors can be identified as playing a particularly important role in contributing to this climate of anxiety. The first is the changed international situation after 1870, specifically the fear that a newly-united Germany was challenging British supremacy.<sup>12</sup> A nation which saw its dominance and leadership called into question by new threats from overseas rivals turned away from an uncertain future and towards a more reassuring past. New threats also seemed to be emerging from within; for the second factor which prompted a turn towards the stability of an idealised past was the increasing prominence of the working class and the growing clamour for wider electoral and social reform. Young described the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a ‘pageant of domestic peace’ (1953:78); fifteen years later, working-class crowds returned to Hyde Park, this time to demand the vote. As Arnold recognised in *Culture and Anarchy*, first published in 1869, a new and more uncertain era was beginning. Against this backdrop of increasing anxiety, it was understandable that the dominant cultural values of the mid-Victorian era should be called into question. In the eyes of many, the only way for Britain to go from its mid-century position of unprecedented supremacy was downwards.

Irrespective of the precise causes of this shift in cultural values, its significance for our purposes lies in its direction. This is indicated especially clearly in the example of the turn away from the city which we described above. For the turn away from the urban was also a turn towards the rural and the natural. It is this emphasis on

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<sup>12</sup> “There, across the North Sea, not in the armies only, but in the factories, schools and universities of Germany, Late Victorian England instinctively apprehended its rival or its successor” (Young 1953: 164)



the rural and the natural which is the most significant aspect of the counter-revolution in cultural values. One of the most striking paradoxes of this era is the fact that a Britain which was being transformed ever more obviously into a nation of cities should at the same time increasingly come to imagine itself as a nation rooted in a rural past. Williams argues that from the late nineteenth century onwards, 'there is almost an inverse proportion ... between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas' (1973:248). This gulf between the reality and the representation of the nation will be examined in our discussion of dialect study in chapter two. The key point to be reiterated here is that ruralist visions of the nation formed only one part of a much broader cultural shift towards a privileging of the natural. Examples of this can be found across the political spectrum and in every field of cultural activity.<sup>13</sup> Morris, who had noted the triumph of reaction, also owed his popularity to it. The rural theme which Morris and so many others used to inspire their work gave rise to Country Life magazine, founded in 1897 and bought almost exclusively by the urban middle classes. And while the richer members of these classes bought their own country houses, the less wealthy made do with the gardening tips of Gertrude Jekyll which were intended to help give every suburban residence the look of a twee country cottage. Ruralism was rampant in literature, nowhere more obviously than in the packaging of Hardy as the Wessex Poet, the last chronicler of a vanishing "merrie England". Writers on Shakespeare took great pains to ensure that nothing marred the image of the bard as an authentic voice of rural England, penning his mighty words amongst the idyllic surroundings of his native village.<sup>14</sup> Wilde pointed out that 'Shakespeare wrote nothing but doggerel before he came to London, and never penned a line after he left' (in Briggs 1968:356). But, as usual, Wilde was a lone voice, and the dominant vision of Shakespeare provided just one illustration of the shift towards the rural and the natural within the cultural values of late-nineteenth-century Britain.

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<sup>13</sup> 'There were variants of ruralism to suit all political inclinations...in place of the squire, one could idealize the peasant of old' (Wiener 1985:50). Morris, Madox Ford and Masterman are cited as examples of this populist ruralism. See also Merrie England by the socialist Blatchford (1894).

<sup>14</sup> Two prime examples are Ditchfield, P. (1917) The England of Shakespeare, London, Methuen; and Hales, J. (1884) Notes and Essays on Shakespeare, London, Geo. Bell.

By locating developments within language study against this backdrop, we can begin to see how they were closely bound up with much broader changes in cultural ideas. This link can be seen still more clearly in the negative aspect of the shift to the spoken word: the denigration of the written word. Linguistic scholars such as Ellis, Müller and the Neogrammarians had labelled the written word as a fossilised relic in comparison to living natural speech. But the view that written language was a somewhat artificial tongue which was far-removed from the authenticity of speech can also be seen in less scholarly work on the subject of language. Kington-Oliphant highlights the gulf between written and spoken language in his sketch of 'an Englishman of the average type setting to work upon a letter to The Times':

The worthy fellow, when at his own fireside, seldom in his talk goes beyond plain, simple words and short sentences...But our friend would feel himself for ever shamed in the eyes of his neighbours, were he to rush into print in this homely guise. He therefore picks out from his dictionary the most high-sounding words he can find, and he works them up into long-winded sentences.

Kington-Oliphant 1886: 215

Labelling the written language as 'long-winded' was to become an increasingly common means of highlighting its artificiality and, by extension, its inferiority to the 'plain, simple words' of speech. In another example of the way in which such views represented a reaction against the dominant values of the mid-Victorian era, it was the middle class, enjoying its political and cultural heyday during the middle of the century, which found itself vilified most frequently for over-use of the 'high-sounding words' and 'long-winded sentences' of written English. As early as 1861, one writer castigated the middle class for its tendency to use what he calls, pejoratively, 'fine English', in an attempt to create for itself an air of refinement:

It is among the great middle classes that fine English flourishes... To give a familiar instance, while the Eton boys or the labourers' children 'begin their holidays', the 'young

gentlemen of Mr Smith's academy or collegiate institute' 'commence their vacation'; and while he that writes a novel for the upper classes calls his hero Adam Bede, the hero for the middle classes must be Montmorency Fitz-Altamont.

Anon. 1861: 206

As further examples of fine English, the writer cites a reference to fishing as 'piscatorial pursuits', along with The Times's description of a shower of rain at Ascot as a 'pluvial visitation'. Punch viciously lampooned what it saw as this elevated, pretentious and long-winded style of language, illustrating its effects on the plain and simple words of homely English proverbs: 'In the absence of the feline race, the mice give themselves up to various pastimes'; 'More confectioners than are absolutely necessary are apt to ruin the potage' (cited in Jespersen 1943:137). Such attacks on 'long-windedness' and wordiness were to become increasingly common throughout the reviews and journals of the late nineteenth century.

The important point about these attacks is that they can be seen as another expression of the hostility to the written word which we have traced within language study. For wordiness and artificiality were associated first and foremost with the written language. All forms of printed matter stood accused of having severed the language from its roots in the spoken tongue, and of having created an artificial and exclusively written vocabulary which was ever further removed from the popular speech. The most frequent target against which these accusations were levelled was the press. Newspaper journalists, preoccupied with the written rather than the spoken word, were often seen as the worst offenders.<sup>15</sup> Meiklejohn describes how 'a reporter, forgetting his knowledge of "the well of English undefiled", writes of some workmen drinking whisky as "ingurgitating spirituous stimulant"' (1903:127). Fowler's explanation, originally given in 1906, was that a journalist 'thinks the length of his words and his capacity for dealing in the abstract to be signs of a superior mind' (1954:17). In Fowler's view, 'the cure...is reading aloud after

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<sup>15</sup> Jespersen provides some examples of "newspaper writing". To show that this had begun to influence speech, he tells how the young Macaulay, aged four, allegedly turned to a concerned lady after having spilled hot coffee on his legs and said "Thank you madam, the agony is abated" (1943:138-9).

writing'; in other words, to translate the written back to the spoken (1954:309). As Alford expressed it: 'the writers in our journals seem to think that a fact must never be related in print in the same terms in which it would be told by word of mouth'(1888:177).

Attacks on the press were matched by diatribes against the whole culture of books and scholarship. 'Book-learning', once the very basis of cultural authority, now acquired the distinctly pejorative tag which it retains in our own day. The long-winded artificial language which was labelled, contemptuously, as 'Fine English' by one writer was described by many others as 'book-speech'. As we shall see in chapter two, this was a phrase which was frequently used by those who wished to highlight the artificiality of the standard language in comparison with the natural and spoken voices of dialect. But the hostility to books and to the written word can be seen most clearly in the increasing mood of anti-intellectualism throughout the late nineteenth century. This was to reach its peak after the sobering experience of the Boer War, when advocates of national regeneration such as Kipling and Baden-Powell inveighed against what they saw as the emasculating tendencies of modern education. In the words of Turley, writing in 1872; 'a nation of effeminate, enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation's liberties' (cited in Colls and Dodd 1986: 5). It was a view which was shared by many during an era which saw the cultural legitimacy of the written word repeatedly called into question. The fact that this era should also see the importance and prevalence of literacy increasing as never before allows us to identify the decline in the cultural status of the written word as an obvious example of a phenomenon which we shall explore in more detail in chapter two: the growing divergence within late-nineteenth-century Britain between dominant cultural values and the social reality which they purport to represent.

Two related points of contact between language study and the broader cultural context have so far been identified. First, the growing prestige accorded to the spoken word as a supposedly natural form of language is clearly related to a general turn towards the rural and the natural in the dominant cultural values of

late-nineteenth-century Britain. Secondly, and more specifically, we have seen that hostility to the written word can be traced beyond the confines of language study; it is precisely this hostility which underlies the widespread attacks on the jargon of the press and the growing tide of anti-intellectualism. In other words, the shift from written to spoken forms part of a much broader canvas. It cannot be fully understood in isolation from the wider cultural values of the era.

However, if understanding such developments is our objective, then linking language study to its cultural context in this way, though a necessary step, is in itself by no means sufficient. For just as language study cannot be examined apart from the broader framework of cultural values, so those values cannot be properly analysed apart from their social and political contexts. To go no further than the realm of cultural values in seeking to understand developments within language study is to risk giving the impression that such values enjoy some kind of free-floating autonomy. We have already seen that this is not the case, having underlined the way in which the general turn towards reaction and the privileging of the natural should be seen as a response to changing social and political circumstances at a global and national level. And it is this broader social context which will be the focus of our attention now, as we attempt to demonstrate that the shift from written to spoken within language study, and the framework of cultural values of which it forms part, are both products and reflections of a society which was in the throes of fundamental social and political transformation.

### **Nation, Class and the Spoken Word: from cultural values to social context**

If we are to explain the reasons why the shift towards the spoken word was so whole-heartedly embraced in late-nineteenth-century Britain, we must focus in particular on two of the many fundamental changes which were transforming British society during the period. Though closely related, for purposes of analysis we shall discuss them separately. The most important of these changes is the trend towards democratisation. We shall examine this crucial contemporary development below. Before doing so, we shall focus on another

key process of transition which coincided with the move towards democratisation, and which can in many ways be seen as another expression of the same levelling impulse. This transition, which has a more direct relationship to the shift from written to spoken word, was the emergence of English in place of Latin as the principal basis of cultural authority.

The opposition between spoken and written within language study was readily mapped on to the much more public and far-reaching conflict between English and Latin. Just as the authority of the written word in general was being challenged by new developments in linguistic scholarship, so the authority of Latin within British cultural debates was being increasingly called into question. Anti-Latin sentiments were widespread in late-nineteenth-century Britain; we shall encounter examples of such sentiments in language study and elsewhere below. But before looking at examples of the reaction against Latin, we can briefly point to the most obvious and enduring result of the shift which they produced. This was the emergence of English studies as an independent subject. In 1870, Freeman had pointed to the fact that supreme cultural authority was still invested in the Classics, complaining that Oxford was 'hardly aware of the existence of Shakespeare and Chaucer yet' (cited in Murray 1979:247). The situation was slowly to change, and English, the poor man's classics, would only finally win the battle with Latin in the wake of the First World War. It is not our concern here to trace the emergence of English studies in any detail. For our purposes, it is enough to highlight the fact that the shift from Latin to English was one of the most far-reaching and controversial cultural debates of the last third of the nineteenth century. This alone would make it an important factor in any attempt to analyse the context of the shift from the written to the spoken word within language study.

Yet the shift from Latin to English is all the more significant for our purposes because of the terms in which the debate was conducted. In short, Latin, in the minds of most British observers, was inextricably associated with the written word. Latin was the archetypal written language, removed as far as possible

from the spoken word by virtue of the fact that it had no native speakers. Indeed, it was the air of permanence and continuity which it enjoyed as a result of its exclusively written status which had long been the very basis of its authority. However, as we have seen, the status of the written word was being challenged by new developments in linguistic scholarship. Müller and Ellis were highlighting the defects of written language in general terms, but it is hardly surprising that their criticisms could be and were readily applied to the most prominent example of a written language within the national context: Latin. Those writers whose attacks on artificial written language were cited above all display a marked hostility to Latin, or, more accurately, to Latinised words in English.<sup>16</sup> Meiklejohn's objection to the wordy language of the press is that it is too Latinised; interestingly, he argues that educated Indians display the same fault, citing a poem written by an Indian author, and claiming that 'no Englishman would write a style so highly Latinised' (1903:126).<sup>17</sup> His hostility to Latin can also be seen in his view that only Anglo-Saxon words are pure English, a distinction which we shall explore at greater length in our discussion of Anglo-Saxonism in chapter four. Similarly, Kington-Oliphant's portrayal of the gulf between speech and print is closely bound up with a hostility to the 'too common love of Latinised tawdriness', which he believes to be 'fostered by the cheap press' (1886:216). Further examples of Kington-Oliphant's vitriolic hatred of Latinisms will be encountered below. The important point to be reiterated at this stage is the extent to which the written word, in late-nineteenth-century Britain, was closely identified with Latin and Latinisms.

If Latin could be readily equated with the written word, so it became necessary to identify English unequivocally with the spoken word. Those who championed the case of English against the Classics consistently portrayed English as a spoken language. Freeman's diatribes against the dominance of the classics were matched by unstinted praise for what he persistently referred to as the 'Old

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<sup>16</sup> See also Huxley's letter to *The Times* of 5 August 1890: "the worst and most debased kinds of English style are those which ape Latinity", cited by Jespersen (1943:120).

<sup>17</sup> Quiller-Couch also picked on journalists and educated Indians ("babus") as the worst offenders (1916:63).

English speech of our fathers' (cited in Meiklejohn 1903:128). The belief that English was based more closely than Latin on the spoken word can also be seen in the fact that one advocate of spelling reform describes his proposed sound-based alphabet as more truly national and English than the existing one:

The alphabet that we borrowed from the Romans has done some service, but a really English alphabet - a complete classification of the sounds of our language, which is a richer tongue than the Latin - would be much more effective.

cited in Pitman 1878: 5

The deadening influence of written Latin extended beyond the orthography. As late as 1921, the authors of the Newbolt Report protested at the way in which English grammar textbooks 'are written as if English were a dead language' (Newbolt 1921:283). In his 1918 lecture, Quiller-Couch underlined the extent to which using a living and spoken language was a necessity for national survival: 'But when does ever a nation live, to whom its language is no longer a living thing?' (1927:299). But perhaps the most significant evidence of the extent to which English was portrayed as spoken is the explosion of interest in dialect. We shall examine this in detail in chapter two. It is worth pointing out at this stage, however, that spoken dialect was often seen as authentic English in a way which the Latinised, written standard language was not. As Snowden expressed it: 'The undefiled well of English is the folkspeech, not the Latinised language of books and newspapers' (1913:26). Similar identifications of English with speech, and of Latin with writing, were widespread within late-nineteenth-century cultural debates. And it is precisely the fact that the opposition between spoken and written could be readily applied to the familiar and increasingly intractable opposition between English and Latin which explains why so many British observers embraced the shift to the spoken word within language study with unbridled enthusiasm. In short, privileging the spoken word was a means of legitimising the national vernacular.

The emergence of English in place of Latin as the basis of cultural authority is therefore the first important transition which can be clearly linked to the shift



towards the spoken word. It is important to underline the strong national dimension of this transition. In many ways, the rise of English can be seen as one example of the emergence of modern ideas and ideologies of nationhood which Colls and Dodd (1986) have pinpointed during this era. However, it would be wrong to see the emergence of English and its rivalry with Latin in purely national terms. We must recognise the extent to which hostility to the written word in general and to Latin in particular also overlaps with powerful contemporary ideas relating to social class. At the very least, we must consider the ways in which the discourse of nation which was deployed in opposition to written Latin was itself infused with a marked populist and class-based dimension. It is the increasing prominence of this class dimension which leads us to the second fundamental change within the social context of late-nineteenth-century Britain which relates closely to the shift from written to spoken. Indeed, in some ways the shift from Latin to English can be seen as one part of this much wider process of social transformation. This over-arching and far-reaching social change was the transition towards democracy and the enfranchisement of the working class.

Spurred by accelerating urbanisation, the call for working-class enfranchisement, relatively muted since the demise of Chartism in the 1840s, was high on the political agenda from the 1860s onwards. Observers such as Arnold looked with increasing concern at the rising tide of working-class agitation for the vote. Gladstone had tried and failed to pass a Reform Act in 1866. But the extent to which this change had been recognised as inevitable, if not necessarily desirable, by politicians of all parties is shown by the fact that the crucial legislation was finally passed by a Conservative government under Disraeli in the following year. The Second Reform Act of 1867 bore a significance out of all proportion to its immediate impact.<sup>18</sup> As Hobsbawm (1979:125) has noted, its importance lay essentially in the fact that a vital principle had been recognised: for the first time, the working class had been acknowledged as having a legitimate political

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<sup>18</sup> Under the 1867 Act, all male householders in towns got the vote. This increased the electorate to 2.5 million. The Third Reform Act of 1884 extended the 1867 measures to the counties, enfranchising a further 3 million.

voice within the nation. Set alongside the Education Act of 1870, which in many ways was prompted by a concern to mitigate the effects of conceding the vote to members of the working class, the Reform Act of 1867 marks the advent of a new and more democratic era.<sup>19</sup>

It is this context of democratisation which helps explain why the attacks on Latin and on the written word were so often infused with a marked populist tone. We have seen how hostility to the written word in general was closely bound up in the British context with hostility to Latin in particular. The key point to be underlined here is that Latin was associated not only with the written word, but also with the upper class. If Latin and Latinisms were deemed to be a corrupting influence in English, a wide range of writers made it clear that the corruption stemmed not from below, but from above. We have already seen one writer ridiculing the fine English of the middle class. A still more damning indictment of the corruption of English from above through the over-use of Latinisms comes from the populist diatribes of Kington-Oliphant:

A brawl is a word good enough for a scuffle between peasants; but when one half-tipsy alderman mauls another, the brawl becomes a fracas... The corruption is now spreading downward to the lower class; they are beginning to think that an operative is something nobler than a workman.

Kington-Oliphant 1886: 214

This populist view that Latinisms are both elitist and obscurantist can be traced back far beyond the late nineteenth century. For example, the belief that one language ought to suffice for both aldermen and peasants fits in with the plea made by Thomas Paine for a classless democratic speech, and with the stand taken by the Quakers in refusing to acknowledge class distinction and addressing everyone, including the upper class, with the familiar "thou".<sup>20</sup> The specific complaint about

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<sup>19</sup> Hence Lowe's famous comment in 1867, "we must compel our masters to learn their letters", cited in Shannon (1974:91).

<sup>20</sup> For the democratic overtones of this Quaker dissidence, see Hill (1980:195). For the links between this radical populism and patriotism, see Cunningham (1989).

the corrupting influence of Latinisms also forms part of an established populist discourse stretching back to the Levellers and their attempt to create a common non-Latinate language. Kington-Oliphant shows his continuity with the democratic and radical agenda of this tradition in remarkably forthright terms when he directs his tirade against corruption towards the very pinnacle of the established order, the sovereign:

We have taken into our heads the odd notion that long sentences stuffed with Latinised words are more majestic than our forefathers' simplicity of speech; the bad grammar, often put into the Sovereign's mouth, smacks of high treason.

Kington-Oliphant 1886: 231

Of course, he is careful to point out that the words have been 'put into the Sovereign's mouth', but the fact remains that the links with a familiar democratic discourse grounded in class opposition were easy to find. At a time when class divisions were being made increasingly apparent, such virulent tirades against the upper classes could exert an explosive political influence. In short, in their marked radical and democratic tone, the attacks on the written word within and beyond language study reflect a wider populist mood. It is a development which can in turn be seen as a symptom of the increasing trend towards democratisation.

If Latinisms and the written word were closely associated with elitism and with the upper class, conversely, the 'plain simple words' which Kington-Oliphant had praised in his description of spoken English bore definite populist and democratic overtones. Again, the link was by no means new. Supporters of what Kington-Oliphant called 'home-spun English' were drawing on a well-founded and enduring association between the spoken word and a residual but powerful tradition of radicalism and populism. As Wordsworth had found when he announced that his Lyrical Ballads were based on the 'language really used by men', privileging speech rather than writing was considered a dangerously radical move by the ruling class

simply because it recognised the voices of the poor and illiterate as legitimate.<sup>21</sup> As Lucas (1990:73) has noted, a similar use of popular prose which is grounded very firmly in the spoken language can be seen in the work of those paragons of radicalism, Blake, Milton and Bunyan.

The democratic and popular connotations of the emphasis on the spoken word and the voice were clearly recognised by those who resisted these political and linguistic trends. Trench had seen phonetic spelling as a form of mob rule, dismissing 'the proposal that the educated should of free choice place themselves in the conditions and under the disadvantages of the ignorant and uneducated, instead of seeking to elevate these last to theirs' (1853:184). In 1889, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine published a long poem entitled, significantly, 'A Determined Aristocrat Denounces the Doctrine of Vox Populi Vox Dei':

The People's voice is not the voice of God,  
Nor that of Reason, Justice, Love, Faith, Peace,  
No! 'tis the voice of Passion, Crime, Revenge,  
Rank Superstition, Ignorance, Bigotry -  
A cry of wild, confused, discordant tones,  
Mere noise, untrained, untuned to harmony.

Anon. 1889: 879

The most potent example of the 'mere noise' of the popular voice was precisely that language form which Murray had audaciously labelled as approximating most closely to language in its natural state, slang. For slang was the archetypal oral language form, a symbol of the new thinking in language study, and of the democratic discourse with which the emphasis on spoken language was inextricably associated. Mackay, another opponent of the 'vox populi', argued that 'democracy, that is rampant in these three great nations [England/USA/France], is the real parent of vulgar slang' (1888:692).

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<sup>21</sup> 'Poetry and Poetic Diction' [Preface to Lyrical Ballads], reprinted in Jones, E. (ed.) (1943) English Critical Essays, OUP.

Mackay's equation of slang with democracy illustrates the extent to which the spoken word could be linked with ideas relating to class as much as with ideas of nation. The strength of the populist and class-based sentiments seen, for example, in Kington-Oliphant's diatribes against the upper class, is shown in the fact that their influence was registered and incorporated within the emerging discourse of nation. One effect of this was that the "common" man was increasingly portrayed as authentically national in a way which the upper classes were not. We shall explore this theme in more detail in chapter two when we consider how this new populist idea of nation underpins attitudes to dialect. The points to be reiterated here are the prevalence of class-based populist discourses during the period, and the extent to which these discourses overlapped with the debates about the spoken and written word. In other words, in late-nineteenth-century Britain, to privilege speech was not merely to support the national vernacular, but also to accord legitimacy to the voices of the uneducated and illiterate. In an era of growing class consciousness and gradual democratisation, we cannot ignore the extent to which the voice was inextricably bound up with the vote.

In the course of our analysis of the British context we have demonstrated how a development within language study, in this case the shift towards the spoken word as a supposedly natural form of language, displays clear links with the wider context in which it occurs. We have seen how a privileging of the natural and a hostility to the written word can clearly be traced within the over-arching framework of cultural values during the period. Moreover, we have shown how these values are themselves related to changes in the social and political configurations of late-nineteenth-century Britain. Yet Britain was not the only country for which the late nineteenth century was a period of fundamental change. Across the Channel, French society was being transformed by a series of wide-ranging political, economic and social changes. In some respects there were close parallels with what was happening in Britain. The most important similarity for our purposes is that in France, as in Britain, major developments in linguistic scholarship were inextricably linked with issues of wider social and political concern. This is not to say that in France the developments in language study, the cluster of broader issues, or the

nature of the links between the two, were the same as they were in Britain. In fact, as soon as we look in any detail at the situation in France, we are immediately struck by differences as well as similarities in comparison with Britain. One central difference between the two countries concerned attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm. Analysing these attitudes is the starting point for our discussion of the French context.

## **France**

### **Hostility to the Naturalistic Paradigm**

#### **Use of the naturalistic paradigm**

The naturalistic paradigm plays a significant part within French language study at the end of the nineteenth century. In Britain we saw that it was revealed especially clearly in the new emphasis on the spoken word. A similar identification between the spoken and the natural can occasionally be seen in French work. For example, Brachet differentiates between 'learned words' and 'popular words', arguing that the latter are 'formed by the ear, not by the eye' (1877:39). And as with Ellis, Murray and the majority of contemporary British philologists, he describes these primarily-spoken 'popular words' in highly favourable terms:

Popular words, then, are spontaneous, natural, unconscious;  
learned words intentional, artificial, consciously-fabricated:  
instinct is the mother of the former, reflexion of the latter.

Brachet 1877: 39

Brachet also pre-figures British writers such as Newbolt and Leavis in suggesting that the new philological emphasis on the spoken word should in fact be seen as the

welcome return of a pre-literate golden age. He makes it clear that the advent of literature and literacy created a new division amongst a once-united people:

Every language has its epoch of division, which comes when the nation opens its eyes to arts and poetry - in a word, to culture and literature. From that time the nation may be divided into two great classes, the lettered and the unlettered.

Brachet 1877: 2

A similar emphasis on the validity of speech can be seen in the work of Bauche, writing at the end of our period. Disputing the view that the written word is superior to speech because it is based on a system of rules, Bauche employs a powerful counter-argument about spoken language which has since become axiomatic within modern linguistics:

Si l'on pouvait placer en une île déserte quelques couples illettrés parlant purement le français populaire et laisser leurs descendants plusieurs générations à l'abri de toute influence externe et de tout texte écrit, la langue qui se constituerait serait une langue qui aurait sa valeur et sa beauté et ses règles exactement comme une autre.

Bauche 1920: 14

As in Britain, this shift in focus from the written to the spoken word brought the question of spelling reform on to the agenda. Appeals for a reform of French spelling were by no means new. In 1542 Meigret had famously called for French spelling to be brought into line with speech.<sup>22</sup> In that year of political revolution, 1830, Marle called on his compatriots to shake off the tyranny of the existing orthography in his *Apel o Fransé*. The question of reform was to re-emerge in the last third of the nineteenth century, enlisting the support of several notable linguistic figures. Foremost amongst them was Passy, singled out by Bréal as the head of the most zealous faction within the spelling reform movement, to which he applied the name of 'fonétistes' (1890:16).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Meigret, 1542, *Traité touchant le commun usage de l'écriture françoise*

<sup>23</sup> Passy exerted an enormous influence over the development of phonetics, founding the International Phonetic Association in 1886.

This brief sketch is intended to show that within French language study, there were broad similarities with developments in Britain. However, as soon as we begin to look closely at the detail, we can identify important differences. In fact, it is the example of spelling reform, mentioned above, which best illustrates the most significant of these differences between Britain and France in terms of dominant trends within language study. If French supporters of reform such as Passy and Havet share the emphasis of their British fellow-travellers in highlighting the primacy of the spoken word, they differ markedly from them in referring very rarely to the notion of speech as more natural than the written word. Viewing the spoken word as natural brings Brachet into step with dominant British trends within language study, but it makes him something of an exception amongst his compatriots.

This absence of the naturalistic paradigm is a crucial point; indeed it is arguably the most significant difference between the dominant trends within language study in Britain and France at the end of the nineteenth century. We shall explore this avoidance of the naturalistic paradigm in more depth below, arguing that it is a significant feature of some of the most important work within French language study, notably the major theoretical advances made during this era. We shall suggest that this contrast with Britain can only be explained with reference to the particular cultural and political context of late-nineteenth-century France. The point to be underlined here, however, is that it is important not to overstate the case. If the naturalistic paradigm was not generally used in French work as it was in British work, it does not follow that it was not used in other ways. As we noted above, it can take many and varied forms. In fact, although it is absent from much of the work which highlights the primacy of speech, and, as we shall see below, from French theoretical work, the naturalistic paradigm does feature prominently in the work of some important writers on language in late-nineteenth-century France. Indeed, we should be surprised if this were not the case, given the enormous influence which had been exerted on linguistic scholarship across Europe by central figures in the science of language who were committed to the naturalistic paradigm.



No figure had been more central or more influential than Schleicher; and no figure employs the naturalistic paradigm to quite the same thoroughgoing extent. Our concern, however, is not so much with Schleicher himself as with the influence which his work exerted in France.<sup>24</sup> His most important French disciple was Hovelacque. In fact, reading Hovelacque's *La Linguistique*, published in 1887, the adulation reserved for Schleicher is unremitting. And nowhere can Hovelacque's debt to his avowed master be seen more clearly than in his repeated insistence that language should be viewed as a natural and living organism:

Les langues en effet naissent, croissent, dépérissent et meurent comme tous les êtres vivants...C'est précisément cette conception de la vie des langues qui ... distingue la science moderne du langage d'avec les spéculations du passé.

Hovelacque 1887: 9

The influence of the Schleicherian naturalistic paradigm over French thought extends beyond Hovelacque. One of its cornerstones was the Hegelian notion that the life of language could be divided into a pre-historic period of formation and growth on the one hand, and a historical period of decay on the other. A similar view underpins the linguistic observations of that ardent Germanophile, Renan: 'nulle part autant que dans l'histoire des langues le progrès n'est douteux et compensé de décadence. Dans les langues, en effet, la perfection est à l'origine'(Renan 1947b:466).<sup>25</sup> In this view, linguistic change is acknowledged, but it is represented as a process of decay from original perfection. In other words, for Renan and Schleicher, as for Trench, language is fallen.

The Christian overtones of this vision of language are unmistakeable. They are seen especially clearly in the notion that the period of formation and creation is deemed to have ended. Given his belief in a vanished era of linguistic creation followed by a

<sup>24</sup> Koerner argues that Schleicher's supporters in France formed the nucleus of the *Revue de Linguistique et de Philologie Comparée*, and that they were deliberately ostracised by the mainstream Bréal-Meillet faction within French linguistics (1989:330).

<sup>25</sup> In his investigation into the prevalence of "L'Esprit Germanique" in France, Lasserre identified Renan as the most pro-Germanic of all nineteenth-century French intellectuals (1901:74).

protracted period of stasis and decay, it is surprising that Schleicher should have portrayed himself as a disciple of Darwin.<sup>26</sup> For this view of linguistic development is completely opposed to Darwin's notion of continuous evolution in response to eternally changing circumstances. Darwin was not the only scientist to challenge the notion of a vanished moment or period of creation. The geological version of this vision of change, catastrophism, was being undermined by the pioneering work of Lyell. For Lyell, the creation of the earth was not a single event, or even a series of events which had now ended; on the contrary, it was a continuous process which was still in operation in the nineteenth century. Change was a constant and uniform feature which could be observed at any given moment. Lyell is significant as it was from his work that the Neogrammarians adopted the term "uniformitarianism" in their attacks on the view that the history of language could be divided into two distinct periods of growth and decay. In other words, in language study as elsewhere, the belief that the process of creation belonged to a vanished and irrecoverable era was beginning to face sustained critical attack.<sup>27</sup>

Leaving to one side its religious overtones, what is of greater significance for our purposes about the belief that the era of growth and creation had ended is its deterministic implications. This link between manifestations of the naturalistic paradigm on the one hand, and determinism on the other, is a crucial point.<sup>28</sup> It can be seen in Schleicher's contention, cited above, that languages, as 'organisms of nature...have never been directed by the will of man'. These deterministic overtones underlie much of the opposition to the naturalistic paradigm which can be detected in the work of French writers on language. We shall look at this opposition in detail below. At this stage, however, it is sufficient to draw attention to these deterministic assumptions. Consider, for example, the words of Renan: 'En fait de religion et en fait de langue, rien ne s'invente; tout est le fruit d'un parti pris à l'origine, une fois pour toutes' (cited in Bréal 1892-4: lxx). In a similar vein, Hovelacque

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<sup>26</sup> Koerner describes Schleicher as "pre-Darwinian", but as an "evolutionist" all the same (1983:xv).

<sup>27</sup> Though it had been attacked far earlier by Kant: 'The creation is never finished or complete. It did indeed once have a beginning, but it will never cease' (cited in Sambrook 1990:23).

<sup>28</sup> Links between determinism and naturalistic imagery and assumptions also feature in the work of Taine.

argues that the identity of a given language is something essential which is fixed and determined by 'nature':

Elles sont, en un mot, ce que leur nature veut qu'elles soient. Jamais, par exemple, on ne parviendrait à créer une langue mixte...L'anglais, par exemple, chez lesquels se sont introduits un si grand nombre d'éléments étrangers, notamment d'éléments français, n'en demeure et n'en demeurera pas jusqu'à son extinction une vraie langue germanique.

Hovelacque 1887: 10

In other words, the identity of English, or any other language, lies in the past, not the present. Identity is stamped at origin, and despite the impression of change, is irrevocably fixed and impervious to any attempts to amend or update it. In short, in this vision, language exists beyond the control or the will of its speakers. It is a profoundly deterministic view; and it is precisely these links with determinism which made it unpalatable in the eyes of many French theorists in the wake of 1870, as we shall see below.

In addition to the division of linguistic evolution into separate periods of growth and decay, another example of the use of naturalistic terminology can be seen in the work of Darmesteter, most obviously, as its title suggests, in his book La Vie des Mots (1887). Even in the work of Bréal who, as we shall see below, can be seen as the most influential opponent of the naturalistic view of language proposed by Schleicher and Hovelacque, we can find occasions where he draws on naturalistic metaphors, as in his reference to 'l'organisme de la langue française' (1882:292). Further examples of the way in which certain elements within French language study drew on notions of the natural will be encountered in chapter two when we examine work carried out on dialect in France, notably by Rousselot. The point to be reiterated here is that in certain quarters in France, as in most quarters in Britain, the naturalistic paradigm remained a powerful framework within which to study linguistic phenomena.

At this stage, and before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of the French context, we can usefully provide a brief summary of the principal points made so far in relation to the naturalistic paradigm. We have seen that this paradigm was used, though often in different ways, by students of language in both countries. In Britain we saw that it was used widely in describing and reinforcing the shift towards the spoken word, and we looked at the way in which this shift towards the natural spoken word tied in with the wider cultural and political context. In France we have seen that the work of Brachet reveals a similar conflation of the spoken with the natural. We also demonstrated the enduring influence of the naturalistic Schleicherian approach to language study, as exemplified by Hovelacque in particular. In both countries then, writing about language with reference to nature was an established practice. However, we have already been alerted to significant differences between France and Britain in relation to the use of the naturalistic paradigm within language study. We noted that Brachet was unusual in that he followed the British practice of justifying his privileging of the spoken word on the grounds that it was more natural than the written word. In the work of other French champions of the spoken word, and in stark contrast to their British counterparts, reference to the discourse of nature is conspicuous by its absence.

It is this absence of reference to notions of the natural which we shall now proceed to examine. We have identified some similarities between Britain and France in the last few pages, but what is most striking about the principal currents within French language study, especially theoretical work, is their avoidance of the naturalistic paradigm which exerted such a major influence over a wide range of British work. An overview of French language study soon reveals that the work of Brachet, Hovelacque and Renan, all of whom draw in different ways on the naturalistic paradigm, represents the exception, not the rule. When Bauche came to write in 1920, he recognised that he was one of the few writers who still believed in the validity of the Schleicherian model in which language was viewed as a living organism. In a footnote he writes that 'il n'est plus de mode de parler de la vie des mots. Mais la vie d'une langue peut réellement être comparée à la vie d'une espèce zoologique'(1920:29). In the remaining parts of this chapter, we shall highlight the

extent to which the majority of French work in this period avoids or consciously repudiates the naturalistic paradigm. And, as in the British context, if we are to uncover the reasons behind this trend within language study, we need to look into the wider cultural and social context.

In our analysis, we shall focus on theoretical work, especially the work of Bréal. This was not the only strand within French language study, but in many ways it can be seen as the most influential. Figures such as Bréal, together with other theorists such as Meillet, Paris and Meyer, were arguably recognised as the major linguistic scholars of their day even by their contemporaries. From a present-day perspective, their importance increases still further; for with hindsight we can see that many of their theoretical ideas effectively paved the way for the foundation of modern linguistics, an achievement often credited solely to Saussure. Given the influence exerted by the work of these French theorists, it becomes all the more important to establish its principal features. That an avoidance of the entire naturalistic paradigm is one of those features is the point which we shall now proceed to demonstrate.

### **Pro-Latinism and Anti-Germanism: the rejection of the naturalistic paradigm**

Theoretical work was not the only place where resistance to the naturalistic paradigm can be discerned. In his 1866 review of the work of Müller, Barthélemy-St. Hilaire directly contradicts the view that language study should be considered as a natural science. His rejection of this example of the naturalistic paradigm is all the more striking when we recall that the mid-1860s were the years when the influence of Schleicher was at its peak:

Pour nous, il semble évident que la science du langage est ce que nous appelons une science morale. Précisément parce que son sujet est mobile et vivant, elle ne doit pas être classée parmi les sciences naturelles, dont la matière est absolument immuable.

Barthélemy-St.Hilaire 1866: 243

However, it is in linguistic theory that we can see the clearest and most significant examples of the turn away from the naturalistic paradigm within French language study at the end of the nineteenth century. We shall illustrate this point with reference to the work of several theorists, but attention will be focused on the views of Bréal. It is Bréal who launches the most sustained and effective attack on the Schleicherian view that language should be considered as a natural science, as in this extract from his 1891 article 'Language and Nationality':

In spite of what some eminent scholars have said on the subject, it is doubtful whether linguistics should be counted among the natural sciences. It is missing a vital component for qualification in that number: its object of enquiry is not found in nature. Language is a human act; it has no reality outside of human activity.

Bréal 1991: 200

As Aarsleff points out, Schleicher had already been castigated by Gaston Paris in 1868 for not making a distinction between the human and the animal realm in his theories (1982: 304). Again, it is Bréal who makes the criticism most succinctly: 'To read the great works of Bopp and Schleicher is to have at times the impression of reading a description of a fourth natural realm' (1991:52).

We shall proceed to examine the very different view of language which Bréal was to advocate. First, however, it is important to highlight the fact that Bréal's objections to the naturalistic paradigm were directed specifically at what he regarded as its deterministic overtones. These can be seen especially clearly in discussions about the link between language and "race". For writers such as Humboldt and Brachet, the linguistic performance of what were seen as different racial groups was felt to be determined by physiological or physical characteristics such as the shape and size of speech organs. This deterministic view of linguistic capacity is completely rejected by Bréal:

Physical characteristics follow a man wherever he goes; yet we have no difficulty learning and in speaking fluently the language of the country of our youth, even if it was foreign

to our parents. If there is indeed a general language faculty, the racial heredity of any given language is itself a fiction. There is nothing more French than the prose of Hamilton. Terence, that model of Latin diction, was a Berber child brought to Rome by pirates.

Bréal 1991: 211

Should he need further examples to prove his point, Bréal need only reveal that he had been born of French-Jewish parents in Bavaria in 1832 and had grown up speaking German as his first language. That he should go on to become a professor at the Collège de France and the foremost French linguist of his generation served as the most convincing proof of his own argument.

Bréal's opposition to determinism within language also led him to criticise the Neogrammarians for their insistence on the inexorability of the supposedly exceptionless sound laws:

For inexorability to be plausible, we would have to assume that at a given moment, the speech organs of each individual in a community changed in the same way. A sound change may be adopted; but it may also be rejected, after a struggle of longer or shorter duration.

Bréal 1991: 234

In other words, whether or not a particular sound change is adopted depends on the will of the speakers, not on some inexorable law of nature operating beyond their control. This emphasis on the freedom of the speakers of a language to determine the way in which it develops can be traced throughout the work of Bréal. In his own words, 'with language begins the reign of freedom' (1991:273). Far from being a 'fourth natural realm', language, in Bréal's vision, is seen as a fundamentally human phenomenon. Distinguishing the human as a separate realm from the natural is one of Bréal's main concerns:

We have heard that linguistics is a natural science....Man doubtless is part of nature, but by the same token the study of laws, that of institutions and that of history would also be natural sciences. As long as a distinction between historical

sciences and natural sciences is maintained, I think we must place linguistics among the former.

Bréal 1991: 135

It is significant that Bréal places the study of language on a par with the study of institutions. For one of the major tenets seen throughout his work is the view that language is itself an institution rather than an organism. It was a view which was shared by his American contemporary, Whitney, by Saussure, and by his compatriot and successor at the Collège de France, Meillet:

Le langage est une institution ayant son autonomie...Du fait que le langage est une institution sociale, il résulte que la linguistique est une science sociale, et le seul élément variable auquel on puisse recourir pour rendre compte du changement linguistique est le changement social.

Meillet 1921: 17

Another example of the rejection of naturalistic thought which, again, is common to Bréal, Meillet and Saussure is the insistence that meaning is a product of convention rather than nature. Bréal in particular consistently underlines the fact that meaning is not fixed and determined. We shall look in more detail below at the views of language held by Bréal and other French theorists, arguing that they relate very closely to the wider social and political context of late-nineteenth-century France. The key point to be reiterated here, however, is that throughout their work, we can identify a significant absence of the naturalistic paradigm.

The question thus arises as to why leading figures within language study in France, in stark contrast to most of their British counterparts, should share this desire to avoid the naturalistic paradigm. Koerner (1989:95) has pointed out that the late nineteenth century sees the emergence of the social sciences, and that these influenced the direction and methodology of language study in the same way as the natural sciences had influenced comparative philology earlier in the century. There were certainly links between French linguistic theorists and figures from the social sciences; for example, Meillet collaborated closely with



Durkheim. However, this analysis, though valid, remains inadequate. It sees links only between different subjects, not between subjects and their wider context. Moreover, it cannot provide convincing reasons why opposition to the naturalistic paradigm should be so much greater in France than in Britain. Having illustrated the rejection of the naturalistic paradigm within an important strand of French language study, we shall now turn our attention to exploring the reasons which lay behind it. As in the British case, uncovering these reasons takes us beyond the confines of language study.

We shall explore two principal reasons for the rejection of the naturalistic paradigm within French linguistic theory. One of these reasons is bound up with the after-effects of the most far-reaching historical event of the period: the traumatic experience of defeat at the hands of the Germans in the war of 1870. As we shall see, one consequence of this conflict was that language study was politicised more overtly than ever before. Adapting Clausewitz's dictum, it had become an extension of war by other means. In a climate of vitriolic anti-Germanism and resurgent Republican patriotism, ideas relating to nature and determinism were seen to be closely identified with German thought, and thereby tainted by association with the enemy. We shall look in more detail at the legacy of 1870 below. First, however, we shall consider the other principal reason for the hostility to the naturalistic paradigm within French language study. This was the legacy of Latin, the role and status of which was itself a subject of vigorous debate in France, as in Britain, at this time.

If attitudes to Latin help explain why the emphasis on the spoken word as natural was wholeheartedly embraced in Britain, they also help explain why that same emphasis was widely rejected in France. In both countries, Latin was closely identified with the written word, and with a whole narrative of civilisation. In Britain, as we have seen, emerging ideas of English and Englishness in particular were to a large extent defined in direct opposition to the legacy of Latin. However, the same did not apply in the French context. In short, Latin was much more central to French than it was to English. Marsh had underlined the 'self-sufficiency' of

Anglo-Saxon, thereby consigning Latin words in English to peripheral status (1860:172). But even the most fanatical French opponent of Latin could not conceive of a French language independent of Latin influence. As a result, in stark contrast to the situation in Britain, in any definition of French national identity Latin, together with its associations with the written word and a discourse of civilisation, would have to remain central.

The extent to which the Latin component of French identity remained virtually unchallenged can be best appreciated by examining the various and opposing arguments in which the significance of Latin was invoked and underlined. For example, the conservative critic Brunetière defends the continued predominance of Latin on the grounds that it symbolises an internationalist culture which was once shared by the European aristocracy:

D'une manière générale, et selon le mot qui servira longtemps à les caractériser, si les classiques latins sont assurément moins anglais que Shakespeare ou moins français que Molière, ils sont en revanche plus humains.

Brunetière 1885: 872

However, in stark contrast to the British context, Latin also forms a central part of the very different vision of French society put forward by populist opponents of such elitism. For example, Brachet, who, given his preference for the spoken word, might be expected to reject Latin out of hand, nevertheless assigns Latin a central role in his view of the nation, arguing that 'it is incorrect to say that French is classical Latin corrupted by an intermixture of popular forms; it is, on the contrary, the popular Latin alone' (Brachet 1877:10). In this view, Latin represents not aristocracy, but democracy, and Brachet incorporates the legacy of Latin into an unequivocally populist discourse in a way that was unthinkable in Britain. That two such completely opposed views of language and society as those of Brachet and Brunetière should be based on the same premiss only serves to underline that the significance of Latin within French identity remained beyond question.

Yet this is not to say that the precise role of Latin was not a subject of debate. On the contrary, as in Britain the need to educate a newly-enfranchised population ensured that the dominance of Latin within the educational sphere was questioned from many quarters. With the advent of the Republic in 1870, we see the start of a series of initiatives aimed at making French the primary language of instruction.<sup>29</sup> The shift away from Latin was associated with Jules Simon, the first minister for public education in the new republic. In a famous memo addressed to the *provisseurs* of the *lycées*, Simon called for 'l'étude sommaire de la langue et de la littérature française, dans leur origine et leurs développements' (cited in Demarolle 1984:453). This call was enthusiastically supported by Janet who draws a parallel with the reforms in learning carried out during the Renaissance:

S'il a été nécessaire à la société moderne, lors de la renaissance des lettres, de se retremper et de se polir dans l'étude des grandes littératures classiques et de renouer par elle cette chaîne de civilisation que l'invasion des barbares avait interrompue, il n'en est pas moins nécessaire aujourd'hui, sans rompre cette tradition sacrée, de se préparer aux conditions nouvelles de la civilisation contemporaine.

Janet 1872: 325

This extract reveals that the case for reform was not necessarily based on hostility to Latin; in fact, Janet couches the reform in terms of its continuity with the 'tradition sacrée' of classical learning. The view that French ought to replace Latin as the language of instruction was, in many cases, based primarily on utilitarian considerations. French would be a more effective medium for educating the population of a rapidly modernising economy. In Britain such considerations formed only a part of the case made by the champions of English; Latin was more likely to be vilified as being culturally and linguistically alien to the emerging idea of Englishness. Such objections played little or no part in the French case for reform. Prominent supporters of the modernising initiative described Latin in glowing terms. Brunot, who had lauded Grégoire and the revolutionaries of 1789

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<sup>29</sup> Writing in 1891, Weiss claimed that "the classical spirit is dead...so is classical culture" (cited in Zeldin 1980:60). From 1902, Latin was no longer a compulsory part of the *baccalauréat* (Nord 1991:215)

for their attempt to unify the nation through French, lent his influential support to Simon's reforms. Yet this prompted him not to bury the language of Caesar, but to praise it; where supporters of English underlined its distinctness and independence in relation to Latin, Brunot emphasised the identity of Latin and French:

Notre parler, si éloigné qu'il paraisse aujourd'hui de ce qu'il a pu être aux temps de Tacite ou d'Ennius provient de là par une transformation ininterrompue, graduelle, telle que, malgré la peine que nous avons à comprendre un vers de Plautes, jamais une génération n'a cessé de comprendre celle qui la précédait.

Brunot 1905: 16

Another prominent linguistic scholar who combined a reverent attitude to the Latin legacy with a fervent desire to see it superseded by French was Bréal. Bréal had been an adviser to Simon at the Ministry of Education and had given his full support to the plan to extend the use of French in education. In fact, as Delesalle and Chevalier point out, many of the reforms which Simon was to implement were first indicated in Bréal's (1873a) book Quelques mots sur l'instruction publique en France. Yet Bréal was also passionately dedicated to Latin and the Romance languages generally.<sup>30</sup> He regarded French as having had the good fortune to inherit what he saw as the logical clarity of Latin, a point he makes to support the claim of French in his essay entitled 'Choosing an International Language':

This does not mean that perfect clarity is not possible elsewhere: other languages, like French, also received a Latin education; but because we came first they resemble us more closely the more nearly they approach the original model.

Bréal 1991: 270

In other words, it is French which is the true heir of the best traditions of Latin. The idea of Romance languages as related offshoots of a Latin parent was of course by no means new, but increasing emphasis was placed on the familial links between these languages and on the concept of a pan-Latin identity. This point will be

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<sup>30</sup> This fact was overlooked by those who, as Delesalle and Chevalier report, saw Bréal's support for the wider use of French in education as evidence of his hostility to Latin (1986:267)

examined in more detail in our discussion of the concept of "Romania" in Chapter Four. For the moment, the interest of the family metaphor so prevalent in attitudes to French and Latin at the time is that it provides an appropriate way of contrasting the situation in France and Britain. For if English deposed Latin as a rival sworn to enmity, French succeeded Latin as a faithful son and heir. Pensioned off from its educational role, Latin continued to play a crucial symbolic role as the fêted head of a Romance family in which power had now passed to French.

The continued importance attached to Latin helps explain why so much work in French language study during this period is based on a firm rejection of the naturalistic paradigm, with its privileging of the spoken word. To follow the British example and embrace a discourse in which Latin in particular, the written word in general, and civilisation itself were all seen as artificial and ossified in relation to the supposed authenticity of nature and living speech would have deprived the French of a cultural and historical narrative which had virtually defined their society for several centuries. The country which had been so long regarded as the very model of civilisation could hardly be expected to suddenly acknowledge that its literary and cultural achievements were less valid than the "natural" speech of the illiterate and uneducated. For this was one of the implications of the privileging of speech. Bréal, recognising the dangers of this linguistic trend for a discourse of nation based around a notion of civilisation and the written word, directs his fire at the most visible disciples of the spoken word, the spelling reformers:

Il n'est sorte de méfaits qu'il ne soit de mode d'attribuer aujourd'hui à l'écriture...Mais qu'est-ce que ces défauts, dont plusieurs ne sont visibles qu'à l'homme du métier, en regard des services que l'écriture rend tous les jours à la conscience linguistique de chacun? .... Les fonétistes sont des ingrats et des barbares qui, si on les écoutait, nous ferait perdre le bénéfice de vingt-cinq siècles de culture.

Bréal 1890: 32

This remarkable polemic can be seen as a resolute defence of the written word at a time when its importance was being denigrated by Neogrammarians and spelling

reformers alike.<sup>31</sup> As we have suggested, the simple fact of the Latin descent of French goes some way towards explaining this emphasis on culture rather than nature. However, there was a second reason underlying French hostility to the naturalistic paradigm; this was bound up not so much with the legacy of the past as with the concerns of the present. The crucial date here is 1870, and the humiliating defeat of the French army at the hands of Germany. As with the legacy of Latin, so with the trauma of defeat; there was simply nothing comparable in the British context. Our task now is to examine the ways in which the national catastrophe of 1870 and its aftermath also play a part in explaining why many French writers on language should have resisted the naturalistic paradigm.

The defeat of 1870 was a calamity for France. Not since the Revolution had a single event exerted such a profound influence over French cultural and political life. Its effects were felt throughout Europe, but, obviously, nowhere so acutely as in France. For those who lived through the war, the conflict was totally unlike any which had gone before. In the fifty-five years since Waterloo, the processes of industrialisation and mechanisation had transformed the major powers on an unprecedented scale. As Anderson points out, 1870 marks the appearance of the modern concept of "total war".<sup>32</sup>

For the first time, two great European peoples fought to the point of total collapse, using against each other all the resources provided by developed economies, mass armies and mass hatreds.

Anderson 1972: 32

Not surprisingly, the prime targets for the 'mass hatred' felt by the humiliated French were the victorious Germans. Although, as Tint (1964:69) has argued, the intensity and prevalence of anti-German feeling can easily be over-estimated, it remained a powerful undercurrent within French society throughout the whole of the

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<sup>31</sup> Bréal supported very limited spelling reforms. In his writing on the subject, however, the most striking feature is his consistent defence of the written word against those whom he labelled "fonétistes". See his 1890 book *La Réforme de l'Orthographe Française*, and his *Causeries sur l'Orthographe* (1893).

<sup>32</sup> As Mosse reports, the number of casualties reached unprecedented heights. 156,000 French and 28,000 German troops were killed in 6 months (1974:103).

period, bubbling to the surface at regular intervals. Certainly in the immediate aftermath of the defeat hostility to all things German was running high.

So profoundly did the shock of Sedan saturate French society that it would be difficult to analyse any facet of French life after 1870 without making reference to the effects of defeat. Given the dominant role of German thought within language study, it is hardly surprising that linguistic debates also reflect the groundswell of anti-German feeling which swept across France after the war. Nerlich (1990:36) provides one example of the way in which the effects of the war were felt within language study; she points out that it made enemies of Bréal and the man whose work on mythology, if not linguistics, had strongly influenced him: Müller.<sup>33</sup> This may be a minor example, but it provides a microcosm of the much wider polarisation of French and German traditions within language study which we shall be examining in the rest of this chapter. This is not to claim that French linguists of the era were motivated purely by a patriotic desire to exact revenge on German scholarship; it is merely to underline that at a time when questions of national pride and identity were more prominent than ever before, debates within language study, as in every other field of cultural activity, took on an intensely national dimension.

We shall now examine one graphic illustration of the way in which ideas about language, reflecting developments in the wider political context, effectively became polarised along national lines. We focus on this example partly because it underlines the unprecedented significance attached to ideas about language in post-1870 France; for it was an issue which dominated French political and cultural life throughout the 1870s and 1880s, provoking vigorous polemics about the nature of nationality and the place of language within it. But more importantly, it is this example of the polarisation between French and German traditions within language study which, in addition to the legacy of Latin, helps account for the widespread rejection of the naturalistic paradigm, with its marked deterministic overtones. Again, we can trace this debate back directly to 1870. Indeed, it revolved around

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<sup>33</sup> See Bréal's obituary of Müller in *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*: 'en 1870, parmi tant de causes de tristesse, ce fut un chagrin de le voir prendre parti contre nous' (Bréal 1899-1900:cxcvi).

the most powerful symbol of the humiliating defeat: the loss to Germany of Alsace-Lorraine.

Language played a crucial role in German attempts to justify their occupation of the captured provinces. The German case, essentially, was that language was the basis of nationality; consequently the fact that the inhabitants of the two provinces spoke German meant that the territory belonged to Germany, irrespective of the will of the population. Within months of the victory, Boeckh had published his Statistics on German Race and Language in the European States, underlining the connection he saw between language and nationality. It received a swift response from Gaidoz in an article entitled 'Le Pangermanisme' published in Revue des Deux Mondes in February 1871:

Si cette théorie de la langue et de la race que prône M. Boeckh devait l'emporter et recevoir une application équitable au profit de toutes les langues et de toutes les races, quelle confusion s'introduirait dans la délimitation des frontières en Europe, et comme l'Allemagne elle-même serait étrangement amoindrie.

Gaidoz 1871: 398

Writing in the previous month's edition of the same publication, Caro had put forward a similar argument about what were - or, in this extract, what were not - crucial elements in nationality, this time referring specifically to the French context:

La race est un élément secondaire. Il y a plusieurs races en France, des Gaulois, des Romains, des barbares, des Allemands. La langue n'est pas l'élément essentiel. Le Breton, qui parle comme parlaient ses ancêtres les Celtes, s'estime français au même titre que l'Alsacien, qui parle allemand.

Caro 1871: 243

Professional linguists added their voices to the chorus. In his 1874 pamphlet 'Langues, Races, Nationalités', Hovelacque exposes the fallacy of believing in a link between language capacity and racial origin. Writing in Revue Critique in 1873, Bréal made his disgust at the occupation clear:



La conquête de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine par les armes allemands est une blessure si cuisante pour la France et un si triste défi à toutes les idées modernes de droit et d'humanité, qu'il semble impossible d'y découvrir cette parcelle de bien que le malheur, dit-on, apporte toujours avec lui.

Bréal 1873b: 244

Historians also joined the debate. The German historian Mommsen had insisted that the ethnic origin and language of Alsace-Lorraine dictated that they rightfully belonged to Germany. This intervention drew an immediate riposte from the French historian Fustel de Coulanges in his 1870 article 'L'Alsace est-elle allemande ou française?':

Vous croyez avoir prouvé que l'Alsace est de nationalité allemande, parce que sa population est de race germanique et parce que son langage est allemand. Mais je m'étonne qu'un historien comme vous affecte d'ignorer que ce n'est ni la race ni la langue qui fait la nationalité.

cited in Girardet 1966: 63

From these extracts and from the mass of other material devoted to the Alsace-Lorraine question, we can draw out two key points. The first is that the dispute enhanced immeasurably the significance of ideas about language. With the end of the war and the signing of the treaty of Frankfurt, it was language which was now the most potent weapon being used by the Germans to defend their wartime gains. As a result, this troublesome legacy of military conflict was carried over into the less bloody but no less passionate arena of scholarly polemic. With such importance attached to recovering the lost provinces, and with language playing such a central role in the dispute, the views and the work of linguistic scholars in France can rarely have enjoyed such national prominence.

But it is the second key point about the Alsace-Lorraine dispute which is of greatest importance for our purposes, as it helps account for the hostility to the naturalistic paradigm amongst so many French linguistic commentators. This second point is the extent to which the opposition between French and German positions in the

Alsace-Lorraine debate essentially revolved around attitudes to determinism. In the German view, the nation was portrayed as a natural organism, the characteristics of which could not be altered or influenced by members of the national group. In short, the nation was not chosen but determined. In the Alsace-Lorraine context, this meant that the will of the inhabitants of the captured provinces counted for little or nothing. National allegiances and identities were determined not by free will but by seemingly immovable factors such as language, origin and race. This view of the nation - which we shall describe as "cultural nationalism" - takes the nation to be a natural construct, based primarily on language. It is a view which has a long pedigree; in Perpetual Peace, Kant had argued that universality was impossible because 'nature...employs two means to prevent nations from mixing one with another, a diversity of language and religion'(1939:26). The view that nationality was identical with language was also expressed by Humboldt:

Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language; we can never sufficiently think of them as identical.

Humboldt 1988: 46

In this extract, as with Kant, the nation is seen as based on and identical with language. But the key point to be underlined is that this vision takes language and nation to be pre-determined natural constructs. It is precisely this emphasis on determinism in matters of language and nation which characterised German attempts to justify their occupation of Alsace-Lorraine. One consequence of this, given the symbolic importance of the Alsace-Lorraine issue, was that French support for any form of determinism could be seen to lend credence to the German position. In short, for a generation traumatised by the defeat of 1870 and transfixed by the desire to recover the lost territories, determinism became virtually taboo.

The French case in the Alsace-Lorraine debate was therefore founded on a complete rejection of determinism in matters relating to language and nation. So powerful was the polarising influence of the debate that even Renan, whose use of the deterministic and naturalistic terminology familiar in German linguistic scholarship

was noted above, rallied to the national colours in 1887 with his famous intervention 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?'. The answer Renan gave was that the nation was not determined by language or ethnicity. For Renan, far more important than language is will: 'Il y a dans l'homme quelque chose de supérieur à la langue; c'est la volonté' (Renan 1947a:899). The importance of popular will and consent is made clear in his famous definition of the nation as 'un plébiscite de tous les jours' (ibid:904). This view of the nation as a human and political construct, rather than a natural organism, lies at the heart of many of the French polemics over Alsace-Lorraine.

These themes have a familiar ring to them. They take us back to the field of language study, and to the extracts cited above from Bréal and Meillet in which they argue that language should be seen as a human institution rather than a natural organism. We shall proceed to explore in more detail the links between definitions of nation defended by French writers in the Alsace-Lorraine debate and contemporary advances in linguistic theory. Before doing so, however, it is important to highlight the fact that the emphasis on the nation as political and human was by no means a new phenomenon which first arose in response to German claims over the lost provinces. The Alsace-Lorraine dispute served not to forge a new definition of the nation in France but to revive an older one. In short, it prompted a revival and a reassertion of the discourse of nation stemming from the Revolution of 1789. The resurgence of Republican patriotism is a central theme within the cultural and political history of late-nineteenth-century France. No analysis of ideas of nation within the Third Republic can overlook the extent to which it saw itself as heir to the First Republic. Indeed, so significant is this notion of continuity that it will resurface in several different contexts in later chapters. Thus, given its importance as a feature of late-nineteenth-century French society, we shall briefly outline some of the main characteristics of this revived discourse of nation before examining its influence over linguistic theory.

### **The Revival of 1789: Republican Patriotism and the rejection of nature**

The most obvious symbol of continuity with the spirit of 1789 was the return of a Republican regime. One of the first acts of the Republican government proclaimed by parliamentary deputies on 4 September 1870 was to attempt to raise new troops to fight the foreign foe, clearly evoking, as Tint (1964:12) points out, the memory of the *levée en masse* of August 1793. Indeed, so powerful and enduring was the popular folk-memory of 1789 that when the government found itself with no option but to seek an armistice from Bismarck in January 1871, Parisians rose up once more in the defiant outburst of radical revolutionary patriotism that was the Commune. The Commune was by no means the only attempt to resurrect the spirit and tradition of 1789.<sup>34</sup> In many ways the luminaries of the Third Republic sought to legitimise their regime by presenting it as a continuation of the First, especially after the conservative republic of the 1870s had been replaced by the more radical and overtly republican regime which was consolidated by Gambetta and Ferry in particular. These and later ministries legitimised their bold programme of social reform, most obviously in the field of education, by presenting it as a logical continuation of the standardising and modernising zeal of the heroes of 1789. Continuity with the First Republic was also underlined in 1879 when it was decided to move the seat of government from Versailles back to Paris, and to reinstate the 'Marseillaise' as the national anthem. The following year, Bastille Day was designated a national holiday. And, on 11 July 1880, the government of Gambetta gave the boldest possible indication of its endorsement of even the more radical strands of the revolutionary tradition when it declared an unconditional amnesty for ex-Communards. Through these and other symbolic gestures, the luminaries of the Third Republic succeeded in diffusing a sense of continuity with 1789 and in enshrining a sanitised and harmonious image of revolution and republicanism at the heart of national mythology.

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<sup>34</sup> Nor was it the first. In 1848, the left wing in the Republican assembly had called itself the Mountain. The radical Parisian newspapers which sprang up at the same time had titles which harked back to 1789, *Journal des Sans-Culottes*, *Tribunal Révolutionnaire* (Anderson 1972:108)

This continuity in general terms between 1789 and the Third Republic was reflected specifically in definitions of the nation. Some of the key principles underlying the idea of nation which was held by the revolutionaries of 1789 were to be reasserted with renewed vigour almost a century later by French writers protesting over Alsace-Lorraine. For example, the nation as conceived by the First Republic was based squarely on political rather than ethnic criteria. The Assemblée Nationale of August 1792 saw no contradiction in bestowing citizenship of the French nation on the Dutch radical, Cloots, and on the Anglo-American Tom Paine. This emphasis on the nation as a human and political phenomenon can also be seen in the replacement of the phrase 'roi de France' with 'roi des Français' in the Constitution of 1791. This view of the nation as a cultural and political construct, rather than a natural or determined organism, is clearly similar to the definition of nation defended by many French writers in the dispute over Alsace-Lorraine, as the extracts cited above make clear.

Following on from the emphasis on the nation as political rather than natural, another continuity between 1789 and post-1870 definitions is the belief that the nation had to be freely chosen. We have seen that Renan underlined this in his description of the nation as 'un plébiscite de tous les jours' (1947a: 904). The point here, however, is that this was another legacy from 1789. Until they were abolished by Napoleon, plebiscites had played a crucial legitimating role in the fledgling revolutionary nation of 1789. Indeed, the importance of consent and voluntarism, stressed by Renan, is also emphasised in the definition of nation given by the chief political theorist associated with the events of 1789, Sièyes:

Un nombre plus ou moins considérable d'individus isolés  
qui veulent se réunir. Par ce seul fait, ils forment déjà une  
nation.

Sièyes 1888: 61 [emphasis added]

In short, the central role played by the Alsace-Lorraine issue in cultural debates after 1870 ensured that the voluntarist discourse of nation conceived by the

revolutionaries of 1789 was given a new lease of life.<sup>35</sup> The defeat at Sedan had caused some to reject that discourse, as we shall see in chapter two; however, it prompted many more to reassert it. We have already seen how this revival of the voluntarist principles of 1789 was reflected in the crucial symbolic case of Alsace-Lorraine; we shall now discuss the ways in which it was reflected within contemporary linguistic theory in France.

Even though the political implications are less obvious than in the polemics addressed directly to the Alsace-Lorraine question, work supposedly confined safely within the boundaries of linguistic theory also reflects the resurgence of the vision of nation stemming from 1789. We have already outlined the way in which theorists such as Bréal and Meillet reject the naturalistic paradigm within language study. But when we put these ideas about language into the wider context of revived Republican patriotism, we can identify subtle but powerful links between discourses of language and the dominant 1789 discourse of nation. For example, Bréal's belief that language is a human institution, subject to human control, rather than a natural organism determined by inexorable laws, clearly evokes the definition of the nation as a political construct based on free will. Amid the sound and fury of the debate over Alsace-Lorraine, such an unequivocal rejection of the deterministic conflation of biology with history, of nature with culture, make Bréal's commitment to the voluntarist narrative of 1789 abundantly clear.

If the belief that language was an institution rather than an organism represents one link with the 1789 discourse of nation, then Bréal's pioneering work in virtually founding (and naming) the study of semantics suggests another.<sup>36</sup> Here again, perceptions of the human and cultural as opposed to the organic and natural play a central role. For the principal object of study in semantics was the question of meaning, and more specifically the role played by non-morphological factors in

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<sup>35</sup> Republican patriotism was also revived by the Dreyfus case, which was widely seen as a conflict between supporters and opponents of 1789. Aulard, a Dreyfusard, described the conflict as the "lutte de la Révolution française contre le passé" (Gérard 1970: 72)

<sup>36</sup> The term "la sémantique" was coined by Bréal in his 1883 essay 'Les lois intellectuelles du langage' (Larousse).

determining meaning. Most important amongst these was the role played by the language user, so utterly neglected in the preoccupation with tracing the evolution of supposedly independent language forms:

Must we believe that our science consists only in the external observation of language-forms?...We do not assume this at all. Rather the description of human language must not allow us to forget man, who is its principle and its purpose; for everything in language either proceeds from or is addressed to him.

Bréal 1991: 53

Not only can we recognise here crucial points about the importance of unexpressed elements and context which have become axiomatic in modern linguistics: we also see what Nerlich calls 'an entirely humanistic description of language use, where the speakers give forms functions and breathe spirit into matter' (1990:145). As we shall see in later chapters, this positive view of human capability and perfectibility, which again owes much to the humanist narrative of 1789, was being called into question by many towards the end of the nineteenth century. For Bréal, the human contribution to the process of making meaning is central:

If we forget for a moment what we owe to our education, and examine one by one the meaningful elements of our language, we shall see that we credit language with many ideas about which it says nothing, and that in fact we ourselves supply the relationships which we assume that it expresses.

Bréal 1991: 81

For advocates of the naturalistic paradigm, notably Schleicher, humanity had soiled the perfection of language: for Bréal, language was being perfected by humanity. Such contrasting perceptions of the human condition tied in closely with contemporary political discourses: at a time when such discourses were becoming increasingly polarised, Bréal's continued commitment to the optimistic humanist narrative of 1789 appears beyond question. As Nerlich argues, 'naturalism and mysticism, these popular currents of linguistic thought, contradicted Bréal's profound belief in the progress of language and the human race' (1990:13).

The emphasis on progress and change and on the role of the language users in making meaning opened up another front in the attack on the naturalistic paradigm in language study. For the main casualty of Bréal's work on semantics was the assumption that the meaning and form of linguistic units are somehow naturally linked together. The most famous attack upon this fallacy was made by Saussure, but its flaws are most clearly expressed by Meillet:

En fait, le signe linguistique est arbitraire: il n'a de valeur qu'en vertu d'une tradition. Si l'on exprime en français l'unité par "un", "une", la dualité par "deux" etc., ce n'est pas parce que les mots "un", "une", "deux", etc. ont par eux-mêmes un rapport quelconque avec l'unité, la dualité etc., mais uniquement parce que tel est l'usage enseigné par ceux qui parlent à ceux qui apprennent à parler.

Meillet 1925: 2

It is Bréal who lays the foundations for this view of meaning as a product of convention rather than nature. Indeed, we can appreciate his pioneering role in establishing the plurality and instability of meaning by recalling that he was responsible for coining a now familiar linguistic term: 'Up to now there has been no term to indicate the potential of words to appear under so many different guises. We might call it polysemy' (1991:157).<sup>37</sup> The radical impact of this insistence on plurality and conventionality in meaning was all the greater because, as Aarsleff has argued, a significant faction within language study in the middle of the nineteenth century advocated a return to the supposed original meanings of words. He describes these figures as the so-called "sages", and amongst their number includes Carlyle, Coleridge, Trench, de Maistre and Grimm (Aarsleff 1982:37). The battle lines were clearly drawn, and Bréal attacked the enemy with deadly accuracy:

In recent years one philosophic school has somewhat over-emphasized the material beginnings of words: the primitive sense having been grasped, it was declared to be the only true and acceptable sense. That may be true historically; but as far as speakers are concerned, a word's true sense is

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<sup>37</sup> According to Larousse, Bréal's first use of "polysémie" was in 1897. However, the essay from which this usage is taken was a review of Darmesteter published 10 years earlier.



its more recent sense.... The point of departure is of little importance for the present usage of words; what matters is the point of arrival.

Bréal 1991: 130

Bréal was writing in 1879, and what is most immediately striking about this passage is the extent to which it foreshadows the distinction between the synchronic and diachronic dimensions which Saussure was famously to make thirty years later. But in addition to the links with Saussure, we can also identify subtle links with concepts of nation emanating from the revolutionary tradition. Pointing out the folly of confusing past with present and of trying to deny the indisputable fact of linguistic change clearly sets Bréal at odds with those of his contemporaries who, like Maurras, looked back to the distant past for a solution to the malaise sweeping the France of the present day. Indeed, the emphasis on constantly changing synchronic structures fostered a view of language and nation as a discontinuous series of synchronic moments which could not be theoretically unified in a seamless narrative of reassuring continuity. As a result, what was underlined about the past and the present was not their identity, but their irreconcilable difference. Meillet underlines this difference with reference to what were seen as two successive stages of the same Persian language: the variety used by the Achéménide dynasty of 500 BC and the variety known as "pehlvi" which dates from the Sassanide era of the third century:

On ne saurait dire que le linguiste possède ici la tradition d'une même langue; il observe, à des dates différentes, deux parlers de types très voisins, mais non identiques. Entre les deux dates, la langue a changé de caractère.... Le linguiste dispose de deux états de langue profondément distincts l'un de l'autre; pour faire une histoire il faut restituer l'entre-deux.

Meillet 1925: 10

Not only did this theory undermine the idea of transcendental linguistic truths implicit in the arguments of the "Sages", it also highlighted the element of human invention and speculation involved in constructing the supposedly self-evident teleologies of language and nation which were the organising principle of the major

new historical dictionaries and the countless historical grammars. Where Maurras, Littré and Murray in different ways underlined identity and continuity, the vision of language and history posited by Bréal and Meillet clearly highlights the process of permanent revolution.

It is at this point that the links between the emphasis on synchrony and the discourses of 1789 become a little clearer. It could be argued that Bréal's focus on the present as the primary frame of reference for establishing meaning actually undermines the claim that his work represents a continuation of the 1789 tradition. After all, by the end of the nineteenth century the Revolution belonged to the irretrievable past. Yet this is to overlook another central feature of that tradition: its self-conscious modernity and its narrative of dynamism, progress and renewal. Hunt underlines the importance within the revolutionary tradition of what she calls the 'mythic present'; fostered partly by a constant emphasis on the absolute cleavage between the *Ancien Régime* and the new nation, this represented 'a new valuation of innovation itself' (1984:50). This equation of the revolutionary tradition with constant innovation can still be seen in the late nineteenth century, even though the events of 1789 had been sanitised and institutionalised to an unprecedented degree. The tradition of radical change served as a useful historical precedent for successive Republican governments, enabling them to present their sweeping legislative programme as a continuation of the reforming modernising zeal of the pioneers in 1789. Indeed, the continued association of 1789 with progress and modernity was most clearly expressed by the decision to commemorate the centenary of the Revolution with that futuristic steel monument to the grandeur of industrial civilisation: the Eiffel Tower. What is clear then is that there was no contradiction between fidelity to the historical narrative stemming from 1789 and a view of language in which the endless process of change rendered the semantic gulf between past and present unbridgeable. On the contrary, in the midst of so many prophets of reaction, following Paine rather than Burke and taking the present rather than the past as the point of departure was confirmation of loyalty to the spirit of the Revolution.

Thus we see that new developments within the supposedly cloistered world of linguistic theory were intimately bound up with the contemporary political context. The emphasis on language as an institution involving human free will rather than as an organism determined by non-human criteria bore an obvious relevance to the dispute over Alsace-Lorraine. Other links with the revived discourse of 1789, if more subtle, were no less significant. In other words, if some of the theoretical insights given their first expression at this time have become virtually axiomatic in modern linguistics, this should not tempt us to overlook the ideological discourses with which they were inextricably linked during this period of unprecedented overlap between language and politics.

In summary we can see that a combination of factors explain why the naturalistic paradigm was not embraced in France to anything like the degree seen in Britain. The historical legacy of Latin together with the particular political climate in the wake of 1870, which made anything which smacked of determinism unpalatable, both played an important role. But attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm are only one example of the way in which, in Britain and France, developments within language study are closely bound up with much wider concerns. We shall be looking at further examples in the chapters which follow. In this chapter, we have attempted to make the methodology as explicit as possible, first looking at developments within language study, and then clearly signalling the point at which the focus shifts to the broader context. Although the following chapters will take language study as their starting point and principal theme, the argument switches more freely between linguistic developments and their context. Having illustrated this methodology in the course of this chapter, the remaining chapters take it as read that analysing language study with reference to wider issues is a valid and consistent procedure, and that such an analysis is necessary for a proper understanding of the significance of language debates during the late nineteenth century.

The specific theme of this opening chapter, the naturalistic paradigm, was chosen partly on the grounds that it provides the clearest example of the overlap between

language study and wider debates. But another reason for examining it at the start of the thesis is that it is arguably one of the most significant areas of debate within linguistic scholarship during the period. It touches on many subjects and raises many issues which we shall encounter in the course of succeeding chapters. Indeed, the issues we have discussed here have an obvious bearing on the theme to be discussed in chapter two. For that theme, though important enough to warrant separate treatment, nevertheless revisits subjects such as the shift to the spoken word, and the revival of a Republican discourse of nation. That theme is the study of dialect.

## Chapter Two

### **Dialect Study and Discourses of Nation**

The last thirty years of the nineteenth century witnessed an enormous expansion in the study of dialect. Numerous societies and journals dedicated to charting the history and use of dialect sprang up across Britain and France. Leaving to one side the way in which it was defined, it is scarcely too much to say that during this era, dialect was studied as never before. Yet when we put this development into its wider context, we are struck by a glaring paradox. For if dialect was being studied as never before, other evidence confirms that it was also being stigmatised as never before. The interest in dialect is accompanied - and partly explained by - the trend towards homogenisation and standardisation which is such a marked feature of this era in Britain and France. In both countries the years from 1870 onwards see a rapid acceleration in the pace at which they were being transformed into single unified national territories. The establishment of national education systems, together with the spread of trains, tourism and national newspapers all served to break down geographical boundaries and forge a relatively homogeneous national space. Indeed, Briggs (1968:43) describes this process as 'nationalisation': referring to the same period in France, Weber (1977) illustrates how peasants were being turned into Frenchmen.

One part of this process was standardisation in language, and its corollary, the marginalisation of dialect. This is not to say that this was the first era in which a particular linguistic variety had been singled out as the most prestigious or authoritative. The Académie Française had been founded as early as 1635 in order to establish and police a recognised linguistic standard. In the British context, the evolution of the standard language goes back at least as far as Caxton's decision to adopt the dialect of the south-east in his publications. Therefore the idea of a standard language was not in itself new; what was new, however, was the fact that in

an age of mass communications, education and literacy, fewer people could remain unaware of it. Before the forging of a unified national space, the need for a nationwide linguistic norm does not arise. As Bourdieu argues:

Aussi longtemps qu'on ne demande que d'assurer un minimum d'intercompréhension dans les rencontres entre villages voisins ou entre régions, il n'est pas question d'ériger tel parler en norme de l'autre.

Bourdieu 1982: 29

Bourdieu also highlights an important distinction between norms and forms of speech. Undoubtedly, the influence of the education system resulted in a certain degree of convergence in the speech-forms used by heterogeneous social and regional groups across the country. However, even today, the percentage of the population who actually speak the language variety which counts as the norm remains relatively small.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is not so much in linguistic behaviour as in the diffusion of linguistic norms that the power of homogenisation and standardisation after 1870 can be detected. Following the crucial distinction made by Bourdieu (1982), late-nineteenth-century Britain was united not so much in a shared "connaissance" of the dominant variety, but in a shared "reconnaissance" that this variety was the standard; the unifying power of the standard was not that everyone knew it, but that everyone recognised and accepted it as such. Britain in this era thus fits the definition of "speech community" proposed by Labov who sees it as 'not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms' (1972:120-1). Given this important qualification then, we can justifiably argue that Britain and France display a clear trend towards standardisation in language, as in other respects, during the last third of the nineteenth century.

But if the forging of a standardised nation was experienced in a broadly similar way in both countries, this process was represented and imagined very differently. As Anderson (1983) has argued, in many ways the nation can be said to exist primarily

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<sup>1</sup> Milroy and Milroy (1985:29) have estimated that between 3 and 5% of the British population speak the variety known as Received Pronunciation.

at the imaginary level. While it is important not to confuse ideas of nation with reality, it is equally important not to dismiss those ideas as irrelevant. And it is in the realm of ideas of nation that clear differences emerge between dominant discourses in Britain and France. In France, as we saw in chapter one, the dominant ideology of nation under the Third Republic was bound up with the legacy of 1789. And one of the central features of this ideology was its emphasis on the inviolable unity of the Republic. In other words, the accelerating trend towards standardisation at the end of the nineteenth century could be portrayed as bringing the reality of nation into line with the well-established rhetoric. In Britain, the shift is in the other direction. The discourse of nation which was to become dominant in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century was not so much a reflection as an inversion of the reality of standardisation. A nation which was ever more urbanised and standardised began to see itself as ever more rural and diverse. Therefore, although the experience of nation in Britain and France reveals clear similarities, the discourses of nation through which that experience was mediated and imagined were strikingly different. Another similarity between the two countries is that although the dominant discourses of nation in each were very different, in each case they were reflected and reinforced by contemporary work within dialect study. Examining the role played by dialect study within the ideologies of nation in each country is the task of this second chapter.

## **Britain**

### **Natural and Local: authentic English voices?**

#### **A United Kingdom: the spread of standardisation**

Briggs (1968) has shown that the process of 'nationalisation' in Britain was driven by several important developments. The role of the railways was central, especially after the Cheap Trains Act of 1883 had brought train travel within the reach of the majority of the population. The creation of Bank Holidays in 1871 was also crucial; it meant not merely that more people could travel to seaside resorts, but that they

could do so at the same times. The founding of the Daily Mail in 1896 also represented a key moment in the process of nationalisation; for it was the first truly nationwide newspaper, read simultaneously, according to the proud boast of its editor, in Brighton and in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Without overlooking the importance of older - and indeed new - local identities (which will be examined below), or the yawning chasms which divided rich from poor, it is plausible to argue that these developments, and many others, contributed to the forging of a relatively homogeneous national community.

All the agencies mentioned above also played an important part in furthering the process of linguistic standardisation. But the most significant role in this process was played by the national system of primary education, the foundations of which were laid in Forster's Education Act of 1870. McCrum, Cran and MacNeil (1989) have argued that linguistic norms were far less prescriptive before 1870. When we remember the plethora of calls for uniformity of speech made as early as the eighteenth century, this claim is clearly open to serious question.<sup>2</sup> It would be more accurate to attribute the difference to the fact that the norm was diffused far less widely before 1870, rather than to a lesser degree of concern about propriety in language. Irrespective of the debate about the situation before 1870, the fact which McCrum, Cran and MacNeil are right to underline is that the Education Act played a crucial role in the process of homogenising and standardising language use.

By the 1890s...a new generation of post-Education Act schoolmasters would rebuke the boy who said "loike" for "like".... Non-standard English was now seriously stigmatized as a mark of the uneducated.

McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 1989: 24

The diglossic split between dialect and standard which arose as a result of the inculcation of a linguistic norm in the classroom was documented by Elworthy in the preface to his West Somerset Word Book:

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<sup>2</sup> See Crowley (1991) for examples of eighteenth-century calls for linguistic unity.



The school-teaching sets the model for written language, and the home influence that for everyday talk. The result is that at the present moment our people are learning two distinct tongues - distinct in grammar, pronunciation and in syntax.

Elworthy 1886: xliv

The standardising effects of 1870 and the concomitant stigmatisation of dialect are also attested in the contemporary fiction of Hardy, most famously in his description of the speech habits of his heroine in the 1891 novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles:

Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality.

Hardy 1891: 58

This extract underlines the extent to which the new national standard diffused through the schools had become normative, and was seen to be synonymous with 'ordinary English'. In other words, in this homogenising and levelling discourse, the one true English was standard English. Such was the view of Moore, writing in 1875, applauding the efforts of the schoolmaster to 'drive out these varieties of speech, and replace them by the pure English spoken by educated persons in all parts of the country' (1875:7). In this formulation, the standard language represented pure English, and the dialects were degenerate corruptions. As we shall see below, one of the striking features of dialect study was that this opposition would, in some ways, be completely reversed.

Thus the result of these linguistic developments, especially the growing influence of the schools, was that Britain was becoming regulated by a shared system of linguistic norms. In the words of an anonymous writer surveying these changes in the crucial year of 1870, 'all castes, and classes, and types, and genuses (whatever we may like to call them), are merging and fusing into one, as our various peoples are using, reading, thinking one universal tongue' (Anon. 1870a:545). A similar

view was expressed by Arnold in his study of Celtic literature, in which he fully endorses this process of homogenisation, though not without some regret:

The fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous English-speaking whole...is a consummation towards which the natural course of things irresistibly tends; it is a necessity of what is called modern civilisation, and modern civilisation is a real, legitimate force.

Arnold 1868: 20-21

It seemed clear to writers such as Arnold that the future would be characterised by an unprecedented degree of unity. The increasing unity of the nation would be reflected, reinforced and symbolised by the unity of its language; such was the natural course of things in the shift towards 'modern civilisation'.

It is important to reiterate at this stage the extent to which this process of standardisation entailed the stigmatisation of dialect. The extract from Tess of the D'Urbervilles in particular illustrates the way in which dialect was relegated to second-class status, and clearly labelled as deviant. One particularly insidious - but effective - method of undermining dialect in favour of the new standard was the token of shame. This was usually applied in schools, and took various forms, ranging from signs to be worn around the neck, to bricks which were to be held out at arm's length by the offending child. Initiatives such as these hastened the eradication of dialect; in the words of Renan, 'L'unité se fait toujours brutalement' (1947a:891). Of course differences in speech had been stigmatised and ridiculed long before 1870. But it is only with the advent of a nationwide norm, diffused in the classrooms of the board schools, that the stigmatisation occurs on an institutionalised basis. Leaving to one side the contentious and important question as to the extent to which the process was welcomed by dialect-speakers themselves, the fact remains that in late-nineteenth-century Britain, dialect was being stigmatised as never before.

Having underlined the shift towards standardisation, and the extent to which dialect was being marginalised, we now shift our focus from the cultural and

social background and examine in depth the unprecedented expansion in dialect study throughout the last third of the nineteenth century.

### **The Growth of Dialect Study**

Three years after the passing of the Education Act which was to diffuse a linguistic norm across the nation, a group of linguistic scholars at the instigation of the Cambridge professor Walter Skeat decided to establish an English Dialect Society (EDS). Ironically, now that dialects had been stigmatised as never before, they were also to be studied as never before. Of course there had been investigations into language variation long before 1873, but it is only with the founding of the EDS that dialect study is carried out on a systematic and nationwide basis. Indeed, the extent to which the EDS saw itself as an organising, governing body for the field of dialect work is reflected in the society's objectives, stated in its annual report for 1876:

The objects of the English Dialect Society are:- 1) to bring together all those who have made a study of any of the Provincial dialects of England, or who are interested in the subject of Provincial English; 2) to combine the labours of collectors of Provincial English words by providing a common centre to which they may be sent, so as to gather material for a general record of all such words.

EDS 1877: 2

What we notice here is that although it was aimed at registering different linguistic varieties, from its inception the aim of the EDS was to gather, classify and order these diverse varieties into a single, unifying structure. As such, for all its focus on diversity, the EDS was perfectly in keeping with the harmonising, standardising and unifying tendencies of the era. Indeed, when the goal of bringing together all dialect words into a single 'general record' was realised with the publication of the comprehensive English Dialect Dictionary in 1896, the society was disbanded, deprived of its *raison d'être*. Our concern, however,

is to try and explain the general resurgence of interest in dialect which the EDS reflected and reinforced. After all, it does appear paradoxical that at the very time that the status of dialects was being eroded in the face of standardisation, those same dialects were first deemed worthy of serious and systematic study.

The first point that needs to be made in any attempt to explain the expansion in the study of dialect is that improved communications meant that it had become far more feasible than before. The pioneering fieldwork carried out across the length and breadth of the country by serious students of dialect would have been impossible but for the fact that the railways had made travel so much easier and cheaper. In addition, as we noted above, the coming of the railway enabled more people to travel beyond their native region than ever before; a more mobile population was more likely to encounter differences in speech forms. Indeed, now that railway stations had become crossroads for people from all parts of the nation, they became ideal places to identify a whole range of different dialects; Murray's biographer tells us that railway stations were 'fruitful hunting ground' for the research into dialect carried out by Murray before his energies were devoted solely to the New English Dictionary (Murray 1979:75).

Thus in some ways the railway threw the spotlight on to diversity. But it was the standardising force of the railways (and of the Education Act) which was most palpable to students of dialect; they clearly recognised that the diversity which they so keenly studied and catalogued was being not so much highlighted as threatened by the trend towards uniformity. We noted above that the railways and the education system were amongst the most potent agents of standardisation in late-nineteenth-century Britain; the linguistic consequences of this were underlined by Ellis in his address to the Philological Society in May 1874:

The work really to be done in England is enormous, and it must be done quickly too, for the railway whistle, and worse than all, the school boards, are screaming down every chirp, and grubbing up every stump of dialectality.

Ellis 1874: 447

As Ellis clearly indicates, in addition to the fact that dialects had been made audible and dialectology made feasible by the railway network, a second point to be made in attempting to explain the interest in dialect is that it was felt to be on the verge of disappearing in the face of the railway whistle and school boards. In the foreword to his 'Glossary of Hampshire Words and Phrases', Cope singles out the education system as the main cause of what he saw as the decline of dialect:

However great the advantages of the present advanced education of the middle and lower classes, the operation of National and Board Schools is fast effacing all distinctive language in the people of this county; and in another generation or two it will probably disappear altogether.

Cope 1883: v

This profound sense of urgency saturates the work on dialect carried out in this era; indeed, it lay behind the establishment of the English Dialect Society. The General Account of the Society in 1876 underlines the perception that the death of dialect was imminent: 'the words of Mr Aldis Wright, that "in a few years it will be too late", apply with continually increasing force' (EDS 1877:2). Ellis was thus expressing a widely held view when he warned the Philological Society in 1873 that time was running 'distressingly short' for the dialects (Ellis 1873:248).

We have therefore gone some way towards explaining the resurgence of interest in dialect; ironically, the homogenising force of the railways and the school boards, having highlighted dialect and made its study possible, now threatened to destroy dialect, making the study of it a matter of great urgency. These are necessary points to make in accounting for the growth of dialect study; but they are by no means sufficient as an explanation. Indeed, these points serve only to raise a further and more fundamental question: why was the study of dialect accorded such importance? Showing how that study had been made possible does not explain why it was felt to be desirable. And showing that dialect was

seen to be under threat begs the question as to why it was thought to be worth preserving, or at least recording.

Another point which partly explains the interest in dialect but which also begs as many questions as it answers is that dialects were studied because of the general interest in spoken language which, as we saw in chapter one, characterised British language study during this era. As we shall see below, dialects were frequently celebrated for the supposedly natural status which they enjoyed by virtue of being unwritten forms of language.<sup>3</sup> However, seeing the interest in dialect as a simple offshoot of the new focus on spoken language does not explain why some spoken forms were studied and legitimised while others were not. For dialect was defined extremely narrowly, as we shall illustrate below. In short, if we have gone some way towards explaining the growth of interest in dialects, we have also identified questions which remain unanswered. It is in order to try and answer these questions that we need to broaden our inquiry beyond the confines of language study and look at the wider social climate in which these developments were occurring. As the process of standardisation showed clearly, linguistic questions were inextricably bound up with wider social developments, specifically with the forging of a homogeneous national space. And it is precisely this link with configurations of nation which we must explore once again if we are to account for the growth and direction of dialect study in late-nineteenth-century Britain.

### **Images of Nation and Inversions of Reality**

Like the increasingly widespread standard variety against which it was defined, dialect too was linked with developments relating to the nation. Unlike the standard variety, however, dialect was linked more with images of nation than with its objective, material development; in other words, it tied in with the

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<sup>3</sup> However, the emphasis on dialect as spoken was not strong enough to disrupt traditional scholarly methods. Wright insisted that a dialect word must have some written authority in order to be included in the EDD. I am grateful to Richard Hogg for reminding me about this important point.

rhetoric of nation rather than the reality. We have already encountered one example of the way in which language study fits in with an evolving set of cultural values and images; in chapter one we demonstrated the prevalence of favourable ideas about nature at the time when the spoken word was being celebrated in precisely those terms. We also showed that this turn towards the natural represented a major divergence from the dominant values of mid-Victorian Britain. But another key point about the idealisation of nature is the extent to which it differs not merely from an earlier set of cultural values, but also from the social conditions of the late nineteenth century. Paradoxically, the turn towards nature occurred at a time of rapid urbanisation. In other words, the increasing prestige of the natural is one particularly powerful illustration of what can be seen as a growing divergence between cultural values and social reality. We referred to this divergence at the start of this chapter, describing it as a process of inversion. However it is described, it remains a striking feature of late-nineteenth-century British history. And its significance at this stage of our discussion is that it plays a vital part in explaining the attention devoted to dialect study.

The divergence between cultural values and social reality is not confined to images of nation; there are few more famous examples of idealised ruralism than the work of Morris, but they were not intended to form part of a discourse of nation. However, it is in images of the nation that this divergence can be most clearly seen. What is so striking about this entire period is the growing gulf between the nation as it was experienced and the nation as it was imagined. Our discussion up to this point has underlined the prevalence of the trend towards homogeneity in the life and language of late-nineteenth-century Britain. Whether we look at "railway time", increasing state power, the Education Act or at any number of other areas of contemporary society, the everyday experience of the people of Britain was characterised by an unprecedented degree of unity around a national standard. As we have seen, this was particularly true of language; now that the 1870 Act had established that all should attend school, all could be united under the same linguistic norms. Turning to the symbolic and ideological dimension, it

was perfectly possible to construct images of nation which would accurately reflect this shift towards standardisation. If the nation as it was experienced was increasingly monolingual, then it could also readily be imagined as monolingual. As we shall see below, the dominant discourse of nation in France celebrated and reflected this shift. In Britain the familiar discourse of cultural nationalism, frequently invoked in eighteenth-century debates, provided clear ideological support for the view that one nation should be united by one language. In other words, there was no shortage of models which could provide an imagery of nation to reflect the increasingly homogeneous, monolingual reality.

But when we examine the ways in which the nation was imagined during this era, we see that the dominant images were not so much an accurate reflection as a total inversion of the reality. If the nation as it was experienced was overwhelmingly urban, standardised and identified with progress and modernity, the nation as it was coming to be imagined was seen as the virtual antithesis of these values. We shall focus on two particular aspects of this antithesis. These have been chosen partly because they illustrate the divergence between reality and rhetoric of nation especially clearly, but more importantly because they both relate to - and help explain - the expansion of dialect study. The second aspect is the importance attached to local and regional identities within the dominant discourse of nation at a time when so many objective differences were being eroded. But before discussing this example of the gulf between the reality and imagery of nation, we shall focus in more detail on the other example of this phenomenon, the broad outlines of which we have already described: the turn towards the rural at a time of urbanisation.

We have seen that the turn towards the rural is a general feature of the dominant cultural values during this era. Its most enduring expression, however, is in the imagery and ideology of nation. Colls and Dodd (1986) have illustrated the way in which the overwhelmingly rural images of essential Englishness which still remain dominant today derive to a large extent from the last third of the nineteenth century. Nation became as closely identified with nature as the etymology of the two words



suggests.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely this turn towards ruralism in ideas of nation that we need to bear in mind in order to account for the explosion of interest in the study of dialect. The nation was seen as natural and the natural was felt to be disappearing; and nowhere was its disappearance more obvious than in the decline in the status and use of what were now seen as regional, and deviant, dialects.

Dialect benefitted from the prestige allotted to the natural in two ways; in practice these are closely related but for purposes of analysis we shall discuss them separately. The first is that dialect was seen to evoke or to symbolise the natural and the rural. The work of the English Dialect Society clearly illustrates that dialect was not merely biased towards the rural but seen as completely synonymous with rural speech. Work on the myriad language forms used by the majority of the population who lived in towns and cities is conspicuous by its almost total absence.<sup>5</sup> For the dialectologists of the late nineteenth century, describing an urban speech-form such as Cockney as a "dialect" would have been unthinkable. "Dialect" referred unequivocally, and uniquely, to rural speech. Where urban speech was mentioned at all, it was usually described as "slang", the pejorative overtones of which were stronger then than now. Taylor expresses the contrast as follows: 'slang is but speech corruption; but a dialect is an old way of speaking good English'(1898:31). Morris provides a more precise definition of what dialect is, and, revealingly, of what it is not:

A great amount of modern slang, abbreviations, and Americanisms, which are frequently adopted in this country, are variations from the standard tongue, but we should scarcely include these under the term *dialect*...Dialect may be said to be the traditional unwritten speech of the people of any district.

Morris 1910: 17

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<sup>4</sup> Both are derived from the Latin root 'nasci' ('to be born').

<sup>5</sup> The same point applies to the Philological Society. A vast range of subjects was covered in their transactions between 1842 and 1914; however, only one article focuses on the language of the city (Thomas Sprague, "On some differences between the speech of Edinburgh and London", *Transactions* 1880-1).

Returning to the theme covered in chapter one, Morris's words clearly illustrate the extent to which dialect was seen as a spoken form of language. We shall proceed to examine how dialect was seen as what Taylor called a 'way of speaking good English', and, as such, contrasted with urban speech or slang, and even with the standard language. The point to be reiterated here, however, is the way in which dialect study focused almost exclusively on rural speech. As one valiant champion of Cockney would later point out, with justified indignation:

We may venture to express a dislike for the dialect of some of the larger towns, Glasgow and Bradford for instance, but we would as soon keep our hats on in church as to speak slightly of the county dialects [which] commanded the time and money of the English Dialect Society for a generation and inspired one of the greatest of all works on language, Wright's English Dialect Dictionary. The dialects of Pewsey and Windhill - how many people have ever heard of them? - have been the subject of two brilliant books. But Cockney, the characteristic speech of a city of six, or is it seven million people, has been ignored.

Matthews 1938: ix-x

And the irony that an increasingly urbanised nation should see dialect in these exclusively rural terms is compounded when we recall that for the majority of its life, the EDS had its headquarters in the engine room of the industrial revolution, Manchester.<sup>6</sup> Such paradoxes were common in an urban and industrial society which defined itself in terms of a mythical rural past. The extent to which dialect excluded any reference to the urban world was most graphically revealed when Wright crowned the work of his colleagues from the EDS and published his English Dialect Dictionary, dividing up the dialect specimens on a county by county basis and wiping the cities, quite literally, off the national linguistic map.

Wright is perhaps the key figure in British dialect study of the period, but his work reveals assumptions which were commonplace. In using the county map of England as the framework into which his dialect words were inserted he displays the

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<sup>6</sup> Founded in 1873, the EDS moved from Cambridge to Manchester in 1876. Its headquarters and library were at the Central Free Library in King Street. In 1893 it moved to Oxford. It was disbanded in 1896 as its work was felt to have been completed with the publication of the EDD.

widespread tendency to base linguistic definitions on territorial and geographical boundaries.<sup>7</sup> In short, he linked language to the land. Such a link was made by most writers on and in dialect, many of whom argued that a particular language form was rooted in the soil of a given geographical area, usually the county. The assumption underlying this insistence on the rootedness and fixity of rural dialects was that they thereby possessed some sort of natural purity, in contrast to the mongrel and adulterated language of the towns and cities. This emphasis on the supposed purity of rural life lay at the heart of the widespread romanticisation of the countryside and its inhabitants, and the dialect study undertaken at this time is no exception. In the introduction to his English Dialect Grammar, Wright explains that when he was gathering material for inclusion in the dictionary, many of the words that were submitted to him were 'valueless, especially such as related to dialects spoken within twenty-five miles of London. In these regions, the dialects are hopelessly mixed and are now practically worthless for philological purposes'(1905:v). In other words, dialects only count as genuine and as worthy of philological study if they can be shown to be pure, unadulterated and uncontaminated by other forms of speech or by the influence of the written word.

What is implicit in this line of reasoning is that dialects, by virtue of this supposed purity, are qualitatively different from other forms of language, including urban language and the standard variety. Such a view was to find theoretical support in the work of the Neogrammarians, whose influence over Wright was considerable. As Petyt (1980:55) argues, they held that the regularity which they ascribed to sound-laws would show up much better in spoken dialects because they had not been subject to what were seen as "external" influences. In other words, they reinforced the view that rural areas were a kind of wildlife reserve where language forms could be observed and recorded, pure and untouched, in their natural surroundings. In the words of Bradley:

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<sup>7</sup> Widespread, but not universal. Murray recognised that linguistic and political boundaries often did not coincide. He rejected Ellis's delineation of Old English dialects on the grounds that it simply followed the political divisions used by Freeman and Green (Murray 1979: 80). He also underlined the relative insignificance, in linguistic terms, of the Anglo-Scottish border, arguing that "the spoken tongue from York to Aberdeen is still one language...agreeing...much more closely than the dialect of Yorkshire does with that of Dorset"(1873:5).

It is only in local dialects that the laws of phonetic change are exhibited in their full simplicity...the principles that explain the development of standard English can be exhaustively discovered only by the examination of those varieties of the language that have remained comparatively free from the disturbing influences of dialectal admixture and literary culture.

Bradley 1908: 27

A related assumption underpinning Neogrammarian views and dialect study more generally followed on from the implication that dialects were natural forms of speech organically linked to the land. This was the view that dialects were given linguistic varieties, the boundaries of which could be clearly traced. Again, Wright's use of the county map is the most obvious example of this belief in discrete dialectal boundaries. But the Neogrammarian insistence on exceptionless sound-changes within a given geographical area also implied that isoglosses will coincide and that self-contained dialects can therefore be discerned. As we shall see below, such views of dialect as a discrete, given and natural linguistic variety were to come in for severe criticism from French theorists such as Meyer and Paris. But in Britain, where the Neogrammarian-inspired views of Wright combined with other factors such as the prestige of the natural and of the spoken word, the link between dialect and a whole discourse of nature went largely unchallenged.

If dialect remained a potent symbol of the natural and the rural, its legitimacy was increased still further because the rural was seen to be identified with the historical. The turn towards the rural which occurred in the dominant cultural values was also a reactionary turn, away from an uncertain future and towards a more stable and reassuring past. We shall look in more detail at dominant narratives of national history in chapter four. For the moment, what needs to be underlined is that, in addition to evoking the rural, dialect was also closely identified with the past. Much of the work on rural dialect confines itself to satisfying the expectations of town-dwellers in search of the romantic and picturesque, seeing nature as merely passive and scenic in the manner of Country Life magazine. But other work stresses how rural dialect should be valued as it maintains a link with the national past. In its

General Account for 1876, the EDS had underlined the urgency of its mission by claiming that this was 'the last chance of saving the fast-fading relics of those forms of archaic English which have lingered on in country places'(1877:2). A similar view of dialect as preserving, unchanged, the relics of the past can be seen in an anonymous article entitled 'Chaucer's English in the Dales': 'what we call provincialisms, are very often the echoes of the long-forgotten national language, and the last remains of primitive national habits'(Anon.1868:305). And the 'relics' supposedly preserved in dialect stretch back even further than Chaucer. In his paper on the dialect of West Somerset, Elworthy describes a 'chain of hereditary pronunciation which has come down to us West Country folks, and which connects us with the times when our British forefathers were elbowed back by the prolific Saxon, and lorded over by the proud Norman' (Elworthy 1875-6:199). In the same vein, Dartnell claims that 'many a word or phrase used daily and hourly by the Wiltshire labourer has come down, almost unchanged, even as regards pronunciation, from his Anglo-Saxon forefathers' (1893:vi). At a time when proven continuity with the past conferred a powerful aura of legitimacy, emphasising the rootedness of dialect speech and its links with the national past served to reinforce its status in some respects as an authentic and legitimate voice within the nation. This is a point to which we shall return. For the moment, what we should also note in the extracts above is that their emphasis on the historical pedigree of dialect also forges an image of dialect as an enduring but therefore frozen "relic" from the past. In other words, its legitimacy in this case derives from what was considered to be its permanence, rootedness and immutability.

Dialect therefore benefitted from the wider cultural prestige of the discourse of nature because it was seen to be one of the most powerful symbols of a vanishing rural past. Dialect evoked the authentic and the natural, and in a society which placed such value on these qualities, this in itself would have guaranteed it a degree of legitimacy. However, there is a second way in which dialect tied in with the increasing prevalence of a discourse of nature. We noted above that the predominance of this discourse was itself a product of a wider climate of reaction. Yet this second area of overlap was bound up not so much with the stability and

rigidity implied by reaction, but with the dynamism of regeneration. If dialect was valued at one level because of its supposed imperviousness to the tides of historical and linguistic change, at another level it was valued for precisely the opposite reason: its dynamism and its powers of word creation. Again, this emphasis on the fertility and transience of dialect ties in with the turn towards the natural which so profoundly influenced contemporary language study. We have seen how dialect was valued as it was felt to evoke the natural; we can go further still, however, as dialect derived perhaps an even greater part of its legitimacy from the fact that it was seen not merely as a symbol of the natural, but as itself a supposedly natural linguistic form. In other words, dialect did not merely evoke the natural; it was natural.

### **The Spoken as Natural: the authenticity of dialect**

As we saw in the first chapter, language study in the last third of the nineteenth century became increasingly focused around the spoken word, partly on the grounds that it was seen as more natural than the written word. If the written word embodied the permanence and stability prized by mid-Victorian writers such as Trench and Marsh, a newer generation of scholars wished to study language 'in its present life, and not, as hitherto almost exclusively, in its past death' (Ellis 1872:31). In this period when "nature" was to be so frequently contrasted favourably with "artifice", similar arguments were also used to bolster the legitimacy of dialect. For dialect was seen as the archetypal natural speech-form. We have seen that Müller had been perhaps the first to bestow a degree of legitimacy on dialects by underlining their dynamism and insisting that 'the real and natural life of language is in its dialects'(1864:49). This view was echoed by Murray, who argued that 'the unwritten dialects, and, to some extent, even slang and colloquial speech, approach in character to language in its natural state'(NED 1888:viii). Moreover, in contrast to the views of those who saw dialect as representing an unbroken chain with the national past, Murray adds that these unwritten dialects should be virtually defined in terms of their capacity to innovate and to break with established ideas, 'treating memory and precedent as ministers, not as masters'(NED 1888:viii). An anonymous article from 1865 entitled 'The Poetry of Provincialisms' also reveals

this view of dialect as the archetypal natural form of language; however, the writer tries to have it both ways by arguing that dialect represents not only dynamism and mutability but also stability and continuity with authentic 'good old English':

And the first thing that strikes us in the majority of provincialisms is that the poetry is not "fossil", as Emerson has described the poetry of words, but alive, quick. Our peasants still speak good old English words pregnant with meaning. Living out of doors, their words breathe an out-of-door air. Their images are picturesque and full of life.

Anon. 1865: 31

In a similar vein, O'Neill eulogises the supposedly poetic and natural qualities of provincial dialect in her article 'The Glens and their Speech', claiming that 'there is not a single Glens man or woman...who could consciously use an artistic mode of speech'(1893:373). At a time when the dominant cultural values allotted much prestige to the natural, the supposed inability of dialect speakers to use 'artistic' and artificial speech would undoubtedly be seen in positive terms.

Dialects then were accorded at least some legitimacy as they were felt not only to evoke the natural but to be natural by virtue of being spoken. One far-reaching consequence of this privileging of the natural was a widespread denigration of the cultural legitimacy of what was seen as the most prominent example of artificial and 'artistic speech', the standard variety. With the spoken being elevated above the written, the largely spoken dialects were favourably contrasted with what was seen as the largely written literary standard. Again, it was Müller who had been the first to represent the standard, literary language in negative terms. At a time when 'fossil books' were being castigated by Ellis for their artificiality and their inability to represent the living nature of language, so too was the standard variety which was so closely identified with books, literacy and the written word in general. In chapter one we noted how the new primacy of the spoken word towards the end of the nineteenth century resulted in widespread condemnation of what was pejoratively labelled as the 'fine English' identified largely with the middle class. But similar accusations of wordiness and artificiality

were made against the standard language as a whole. The alleged artificial and convoluted characteristics of the standard language as taught in the new national schools are overtly condemned by a writer whose populist paeans to unstudied and natural speech were discussed in chapter one:

The books used in our National schools show a lofty disdain for home-spun English. As the pupils grow older they do not care to read about a "fine lady", but they are at once drawn to a "female possessing considerable personal attractions".

Kington-Oliphant 1886: 214

As we saw above, many writers shared Kington-Oliphant's concerns over wordiness and over the gulf between natural homespun spoken English and the artificial, longwinded written variety which was being spread by books and newspapers. What was all the more disturbing to such writers was that this was not merely a gulf between the spoken and the written; in fact, the increasingly prevalent written standard appeared to be exerting what was seen as a corrupting and fossilising influence on the spoken word. It was a point made by the Neogrammarians; the written was now intruding upon the spoken in all but a few isolated areas, the dialects of which provided a rare opportunity to observe the supposedly natural process of linguistic growth. Consequently, dialect was defined and legitimised not only against the written standard, but also against the spoken standard. Greenough and Kittredge underline that the artifice of standard written English is reproduced in the standard spoken version:

The language which all educated users of English speak and write is in one sense an artificial tongue. It is what is called a "literary language" as distinguished from the unstudied speech of peoples whose mother tongue comes to them without the influence of literature or the schools.

Greenough and Kittredge 1901: 80

A similar distinction between artificial and natural forms of speech can be seen in Lawson's description of the standardising effects of 'the advance of railways, newspapers, and schools'. He argues that 'it is the tendency of these, while levelling up our vocabulary to the requirements of contemporary diction, to smooth down and



bury all out-cropping ruggedness of old-world speech'(1884:5). Here we see the familiar contrast beloved of the more nostalgic students of dialect between 'contemporary' and 'old-world'. The more significant distinction for our purposes, however, is between 'diction' and 'speech'; one conveying the pedantry, latinism, bookishness and, above all, the artificiality of the spoken standard, the other denoting the unaffected, genuine, indigenous and, most importantly, natural qualities of non-standard spoken English. And of these two contrasting forms of spoken language, it was the levelling but unnatural accents of careful standard pronunciation which were felt to be winning out. As another EDS writer noted with regret; 'the spread of reading and writing among the people [is] making us all, high and low, "talk just like a book"'(EDS 1879:56). In its spoken and written form then, the standard was condemned as artificial, and as Müller had insisted, the real and natural life of language was seen to be in its dialects. In a society transfixed by the authentic and the natural, such attitudes served only to enhance the cultural status of dialect in contrast to the "artificial" standard.

But if the dialects and the standard were thus seen to represent an opposition, they were not seen as totally unrelated. On the contrary, in keeping with the emphasis on dialect as natural, many writers underlined that the rural dialects were the fertile sources from which the standard language derived its sustenance. Again, it is Müller who provides the most powerful naturalistic imagery to describe this dependence of the standard on dialect:

Our chief object today was to explain the growth of language, and for that purpose it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the constant undergrowth of dialects. Remove a language from its native soil, tear it away from the dialects which are its feeders, and you arrest at once its natural growth.

Müller 1864: 62

The name Müller gave to this process was to emerge as a constant theme in cultural debates of this era, 'regeneration'. This was a time when a wide range of educated opinion, from sociologists to scoutmasters, sought the cure for the artificiality and degeneracy of urban existence in the invigorating and regenerating life of the great

outdoors. Rural dialect, like rural life in general, was seen to embody the vigour and dynamism which the nation and its unifying but artificial linguistic standard was felt to have lost. The Society for Pure English, founded in 1913, highlighted the regenerative powers of dialect:

Not only is some knowledge of dialects needful for any true understanding of the history and character of our language, but the standard speech in the past derived much enrichment and what is called "regeneration" from the picturesque vocabularies of local vernaculars. The drying-up of these sources cannot but be regarded as a misfortune. We shall therefore actively encourage educated people, and, above all, teachers in country schools, to take a more sympathetic interest in the forms and usages of local speech.

Society for Pure English 1919: 9

The enriching, regenerative powers of dialect were also underlined by the writer whose praise for the poetry of provincialisms was cited above:

Our language requires both enriching and purifying. And we can best do this by drawing on our rich mines of dialects. They still fortunately furnish us with an armoury by which we may hold our own against all the hideous hybridisms that are invading us.

Anon. 1865: 40

What we see in this extract is the extent to which dialects were seen not only as natural and regenerative, but as pure and uncorrupted sources which the nation could tap in order to fend off the influx of 'hideous hybridisms'. As Pearsall Smith expressed it:

Since our language seems to be growing year by year more foreign, abstract and colourless in character, it stands in greater need than ever of this vigorous and native reinforcement.

Pearsall Smith 1925: 161

In other words, dialects were valued not only because they were natural resources on which the standard depended, but also because they were seen as authentically national in a way which the standard language, in contrast, was not. Indeed,

Pearsall Smith went so far as to describe standard English as 'parasitic', saying that it 'never exists entirely on its own capital', but that from its competitors 'it is able to draw valuable elements for its own enrichment'(1925:164). And in contrast to this foreign parasite, it was dialect which represented the genuinely native, natural and national speech. The irony then is that as the standard language was becoming the authoritative speech of the nation, it was dialect which was increasingly seen to be the authentic speech of the nation. A more powerful example of the dichotomy between the nation as it was experienced and as it was imagined would be difficult to find.

In summary, dialect, by virtue of the fact that it fitted in with the ruralist emphasis in the dominant discourse of nation, therefore enjoyed a certain degree of legitimacy. We have seen how this legitimacy arises because dialect was felt to evoke the natural and to actually be a natural form of language. These constitute two of the major reasons for the unprecedented degree of interest in dialect; this after all was a time when ideas of nation were inextricably bound up with the discourse of nature. However, the value attached to all things natural is not the only factor we need to consider in order to account for the spectacular boom in dialect study at the end of the nineteenth century. If dialect embodied the authentic voice of the nation, then that voice represented not only the rural as opposed to the urban, or the spoken as opposed to the written, but also the local and the regional as opposed to the national. For this was another area in which we can identify a divergence between the rhetoric and reality of nation. Just as an urbanised nation saw itself as rural, so an increasingly standardised nation was portrayed as embodying difference and diversity. Examining this emphasis on difference and local identity, and analysing the ways in which it was reflected and reinforced in dialect study, are the tasks to which we now turn.

### **County and Country: dialect study and local identity**

We have seen that one of the main features of late-nineteenth-century British experience was the trend towards standardisation and erosion of differences; indeed, it was the strength of this trend which lent so much urgency and impetus to the study of dialect. At this point, however, it is appropriate to sound a note of caution about the danger of overstating the case. The national may have superseded the local, but this is not the same as saying that the local dimension of identity was utterly discredited and discouraged. On the contrary, local loyalties and identities often remained strong. In fact in some ways they were actually strengthened.<sup>8</sup> Samuel (1989 vol.3:xvii) has highlighted the paradox that an era of national homogenisation should also have given rise to stock regional characters such as the cheeky but lovable Cockney. A more powerful proof of the persistence and strengthening of local identities during this era can be seen in the fanatical loyalties inspired by sports such as soccer and cricket, both of which began to attract a mass following at this time. The particular importance attached to derby games provides compelling evidence of the extent to which these sports served as an outlet through which to express local identity.

The importance accorded to local identities within an overarching national framework was also recognised in two important organisational reforms carried out during the period. The first of these was Cardwell's reform of the British Army, implemented in the early 1870s with an eye on the startling military success of Prussia and Germany. For our purposes the most significant of Cardwell's changes was that infantry regiments would henceforth be organised on a county basis. The second reform was the establishment of county councils in the wake of the Local Government Act of 1888. There may have been a shift in political power from town hall to Whitehall, but the 1888 Act illustrates the dangers of overstating the extent to which the national superseded the local during this period. In short, during this era of unprecedented national standardisation, there remained a place for the local and the regional within the national framework.

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<sup>8</sup> Walvin discusses "Pride in Town and Country" in *Victorian Values*, (1988) chapter 9.

The validity accorded to the local can be seen especially clearly in dominant cultural values, and it is here that dialect study was to play an important role. We have seen how the dominant vision of the nation was of an enchanting rural idyll, but this image also evoked a vanishing world of small-scale and local communities. Its world was that of the village or the county, not merely rural but also self-contained, independent, and untouched by external influences. Against the backdrop of the First World War, Quiller-Couch's description of a man seeking the basis of patriotism highlights the importance of the local in the rural vision of Englishness.

London is just the arteries of patriotism... For the true source that feeds them, the spirit that clarifies, he must seek home to a green nook of his youth in Yorkshire or Derbyshire, Salop or Kent or Devon; where the folk are slow, but there is seed-time and harvest, and 'pure religion breathing household laws'.

Quiller-Couch 1927: 283

A similar emphasis on an exclusively rural local identity can be traced throughout dialect study of the period. Indeed, as we noted above, the English Dialect Dictionary divided up the country on a county basis. Likewise, the vast majority of the studies carried out by the EDS take the county as their starting point and aim to show the distinctiveness of the dialect spoken in that county. Many of them take the emphasis on underlining distinctiveness a stage further by prefacing their dialect research with an overview of the customs or folklore which are also seen to be peculiar to the county in question.<sup>9</sup> In short, dialect study not only validates the spoken over the written, the natural over the artificial, and the rural over the urban; it also legitimises the regional within the national. Most of the EDS extracts we have quoted thus far illustrate this concern to legitimise local identities. But there is one region which we have not mentioned so far which reveals this process of legitimation especially clearly. This is the region which best illustrates the extent to which definitively non-standard speech-forms were seen to constitute a more authentic national voice

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<sup>9</sup> The ongoing project, the Victoria History of the Counties of England, was begun in 1899.

than the standard. We refer of course to the area which had become - and which remains - the single biggest and most powerful pole of regional identity within the national space, "the North".<sup>10</sup>

We saw above that the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a shift towards a unified national space. The corollary of this was the ebbing away of political and economic clout from the dynamic and doggedly independent northern cities which had so powerfully symbolised mid-Victorian Britain. Political power was slowly being transferred to the level of the state, enhancing the importance of Westminster. As Hobsbawm (1979:191) has argued, economic factors also played a part in boosting the position of London and the South-East, with the relative decline from the 1870s onwards of industrial production concentrated in the North, and the emergence of an economy revolving around London and geared more to finance and trade. These shifts were reflected in cultural terms too. Howkins (1986:64) has pointed out that many of the symbols of the emerging national identity reflected the new dominance of the South; images of thatched cottages, village greens, and gently rolling hills replaced the much starker and wilder vision of nature which the early Romantics had seen in Cumbria, Scotland and north Wales. If this was the era in which a unified nation was forged, it was also an era in which the cultural and economic centre of the nation shifted definitively to the south. Having led the world in industrial might, 'the North' no longer even led the nation. The workshop of the world had been, to some extent, marginalised.

However, along with other marginalised regions and the "minority" nations, the North preserved a limited but distinctive regional identity which enjoyed a certain degree of legitimacy. This was frequently bolstered by reference to northern speech. For northern speech-forms were now measured in relation to the new national standard language; in other words, they now constituted dialect. At one level, that meant that they were marginalised and stigmatised; however, at another level, as we have seen, that meant that they were legitimised as more natural, native and

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<sup>10</sup> Of course "the North" can itself be subdivided; nevertheless, in terms of cultural attitudes to language and dialect, less importance is attached to these divisions than to the gulf between north and south.

authentic than the standard. Samuel argues that the North-South divide has been a major axis of division at several points in national history, describing it as 'a contrast, in one register, between the barbarous and the civilised, and, in another, between hardy independence and the effete' (1989 vol.3: xii). The second of these contrasts is clear in the widespread view of the South as a place of degeneracy and decadence which had somehow betrayed the soul of the nation and mangled the purity and beauty of its speech. The Society for Pure English plead for 'some correction of the slurred and indistinct way of speaking which is now regarded as correct English, and deliberately taught as such on the Continent' (SPE 1919:10). In his paper for the SPE on English homophones, Bridges (1919) argues that the emerging science of phonetics had erred in choosing too low a standard of pronunciation, and ought to use the clearer vowel sounds heard in the North as its model.<sup>11</sup> The implication is that the truest, purest and most genuine form of English is not the degenerate and fancy southern-influenced standard, but the unaffected and down-to-earth dialect of the gruff and sturdy northerner. In other words, it was northerners who were seen - and who saw themselves - as the archetypal and authentic plain-speaking Englishmen. What the North lost in political and economic authority, it gained in cultural authenticity. Borrowing Stedman Jones's phrase, it was one of the many trade-offs which could be found in this 'culture of consolation' (1983:237). Consigned to peripheral status, northerners, the working class, the Celtic "fringe" and other groups marginalised in the new national space could safely be allowed to retain at least some feelings of pride and superiority in relation to the centre: that they are the fabled plain-speaking Englishmen who call a spade a spade unlike the long-winded toffs; that they can express spontaneity, emotion and flair whether in poetry or on a rugby field in a way which puts the bumbling, slow-witted Saxon in the shade. Such beliefs console us still, and make us feel as though we belong, however tenuously, to the imagined community of the nation.

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<sup>11</sup> Bridges argued this case as a member of the Advisory Committee on Spoken English set up by the BBC in 1926. Had his view prevailed, BBC English would have had a distinctly northern tone.

If northerners of all descriptions could recognise themselves as the authentic plain-speaking Englishmen, it was almost certainly Yorkshire where they were to be found in greatest concentration. The pride which the people of Yorkshire felt for their county, and their belief that it was their speech, and not the standard, which was the truly authentic and legitimate form of English, was noted with some incredulity by a somewhat scandalised southern observer as he compiled 'A Glossary of the Dialect of Almondbury and Huddersfield':

All Yorkshiremen unite in looking down on men of other counties as unenlightened barbarians, insomuch as they regard the county as the undoubted centre of the universe, and would say, to parody the Earl of Derby's declaration, "An Englishman if you please, but a Yorkshireman first". By no means inconsistently with this amusing view of their position they hold two canons. First, that no south countryman can speak Yorkshire at all; second, that they themselves speak the most perfect and classical English.

Easter 1883: ix

The contempt for southern claims to possess the legitimate linguistic standard for the whole nation is made clearer still in an EDS article from 1877 entitled 'A Glossary of Words used in Holderness in the East Riding of Yorkshire'. The writers underline the greater length and purity of the pedigree of the English spoken in Yorkshire, making their point by drawing a comparison between the language used by Chaucer and that used by his contemporary, Wycliff:

The former was a Londoner and a courtier, and his writings abound with words of Norman-French derivation; whilst the latter, a Yorkshireman, makes use, to a much greater extent, of the homeliest Saxon. It may nevertheless be remarked, en passant, that Yorkshire stands pre-eminent in the history of the English language.

Ross, Stead & Holderness 1877: ii

Such claims for the legitimacy of dialect were made in a grander fashion for Yorkshire and the North. But all dialects - always remembering the exclusively rural connotations of this term - were seen to represent to varying extents what Reeve called 'the very root and essence of the language' (1889:344). In an obituary



of the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes, published in the Edinburgh Review, one of his biographers notes that the poet began to write in dialect 'with a hope of preserving and a dream of restoring the pure ancient language and character of England'(Anon.1888a:130). And the obituarist says of Barnes that 'no philologist knew better that provincial dialects are not corruptions, but individual varieties of the language which, through the operation of political and geographical causes, has happened to become national'(ibid:129). Even Wyld, who did more than most to legitimise what he called Received Standard pronunciation, and who had referred contemptuously to the 'chaos of uncouth provincialisms'(1914:149) had to admit that 'pure provincial dialects are not in themselves vulgar [but] a separate and independent form of English'(1907:56).

What emerges in all these extracts then is the fact that those speech-forms which were seen as regional or provincial dialects enjoyed a certain legitimacy by virtue of their supposed links with nature and the past. This in turn allowed and positively encouraged the fostering of myriad local identities and loyalties, all of which could be defined against the standard language and the unifying, homogenising values with which it was identified. Yet it was not only against the standard language that these legitimised regional voices were defined. As we noted above in our distinction between norms and forms of linguistic behaviour, the spoken standard, though clearly a southern dialect in origin, was often recognised, albeit grudgingly, as a "national" form of speech, or as "the language" per se. In other words its specificity as a southern form was disguised or, as Barthes would put it, 'exnominated' (1988:138). The same could not be said for the variety of speech identified exclusively with London: Cockney. The extent to which the "provincial" dialects were defined not only against the standard but also against Cockney can clearly be seen in Hamerton's boast about the historical pedigree of the Lancashire dialect:

One might write a dissertation to prove the vigour, the terseness, and the venerable antiquity of this [the Lancashire] variety of speech, which ought to be studied as an independent idiom; and not confounded with corrupt and vulgar English, like the English of the uneducated Londoner.

cited in Nodal & Milner 1875: vii

The contrast between the 'venerable antiquity' of regional non-standard dialects and the 'corrupt and vulgar English' of Cockney can also be seen in the work of Gissing, himself a Londoner, notably in his 1892 novel Born in Exile:

The father spoke with a strong Midland accent, using words of dialect by no means disagreeable to the son's ear - for dialect is a very different thing from the bestial jargon which on the lips of the London vulgar passes for English.

Gissing 1892: 497

Such views also informed educational policy, as is seen in the report of a 1909 Conference on the teaching of English in London elementary schools:

When a boy or girl in Devonshire, Lincolnshire or Yorkshire is taught to acquire the constructions of the King's English at the expense of his native forms of speech there is a balance of loss and gain in the process. But with the pupil in the London elementary school, this is not the case. There is no London dialect of reputable antecedents and origin which is a heritage for him to surrender in school. The Cockney mode of speech, with its unpleasant twang, is a modern corruption without legitimate credentials, and is unworthy of being the speech of any person in the capital city of the Empire.

cited in Matthews 1938: 157

This vilification of Cockney can be traced throughout dialect study and other writing on linguistic issues at this time. None of the "dialects" is attacked with such frequency and ferocity, and attacked not only by the advocates of the national standard but also by the defenders of regional dialect. The almost universal hostility to Cockney can be partly explained as the result of the widespread resentment felt towards London. However, as with the anti-Latin tirades we examined in chapter one, it would be wrong to overlook the role played by questions of class. The key to understanding the hostility to Cockney takes us back to the prevalence of ruralism we discussed above and to the perceived rise of the working class which we examined in chapter one. For what really underlies the vilification of Cockney is that no other language variety was so completely identified with the urban working class. Other non-standard varieties could be accommodated within the discourse of

nation. But this was done largely by representing them as regional, provincial and county dialects, all of which could fit readily into the dominant rural and reactionary vision of the nation. And with the insistence on the link between language and land, differences could be portrayed as due solely to geographical, rather than social, variation. Working-class speech forms in other cities could either be ignored or subsumed within a wider regional and ruralist identity; the urban voices of Manchester or Leeds sounded less threatening when cast as the historic county voices of Lancashire or Yorkshire, or as the authentic English voices of "the North".<sup>12</sup> At a time when the cultural, economic and political centre of the nation was shifting to London, Cockney could not be ignored. Nor could its essentially urban and class character be subsumed within a comfortably rural notion of the region or the county.<sup>13</sup> It was clearly not the speech of London as a whole; it was clearly a class dialect. It is a point highlighted by Ripman:

The term "cockney" is often very loosely used. Some employ it indiscriminately to designate all forms of Southern English speech, whereas it should be applied only to the speech of certain classes in London.

Ripman 1906: 3

In short, Cockney was singled out for criticism because it provided audible evidence that not all differences within the nation could be assigned to regional variation. It was uncomfortable proof of the enduring presence of distinctions based on class.

The purpose of this brief overview of attacks on Cockney is to underline that Cockney is the exception which proves the rule. The fact that it was so consistently singled out for condemnation serves to reinforce the point that other non-standard

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<sup>12</sup> Peile shows how the speech of northern cities could be cast as rural. Highlighting the legitimacy of the so-called "vulgar" words of uneducated people, he says that such people usually live in the country, "though in the great towns of the North there are plenty of those 'vulgar' words which their speakers have inherited from their fathers who lived in the country" (1877:13).

<sup>13</sup> The irony is that many features of Cockney illustrate its origins in the rural dialects of the south east: the silent "g" (walkin', talkin') and the extended "o" in words such as "off" (orff). More ironically still, these features also survive in - and are associated with - the speech of the "huntin' shootin' fishin'" landed aristocracy (McCrum et al 1989:276). Our focus, however, is on perceptions and discourses; whatever the facts, Cockney was perceived as rootless and thoroughly urban.

varieties of English were successfully accommodated and incorporated within the dominant discourse of nation. For all its emphasis on standardisation, homogenisation and unity within the nation, the dominant discourse of national identity permitted and actively encouraged the expression of local and regional loyalties. Just as an urbanised nation imagined itself as a rural idyll, and just as a modernising nation looked backwards to its past, so an ever more unified and homogeneous nation insisted all the more fervently on the importance and value of diversity.

Thus it is precisely this dichotomy which accounts for the fact that dialects were being both stigmatised and legitimised. In its celebration of the local and of the natural, dialect study reinforced and mirrored a particular vision of the nation which, far from reflecting the reality of modernisation and standardisation, totally inverted it. In short, dialect study in late-nineteenth-century Britain slotted readily into the dominant contemporary discourse of national identity; therein lies the most important reason for its prevalence.

Having examined the relationship between dialect study and discourses of nation within Britain, we now turn our attention towards France. In chapter one we identified an important difference between the two countries in terms of dominant attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm. Further evidence of this difference, and of others, will be provided in this chapter. It is important, however, that we should not overlook the similarities. One such similarity is that for France as for Britain, the last third of the nineteenth century was a period in which the levelling forces of standardisation were exerting an ever greater influence. Examining these forces is the starting point for our analysis of dialect study and discourses of nation in post-1870 France.

## France

### Republican and Reactionary: dialect study in France

#### Une et Indivisible: linguistic standardisation in the Third Republic

As in Britain, the trend towards standardisation within French society can be identified long before 1870. As Zeldin (1979:189) shows, 18,000 kilometres of railways, half of those ever to be laid in France, were put in place under the Second Empire; peasants were being turned into Frenchmen long before 1870. However, 1870 does mark a crucial turning point. In France, arguably even more so than in Britain, it marks the start of an era in which the forces of uniformisation and standardisation across a wide range of fields were in the ascendant.<sup>14</sup> We have shown that the dominant ideology of nation within the British context was diverging ever more rapidly from the reality. In France, by contrast, the situation is quite different. As we saw in chapter one, the dominant ideology of nation in post-1870 France was grounded firmly in the tradition of Republican patriotism stretching back to 1789. We have already seen that one of the main features of that tradition was its vision of the nation as a political and human institution, rather than a predetermined natural organism. But another key feature of the Republican discourse of nation is the way in which it celebrates standardisation, modernisation and unity. The primary characteristic of the Republic was that it was *une et indivisible*; the standardising zeal of the 1789 revolutionaries can clearly be seen in the implementation of the metric system and a uniform scale of weights and measures, and in the abolition of internal tariffs. In the case of language, it is seen in the attempts to spread French throughout the new Republic, spearheaded by the formidable Abbé Grégoire. In other words, when the Third Republic looked back to the First, they looked back to a vision of the nation in which standardisation was seen as a desirable national goal. Consequently, the trend towards standardisation which, as we shall see below, accelerated after 1870 can be seen in some ways as

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<sup>14</sup> Given further impetus by a new bout of railway expansion as part of Freycinet's public works programme from the early 1880s. By 1910 there were 39,000 kilometres of track. (Zeldin 1979:271-3).

bringing the reality of French experience more closely into line with the well-established rhetoric of national unity. Indeed, as with the arguments advanced in the Alsace-Lorraine dispute, the political and economic developments which helped to forge a greater degree of national unity during this era were often consciously presented with reference to the principles of the First Republic. Examples of this symmetry between First and Third Republics on the question of standardisation will be found below.

We shall look at two areas in which reforms carried out by the Third Republic played a major part in forging and consolidating an unprecedented degree of national uniformity. We shall focus specifically on the wider linguistic uniformity which such reforms brought in their wake. As Weber (1977:70) has shown, at the dawn of the Third Republic in 1870, French remained a foreign language for almost half of the inhabitants of France. But this situation was to change rapidly as the trend towards standardisation gathered pace. The most important of these two areas, education, will be discussed below. First, we shall look briefly at another area which, unlike education, does not apply to the British context, but which played a vital part in underpinning linguistic unity in France: conscription.

The defeat of 1870 prompted calls for regeneration and reform in many aspects of French society. After the humiliation of Sedan, no sector of society was in need of more urgent reform than the army. Consequently, a five-year period of compulsory military service was introduced in 1872. As Jauffret (1991) argues, these reforms represented a significant victory for the forces of democratisation over the traditional military elite. Indeed, the levelling tendency was reinforced by the law which put an end to "substitution", the practice whereby rich men could hire a substitute to serve on their behalf. But more importantly, the introduction of conscription also represented a major step forward on the path to linguistic uniformity. If many Britons first encountered significant linguistic difference in the newly accessible holiday resorts, for many French men at least, the first such experience took place in the far less frivolous environment of the barracks. As evidence of the way in which the experience of conscription helped erode linguistic difference, Weber cites an 1880 report on Breton conscripts given by an army recruitment officer:

The young Bretons who don't know how to read, write or speak French when they get to their units are promptly civilised ... lose the prejudices of their "pays", abandon native suspicions and backward opinions; and when they return to the village, they are sufficiently Frenchified to Frenchify their friends by their influence.

Weber 1977: 299

Two further points of significance emerge in this extract. First, it is clear that adopting the standard language is seen to be much more than simply a question of linguistic usage. On the contrary, as in contemporary British evidence, the familiar diglossic opposition between the standard language and "dialect" represents a far more wide-reaching split between 'civilised' values on the one hand, and 'backward suspicions and prejudices' on the other. A second point worth highlighting is that this extract reveals how the standardising influence of military life spread far beyond the conscripts themselves. In another example of the continuity with the First Republic, we can see that this point was well understood by Grégoire in his 1794 report: 'En général dans nos bataillons on parle français, et cette masse de républicains qui en aura contracté l'usage, le répandra dans ses foyers' (1974:208). From the 1870s onwards, with even the smallest and most isolated of communes obliged to send its menfolk on military service, no corner of the national territory could remain impervious to the influence of the standard language.

In this way, conscription, which itself had been made possible by the railways, played a vital part in consolidating the unifying, nation-building process which the railways had initiated. As Antoine and Martin have argued, 'le dépaysement et le brassage qu'a représenté cette expérience' served to accelerate the process of national unification:

Il est probable qu'elle a fortifié l'intégration à la vie et aux valeurs nationales, qu'elle a renforcé l'action de l'école dans la connaissance du français.

Antoine and Martin 1985: 14

As Antoine and Martin suggest, the linguistic integration fostered by conscription served to reinforce the standardising effects coming not only from the railway, but also from the new national education system. This then is the second area of

nineteenth-century French society where an unprecedented degree of standardisation can clearly be seen. As in Britain, the establishment of a unifying national educational structure played a crucial part in the process of nation-building. And again, as in Britain, educational provision was closely bound up with wider linguistic uniformity.

The extent to which the creation of a free, compulsory and secular education system in France in the 1880s was seen as a levelling, unifying and nation-building step is clearly revealed in the words of its chief architect, Jules Ferry:

I defy you ever to make out of two such classes an egalitarian nation, a nation animated by that spirit of unity and that confraternity of ideas that makes the strength of true democracies, if, between these two classes, there has not been the first *rapprochement*, the first fusion which results from the mixing of the rich and the poor as children on the benches of a school.

cited in Zeldin 1979: 261

The education legislation initiated by Ferry set in place a nationwide system of schools which, even today, is widely seen as the most valuable and lasting legacy of the Third Republic. As with the conscripts drafted into the national army, for the schoolchildren enrolled in the new state schools, like their counterparts in Britain, the experience amounted to a process of standardisation. Girardet (1966) has illustrated the way in which schoolchildren throughout France were taught the same basic curriculum, infused with Republican patriotism. But if the discourse of national unity can be detected in all the subjects within the curriculum, it can be seen most clearly of all in attitudes to the subject which dominated all the others by virtue of the fact that it was the very medium through which they were conducted: French language. Speaking at a teachers' conference which formed part of the Exhibition of 1878, Bréal reiterates the centrality of French within any educational programme:

Quelles que soient les parties nouvelles dont s'enrichira le programme de notre enseignement primaire, le français en est et en restera toujours la partie essentielle. Il n'en peut pas être autrement; c'est par la langue que nous entrons en communication avec nos semblables; c'est par la langue que nous recevons le



dépôt des connaissances acquises par nos ancêtres; tout vient converger vers l'enseignement de la langue.

Bréal 1878: 194

When Bréal's call for educational provision was finally answered in the Ferry legislation, his wish that French would form 'la partie essentielle' was fulfilled. One of the major obstacles which had to be negotiated was the resistance of those who wished to preserve Latin as the medium of instruction. But when this resistance had been overcome, the way was clear for the institution of French language as the keystone in the edifice of the Republican school system. The extent to which schools were seen as symbols of a glorious future characterised by linguistic uniformity is made clear in Bruno's *Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants*, especially in this description of the visit of the central figures in the story, the young brothers André and Julien, to a house in the Dauphiné region:

Les gens qui entraient parlaient tous patois entre eux; les deux enfants, assis à l'écart et ne comprenant pas un mot à ce qui se disait, se sentaient bien isolés dans cette ferme étrangère. Le petit Julien finit par quitter sa chaise et, s'approchant d'André...lui dit tout bas: - pourquoi donc tous les gens de ce pays-ci ne parlent-ils pas le français? - C'est que tous n'ont pas pu aller à l'école. Mais dans un certain nombre d'années il n'en sera plus ainsi, et par toute la France on saura parler la langue de la patrie.

Bruno 1878: 164

The moral about the significance of language as the motor and symbol of national unity was also hammered home in lessons devoted specifically to linguistic study:

L'école et ses maîtres virent dans une excellente connaissance de la langue nationale la condition même de cette unité sans laquelle la République ne serait point. Voilà le fondement de cette attention extrême apportée à l'orthographe, à la grammaire, à l'expression.

Antoine and Martin 1985: 17

It is worth reiterating at this stage that, as in the British context, the corollary of this process of linguistic homogenisation was the disappearance of those language

varieties which were counted, according to the definition of the time, as dialects.<sup>15</sup>  
It was a development noted, though not especially regretted, by several French observers:

Donc les patois s'en vont. C'est un fait contre lequel il serait puéril et vain de recriminer; c'est une évolution sociale nécessaire, que le savant doit constater, quels que puissent être ses regrets, sans avoir l'inutile prétention de l'enrayer.

Dauzat 1912a: 192

As in Britain, it was the perception that dialects were on the verge of disappearance which made studying them a matter of such urgency. The urgency is clear in this extract from the Revue des Patois in 1887:

Nous ajouterons qu'il est urgent d'entreprendre une enquête sur les patois de France; car le développement si heureux de l'instruction primaire tend à leur enlever une grande partie de leur originalité en y introduisant chaque jour un plus grand nombre de formes et de tournures françaises.

Anon. 1887: 1

Apart from the fact that this observer welcomes the introduction of 'instruction primaire', this extract bears close similarities to contemporary British observations about the disappearance of dialect. The similarities extend further. In France as in Britain, the last third of the nineteenth century sees an explosion of interest in the study of dialect. Dauzat (1912a:197) traces this back to the founding of the Revue Critique in the late 1860s. Certainly, we can detect a growing interest in dialect from that date onwards; the founding of journals such as Romania (1872), Revue des Patois (1887), and the Revue des Patois Gallo-Romans (1887) all testify to this new interest. In 1883, dialect study was taught for the first time at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes. The figure responsible for teaching the new subject was Gilliéron, who was to achieve far greater fame within dialect study by compiling the Atlas Linguistique de la France. In short, in France as in Britain, linguistic standardisation generated an unprecedented degree of interest in the study of dialect.

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<sup>15</sup> According to present-day definitions of course, "dialects" did not disappear.

As in the British context, however, dialect in France was being stigmatised as well as studied on an unprecedented scale. In fact it could be argued that a far greater stigma was attached to dialect in France than in Britain. A closer look at the expansion of dialect study bears this out: Dauzat (1912a:198) reports that 75% of Gilliéron's students were foreigners. Indications of the widespread contempt for dialect can clearly be seen in the report on Breton officers cited by Weber, and in Bruno's description of the lost brothers' encounter with dialect-speakers in the Dauphiné. The question thus arises as to why dialect was treated with even greater disdain in France. The answer is to be found by considering the very different discourses of nation which, as we have seen, were dominant within late-nineteenth-century France and Britain respectively.

As we saw in our discussion of the British context, dialect enjoyed some degree of cultural legitimacy by virtue of the fact that it reflected and reinforced the dominant discourse of nation. The same cannot be said of the situation in France. In short, there was no place for dialect within the Republican vision of nation which became dominant within post-1870 France. The stigmatisation of dialect was another of the legacies of the Revolutionary discourse of nation which had been bequeathed to the Third Republic from the First. Bauche describes the re-emergence of regionalism and dialect in terms of a threat to national security, echoing Barère's famous 1794 warning about linguistic disunity breeding counter-revolution and treason<sup>16</sup>:

Ce qui importe, d'abord, c'est que la France soit un pays où l'on parle français, le français d'en haut ou celui d'en bas, mais le français, celui de l'Ile de France, celui de la capitale, et non des langues étrangères ou intérieures et des patois locaux. Le régionalisme linguistique est mortel pour une nation. Le félibrige, l'exaltation de la "Muttersprache", les efforts pour ressusciter ou développer les langues et dialects provinciaux sont des crimes, conscients ou non, de lèse-patrie.

Bauche 1920:18

<sup>16</sup> See Barère's report on foreign dialects to the Committee of Public Safety on 27 January 1794: "le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton; l'émigration et la haine de la République parlent allemand; la contre-révolution parle italien et le fanatisme parle basque. Brisons ces instruments de dommage et d'erreur". Cited in Brunot (1927:181).

The extent to which hostility to dialect was a common feature of First and Third republics can also be seen in the similarity between Grégoire and Brunot's respective attacks on dialect as a symbol of reaction:

La féodalité qui vint ensuite morceler ce beau pays, y conserva soigneusement cette disparité d'idiomes comme un moyen d'y reconnoître, de ressaisir les serfs fugitifs et de river leurs chaînes. Actuellement encore l'étendue territoriale où certains patois sont utilisés, est déterminées par les limites de l'ancienne domination féodale.

Grégoire 1974: 199

Over a century later, Brunot, in his chapter on language policy under the Revolution, paints a glowing portrait of Gregoire and reiterates the equation between dialect and reactionary division:

Quel role pouvait jouer, à ces heures d'extase et d'élan mystique, ces misérables parlers qui empechaient les foules de s'entendre, d'échanger des promesses, de comprendre les décrets, les lectures, les discours, les chants?...C'était encore des vestiges du passé abot et maudit, une de ces inventions ténébreuses des tyrans, imaginées pour isoler les frères, les empêcher de se joindre dans le besoin de s'aimer et d'unir leurs forces.

Brunot 1927: 5

Thus we see again the extent to which the luminaries and supporters of the Third Republic (Brunot was a staunch Republican) legitimise their beliefs and policies with reference to the revolutionary tradition stemming from a century earlier. Delesalle and Chevalier (1986:316) underline further similarities between Grégoire and Brunot. For instance, both writers, in common with Bourdieu, see language in terms of its role as an instrument of exchange and communication within a single linguistic market. But what is clear is that the point on which both writers insist with most vehemence is the importance for the nation and the benefits for the individual of uniformity and identity of language. In this respect, the principal linguistic historian of the Third Republic and the architect of language policy under the First Republic speak with one voice.

Thus, within the Republican tradition which constituted the dominant discourse of nation in the Third Republic, dialect was roundly condemned and not even allowed a degree of legitimacy within ideas of nation, as was the case in Britain. Yet, as we have seen, despite this deep-seated stigmatisation, dialect was studied on an unprecedented scale. We shall proceed to examine different strands within French dialect study from the period, arguing that they can be related to differing discourses of nation. Before doing so, we first need to underline that opposing visions of the nation did exist within late-nineteenth-century France. The tradition of 1789 may have been the dominant discourse of national identity; but it was not the only one.

### **From Revolution to Reaction: alternative discourses of nation**

Ideas of nation were high on the agenda in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus far we have discussed only the revived Revolutionary discourse of national identity, although that discourse itself was of course made up of complex and often conflicting strands. However, if a sanitised and harmonised version of 1789 was the official vision of national identity promulgated by the Third Republic, it was by no means the only such vision to be put forward during this period. To understand why alternative ideas of nation should have emerged, we need to go back to the events of 1870 and 1871. This short period stands out as a crucial moment in the history of ideas of nation. In the space of months, the dominant narrative of national identity was suddenly and dramatically called into question. This was prompted partly by the emergence of a unified Germany and the bloodshed of the Commune. But the event which had the most far-reaching consequences for the perceived idea of nation in France was the humiliating defeat of 1870. As Taylor has argued: 'the myth of *la grande nation*, dominating Europe, was shattered for ever' (1973:210). With a whole set of assumptions about French identity and status so severely and so unexpectedly called into question, it is hardly surprising that ideas of nation should have been one of the most consistent and controversial areas of debate from 1870 onwards.

We have seen that the new Republican regime responded to the defeat by redoubling efforts to anchor ideas of nation even more firmly in the dominant post-Revolutionary discourse. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, an entirely different narrative of national identity had arisen in direct opposition to the discourse of 1789. This new narrative, preached by the newly-emerged "nationalist" movement and endorsed by writers such as Maurras and Barrès, projected national identity way back beyond 1789. Indeed, it caused many, including Maurras, to view the Revolution as a dreadful mistake which had distorted what he saw as the essence of the French nation.<sup>17</sup> Take the words of Action Française activist Paul Bourget, writing in 1895:

Nous devons chercher ce qui reste de la vieille France et nous y rattacher par toutes nos fibres...rendre à la vie religieuse sa vigueur et sa dignité par la suppression du budget des cultes et par le droit de posséder librement assuré aux associations religieuses; en un mot...défaire systématiquement l'oeuvre meurtrière de la Révolution Française.

Bourget 1895 (vol. 2): 320

If few went as far as Bourget in their opposition to the Revolution, we can nevertheless identify a widespread trend towards a reassessment and a questioning of the significance and value of the 1789 Revolution. Taine challenged the dominant Enlightenment narrative by arguing that the Revolution was driven not so much by the forces of reason, but by what he saw as the perennial determinants of all historical change, "race, milieu, moment". At a broader level, the phenomenal spread throughout France of the movement known as Solidarism also testifies to a disillusionment with the principles of 1789. For Solidarism provides another example of the turn away from the individual and towards the collective which we discussed above with reference to Britain. In the French context the attack on individualism was seen to some extent as a reaction against the discourse of 1789, with its insistence on the inalienable rights of the individual. For Solidarism, the Revolution was not so much wrong as wrong-headed and inadequate. Such views

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<sup>17</sup> "Dans toute cette période [1880-1945], c'est l'acceptation ou le refus de 1789 qui reste le principal critère de discrimination entre Droite et Gauche" (Gérard 1970: 65).

all contributed to a widespread sense that the value of the Revolution was questionable.

The tone of this challenge to the modernising, centralising discourse associated with 1789 often bore strong similarities to the dominant British ideology of nation in that it privileged the natural and the local. Maurras (1986) captured the tone in the title of one of the chapters in his book Mes Idées Politiques: 'Retour aux Choses Vivantes'. The prevalence of naturalistic imagery amongst prophets of reaction can also be seen in Mazade's 1875 article entitled 'La littérature et les malheurs de la France'. Mazade claimed that things had been going wrong since the revolution of 1830, which he describes as both a 'victoire de libéralisme', and 'une victoire de l'esprit moderne'. Since then, he argues, the changes have all been for the worse:

L'éloquence, l'imagination, l'étude, la raison, l'esprit, n'ont point disparu; mais il y a visiblement une diminution de fécondité intellectuelle jusque dans la profusion apparente des talents, une décroissance de certaines qualités supérieures, une sorte d'insurrection ou d'invasion bruyante d'une littérature nouvelle détachée des hautes traditions, plus ou moins atteinte des vices d'une civilisation superficielle.

Mazade 1875: 903

As references such as 'civilisation superficielle' attest, there is a clear line of descent here from Rousseau, thus making it difficult to argue that using naturalistic imagery is inherently reactionary and opposed to the progressive ideals of 1789. It was Rousseau after all who was regarded as one of the main philosophical fathers of the Revolution. Moreover, as the example of Morris in Britain suggests, ruralism could be linked as much with radicalism as with nostalgic conservatism. In the specific context of post-1870 France, however, the discourse of nature was firmly grounded in a reactionary right-wing vision of French identity which to a large extent defined itself in opposition to the revolutionary narrative stretching back to 1789. In their analysis of key terms in the political vocabulary of late-nineteenth-century France, Antoine and Martin (1985) highlight the increasing prevalence within right-wing political circles of words with rural and natural associations. For example, a

shadowy ultra right-wing party which had a policy of excluding Jews and Protestants called itself the Parti Agraire National.

The wider connotations of ideas about nature within post-1870 France have already been discussed in chapter one. It was argued that such ideas were largely rejected by French critics, from Renan to Bréal, because they were felt to be closely linked to a determinist vision of language and nation which had become unpalatable as a result of the Alsace-Lorraine dispute. The extent to which a discourse of nature was closely linked with determinism is also borne out in the work of those who endorsed it. For the point to be reiterated here is that there were important figures within post-1870 France who effectively voiced their support for the vision of nation as natural and determined which was being rejected by the majority of their compatriots. One such figure is Barrès. His work clearly reveals the overlap between a discourse of nature and an exclusive, reactionary and xenophobic concept of nation. Conflating not only nature and nation, but also the etymologically-related term "naissance", Barrès held that the nation is a natural phenomenon, membership of which is determined by birth. Consequently, in this view, the idea that an individual can freely choose to identify with a given nation becomes inconceivable. Hence Barrès's opposition to the view that those whom he regards as foreign can be "naturalised" into French citizens: 'la Naturalisation est une fiction légale qui fait participer aux avantages d'une nation, mais ne peut en donner les caractères' (cited in Antoine and Martin 1985:72). Of course, the reasoning behind such views was specious. Despite the importance attached to birth, being born in France was not in itself a guarantee for Barrès that one would possess the 'caractères' of the nation; few writers equalled Barrès in the ferocity of his attacks on Dreyfus as an "apatride" or "déraciné".

One writer who did share Barrès's contempt for Dreyfus and for other 'étrangers de l'intérieur' was Maurras. If Barrès had linked "nation" to "nature" and - selectively - "naissance", Maurras suggests a similar organic relationship between territory, ancestry and identity in another crucial term, "patrie":



La patrie est une société naturelle, ou, ce qui revient absolument au même, historique. Son caractère décisif est la naissance. On ne choisit pas plus sa patrie - la terre de ses pères - que l'on ne choisit son père et sa mère.

Maurras 1986: 278

As we see especially clearly in this extract, this deterministic definition of the nation as an organic and natural phenomenon runs totally counter to the 1789 political concept of nationality revived and reasserted by so many French writers in the Alsace-Lorraine debate. For Renan, Hovelacque, Coulanges and so many others a nation was constituted by the free choice of its members; for Maurras and Barrès, on the contrary, the essential characteristic of the nation was precisely that it was not chosen, but determined.

In addition to the emphasis on the natural, another theme which often surfaces in right-wing visions of nation opposed to the tradition of 1789 is localism. We saw how Grégoire identified the localism symbolised by dialect with the divisions of a fragmented feudal society. The extent to which Republican heirs of Grégoire shared his view that localism was tainted with the whiff of reaction can be seen in the uproar caused in 1865 when a few Republicans joined Orleanists and Legitimists in demanding decentralisation (Zeldin 1979:173). The Republicans' suspicion was not without foundation. Decentralisation was indeed a key element on the political agenda of the established right-wing parties throughout the nineteenth century. As Thomson (1964:118) notes, during the 1870s it was the extreme Legitimists who were the most fervent believers in decentralisation.<sup>18</sup> Taine and Barrès, both of whom were at best ambivalent about the Revolution, were firm opponents of the centralising tendencies of the Republican tradition, and underlined the importance of local, as well as national, identity. Maurras, himself a man of Provence, had been strongly influenced by Mistral and the *Félibrige*. Moreover, strong regional autonomy was one of the key demands in the *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, set up by Barrès in 1898 to

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<sup>18</sup> Paradoxically, as Thomson points out, decentralisation was also a key part of the left-wing challenge to mainstream republicanism mounted by the Commune. See also Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*.

counter the Dreyfusard Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. Bourget's hostility to the Revolution was essentially a hatred of centralisation, a process which he wishes to reverse in order to restore older poles of identity. Indeed, his words illustrate both of the main themes within the reactionary discourse of nation which was being advanced in place of the dominant Republican vision: the idealisation of the local together with an emphasis on the natural:

[Nous devons] retrouver la province d'unité naturelle et héréditaire sous le département artificiel et morcelé, l'autonomie municipale sous la centralisation administrative, les universités locales et fécondes sous notre Université officielle et morte, reconstituer la famille terrienne par la liberté de tester.

Bourget 1895 (vol. 2): 320

Thus the key point to be underlined is that the discourse of nation stemming from 1789, though dominant within France, was not unchallenged. It was challenged by an alternative discourse of nation which resembled the dominant British vision in displaying a marked emphasis on the natural and the local. If dialect was stigmatised within the dominant 1789 tradition of standardisation and unity, there was therefore an alternative vision of nation where dialect and dialect study may have been able to find a place. To what extent does French work on dialect resemble its British equivalent in tying in with this reactionary and - in the French context - unequivocally right-wing vision of the nation as natural?

### **Dialect Study, Nature and the Politics of Reaction**

The link between dialect and the politics of reaction had been made long before the dawn of the Third Republic. Grégoire had identified patois unequivocally with a divided feudal society and with the tyranny of the Ancien Régime. One of the pillars of the Ancien Régime was the Church, and even though Grégoire was himself a priest, it is clear that he regards the clergy as playing a major part in preventing the spread of the unifying national language by continuing to use dialect. As Antoine and Martin report, the use of dialect by the clergy still

persisted under the Third Republic, especially in the teaching of the catechism and other religious mantras. And proof that the clergy were still seen in the same negative and reactionary light under the Third Republic as they had been under the First can clearly be found in the deluge of anti-clerical propaganda disseminated by the Republican regime. The Republicans' portrayal of the Church as a bastion of reaction and anti-modernism was not without foundation. As Macleod and Rémond have argued, from 1871 onwards French Catholicism takes a distinctly conservative turn.<sup>19</sup> Boosted by the proclamation of papal infallibility (1871), and by a widespread sense that the bloodshed of war and the Commune was punishment for the sins of a nation which had turned away from God, the ardently pro-Roman ultramontanist faction within the French church moved into the ascendancy, and began to spread its pietistic, orthodox and doggedly anti-Republican version of the gospel. In the eyes of Republicans at least, the link which Grégoire had made between patois, priests and reaction remained intractable.

By no means all dialect study was carried out by priests and thereby tainted with reaction. As we shall see below, much of the most significant work on dialect at the time was carried out at a theoretical level, often by dedicated supporters of the Republic. But priests did play a prominent part in dialect study of the era. Their knowledge of dialect usage was often unrivalled. They were dispersed across the entire nation, not concentrated in a few large cities. As a profession they were sufficiently educated to be able to communicate their findings to a wider audience; however, unlike other educated figures found in a given community, notably teachers, they were not servants of the Republican state and thereby inclined or obliged to display a Jacobin hostility to dialect.

The single most influential priest to be involved in dialect study was Abbé Rousselot. His attitudes to dialect certainly do not mark him out as the stereotypical clerical reactionary demonised in Republican propaganda, using the

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<sup>19</sup> Macleod 1981:47, Rémond 1971:184. The tone of the new conservatism was set in the building of the Sacré Coeur church in the 1870s. Located in the Communard bastion of Montmartre, it was a symbolic white expiation of the sins of the red Commune.

peasants' own patois to indoctrinate them with religious superstition. We refer to him here, however, because of all the major figures associated with the study of dialect it is he who best illustrates the potential overlap between attitudes to dialect and the reactionary ideas of nation which were gaining some ground during the same period. The most obvious aspect of Rousselot's work which displays links with the politics of reaction is his use of the naturalistic paradigm. As we saw in chapter one, the discourse of nature, so prevalent in Britain, was closely associated in the French context with a deterministic view of language and nation. It was this link which prompted many, like Bréal and most of the theorists, to reject references to the natural, and which prompted others, like Maurras and Barrès, to make widespread use of them. Rousselot was not the only figure within language study to make use of assumptions and metaphors connected with the discourse of nature. Antoine and Martin argue that an opposition between the standard language 'artificiellement créée et maintenue', and local dialect, which was seen as 'libre et vivant', can be seen throughout much of the work within dialect study at this time (1985:601). However, amongst the writers on dialect, it is Rousselot whose work most closely resembles contemporary British work in the field with its heavy reliance on the naturalistic paradigm. For example, Rousselot explains his preference for dialect over 'langues cultivées' in terms which clearly evoke the contrast between the natural and the artificial:

Si je disais toute ma pensée, je réclamerais pour eux [les patois], en regard des langues cultivées, la préférence que le botaniste accorde aux plantes des champs sur les fleurs de nos jardins.

Rousselot 1887: 2

As with so much of the British work, the image of dialect implied here is that it is not only associated with rural and "natural" environments, but that it is itself an untamed, dynamic and natural form of speech, in stark contrast to the artificial and rule-bound 'langues cultivées'. The similarities with Müller and with many of the British writers emerge even more clearly when Rousselot underlines that the supposedly natural qualities of patois derive from the fact that

it is a primarily spoken form of language. Sharing Müller's view that the real and natural life of language is in its dialects, Rousselot lists some of the ways in which he considers the influence of the 'langues cultivées' to be complicating and interfering with the natural development of dialect speech:

C'est l'action rétrograde du maître qui combat celle de la famille et du lieu; c'est l'autorité d'un dictionnaire, d'une grammaire, qui, en prescrivant une prononciation surannée et mal comprise, amènent des sons barbares, inconnus dans la langue; c'est l'influence du livre, cet agent si actif aujourd'hui de conquête linguistique, qui, incapable de rendre les sons, se prête à toutes les interprétations des lecteurs.

Rousselot 1887: 2

Indeed, so closely does he identify language with the spoken word that he views these influences not merely as negative but as 'causes étrangères à la linguistique' (ibid.:2). In other words, the only genuine linguistic developments are those which occur in supposed isolation from the contaminating influences of the 'langues cultivées'. Having listed what he sees as the extra-linguistic factors which distort pure and natural linguistic development, Rousselot explains why unwritten and thus uncontaminated dialects are one of the few remaining places to observe language in its natural surroundings:

Dans les patois...le mode de transmission est uniquement la tradition orale. Dès lors, rien n'entrave l'évolution naturelle de la langue. L'enfant reproduit le parler qu'il entend avec l'exactitude que comportent l'imperfection de son oreille et la paresse de ses organes, sans être ramené par force à un type convenu. Puis, sa langue faite, ses habitudes prises, il les conserve, et, vieillard, il parlera le patois de ses jeunes années.

Rousselot 1887: 2

Here we see an assumption shared to some extent by Wright and the Neogrammarians: dialect, by virtue of its being largely spoken, represents the best example of natural linguistic growth, its purity and natural evolution unpolluted by external influences. And the fact that speakers in a given region

had manifestly not escaped those influences did not alter Rousselot's belief in the existence of an authentic and originally pure regional dialect:

Souvent il y a dans un même lieu comme deux patois: celui du peuple et celui des messieurs. Il faut bien se garder de les confondre. Le patois des messieurs donne l'explication de certaines anomalies qui se rencontrent dans le langage du peuple; il montre aussi de quel côté viennent les influences étrangères qui agissent sur le patois. Mais il n'est pas le patois du pays.

Rousselot 1887: 20

In other words, only some of the members of any given community can be seen as genuine; it is their language alone which represents the true 'patois du pays'. Other influences, though present in the community and its language, are labelled as 'influences étrangères' and therefore marginalised. Such contrasts between the genuine and the artificial, the pure and the mixed, the rooted and the rootless show remarkable similarities to the assumptions made by Barrès in his dismissal of the 'déracinés' and by Maurras in his hostility to the 'étranger de l'intérieur'. Indeed, the link with Maurras in particular can be seen more clearly still in Rousselot's view that purity is intimately linked to ancestry:

Ordinairement, chacun parle le patois du lieu où il a été élevé. Mais le patois d'un village n'est réellement pur que dans les familles anciennes du pays.

Rousselot 1887: 19

Through his use of the naturalistic paradigm in particular, Rousselot thus displays similarities in his terms and reasoning to Maurras and Barrès.<sup>20</sup> If this represents one possible overlap between dialect study and a reactionary vision of the nation in opposition to the tradition of 1789, another is the way in which dialect study as a whole could be seen as spurring a decidedly anti-republican localism. As in British dialect study, the tiniest villages became the focus of unprecedented academic study, and found their profile and prestige considerably

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<sup>20</sup> The idea that Rousselot's work tied in with reactionary and anti-Republican views is given further credence by his apparent endorsement of a cultural nationalist view of identity. "J'appelle Allemand quiconque a pour langue maternelle l'allemand" (Dauzat 1912a:106).

raised as a result. Appreciating the danger that ignoring patois and local loyalties altogether would allow them to be exploited by the right, Bréal calls for them to be given some recognition within the unifying, levelling discourse of Republican patriotism which was being diffused through the schools:

Le clergé connaît bien cette puissance du dialecte natal: il sait s'en servir à l'occasion, et c'est pour avoir méconnu la force des attaches locales que votre culture est trop souvent sans racine et sans profondeur. Il faut que l'école tienne au sol et n'ait pas l'air d'y être simplement superposé.

Bréal 1873a: 63

The view that the nation as construed by Republican patriotism was too intangible and remote was also expressed by Bruno: 'la patrie ne représente pour l'écolier qu'une chose abstraite à laquelle, plus souvent qu'on ne croit, il peut rester étranger pendant une assez longue période de sa vie' (1878:iii). Her aim in writing her famous school textbook was to remedy this situation by making the patrie 'visible et vivante' (ibid.:iii). These pleas from supporters of the Republic for attention to be paid to more tangible and local loyalties underline the extent to which localism and regionalism were seen to be incompatible with the Republican tradition: after all, as we saw above, the emphasis at this time was on building a republic which was truly *une et indivisible*.

Thus we have seen that dialect study in late-nineteenth-century France does display some links with the reactionary conceptions of the nation which, during this period, were starting to challenge the dominant Revolutionary narrative. Rousselot provides the best example of the overlap, but it can be seen elsewhere. Even some of the major theorists occasionally lend some credence to the identification of "nation" and "nature". For example, Gilliéron, whose work on dialect differed dramatically in its theoretical rigour from that of his British counterparts, nevertheless shared their focus on rural speech: the 639 localities investigated by his indefatigable bicycling fieldworker, Edmont, were overwhelmingly rural. Likewise, dialect study as a whole, in elevating the prestige of the local, ran the risk of being associated with the forces of reaction.

In other words, by examining dialect study carried out in France under the Third Republic, it is possible to find evidence to support Grégoire's view that dialect was closely linked to the politics of reaction. Such a conclusion, however, demands that we overlook much of the most important work on dialect within late-nineteenth-century France. That such work can be seen to endorse rather than undermine the dominant Republican vision of nation is the point which we shall now proceed to demonstrate.

### **Dialect study and rallying to the Republic**

In discussing the Alsace-Lorraine dispute in chapter one we saw that writers on language such as Bréal, Hovelacque and even Renan rallied to defend the vision of nationality associated with the French Revolution against the determinist cultural nationalism put forward by the Germans. We argued that much of the theoretical work from the era also ties in with this context, representing a clear rejection of the determinist discourse of nature. A similar rejection can be seen in the widespread hostility expressed by many of the major linguistic theorists towards the view of dialect held by Rousselot. In other words, in defining dialect in terms of its supposed purity, authenticity and assumed proximity to the "natural", Rousselot represents the exception, not the rule. As we shall see, such views were to come in for sustained theoretical attack from his contemporaries.

One respect in which work within dialect study can be seen as an extension of the general trends within French linguistic theory at this time is the hostility to the view that dialects could be seen as natural or pure. In the work of Rousselot and many other writers on dialect in France (and of course in Britain), dialects were seen to represent an idealised rural past which was rapidly being wiped out by the relentless pace of economic expansion and urbanisation. Underlying this idyllic vision was the familiar assumption that these language forms, like the societies in which they were used, possessed a natural purity which was slowly being corrupted by the degenerating force of modernity. If the belief in purity was given theoretical support by Rousselot and the Neogrammarians, then the view that this purity was being



corrupted by the incursion of the standard language can be seen in an 1888 article on the dialect of Puybarraud by another priest, Fourgeaud:

Le patois n'est pas à l'abri de toute influence étrangère. L'instruction primaire se développant, les enfants emploient des mots nouveaux qu'ils empruntent aux livres. Les militaires eux-mêmes rapportent des garnisons des termes qui peu-à-peu se glissent dans le patois.

Fourgeaud 1888: 54

What is most significant about Fourgeaud is that he believes that this interpenetration of patois and the standard language is a new phenomenon, attributing it to precisely those standardising forces, conscription and education, which we discussed above. But if Fourgeaud believes that patois is no longer sheltered from external influences, Bréal makes it clear that this has never been the case:

The alleged purity of patois is an illusion owing to our ignorance; and this is dispelled by careful examination. Except in a case of isolation which would be difficult to conceive of, how could a patois avoid the influence of neighbouring dialects or the ubiquitous infiltration of the official language? ... Even the humblest patois is subjected, all things being equal, to the same intellectual laws as is the French of Pascal or Descartes.

Bréal 1991: 209

What Bréal underlines here is that all language varieties, including dialects, are exposed to 'the same intellectual laws'; in other words, he dismisses the view held by Rousselot and the Neogrammarians that dialect is qualitatively different from other forms of language by virtue of its supposed purity. In linguistic terms, if not in terms of its social status, dialect is thus placed on a par with the standard and with all varieties of language. Dichotomies are collapsed and hierarchies are levelled. If this serves on the one hand to enhance the status of dialects by ranking them alongside the prestigious standard, it also serves to undermine the views of those who sought to legitimise dialect by stressing its separateness from the standard. In linguistic terms, the standard could not be seen as intrinsically more authoritative

than dialects; but by the same token, the dialects could not be seen as intrinsically more natural or authentic than the standard.

If dialects themselves were not natural, neither were the boundaries which were assumed to exist between them. The view that dialect, far from being a given, natural and determined entity, was in fact an artificial and arbitrary construction, was given additional theoretical support by Meyer:

Le dialecte (qui représente l'espèce) n'est lui-même qu'une conception assez arbitraire de notre esprit ... Voici en effet comment nous procédons pour constituer un dialecte. Nous choisissons dans le langage d'un pays déterminé un certain nombre de phénomènes dont nous faisons les caractères du langage de ce pays. Cette opération aboutirait bien réellement à déterminer une espèce naturelle, s'il n'y avait forcément dans le choix des caractères une grande part d'arbitraire ... Il s'ensuit que le dialecte est une espèce bien plutôt artificielle que naturelle; que toute définition du dialecte est une définition nominis et non une definitio rei.

Meyer 1887: 305

In other words, what had been seen as clear boundaries between supposedly self-contained dialects were exposed as arbitrary. Meyer points out that such neat lines of division do not occur in reality:

C'est que les phénomènes linguistiques que nous observons en un pays ne s'accordent point entre eux pour couvrir la même superficie géographique. Ils s'enchevêtrent et s'entrecoupent à ce point qu'on n'arriverait jamais à déterminer une circonscription dialectale, si on ne prenait le parti de la fixer arbitrairement.

Meyer 1887: 305

Indeed, so rarely did isoglosses seem to coincide that some of the most influential linguistic scholars speculated that it had become virtually meaningless to speak of "dialects" at all:

Est-ce qu'il y a vraiment des dialectes, dont on puisse marquer les limites, ou seulement un fond unique de langue sur lequel sont nés et se sont répandus des phénomènes qui couvrent certaines

aires géographique différentes, mais sans que deux de ces aires se superposent jamais?

Brunot 1905: xi

Brunot posed the question as to the existence of dialects: nearly two decades earlier, Paris had offered an unequivocal answer in far more confident terms:

Dans une masse linguistique de même origine que la nôtre, il n'y a réellement pas de dialectes ... Tout le travail qu'on a dépensé à constituer, dans l'ensemble des parlers de la France, des dialectes et ce qu'on a appelé des "sous-dialectes" est un travail à peu près complètement perdu.

Paris 1888: 163

Paris is a key figure in language study of the late nineteenth century. It was he who had given much of the impetus to the study of dialect with his 1888 paper 'Les Parlers de France'. In this paper, he calls for the creation of a dialect atlas (a project which was ultimately to be undertaken by Gilliéron and Edmont). But what is noticeable about his call is that he insists that the project does not concern itself with the question of establishing or consolidating boundaries:

La grande tâche qui s'impose à nous, et qui ne peut s'exécuter que par la collaboration active et méthodique des savants de la France entière, est de dresser l'atlas phonétique de la France, non pas d'après des divisions arbitraires et factices, mais dans toute la richesse et la liberté de cet immense épanouissement.

Paris 1888: 168

As Paris and Meyer had anticipated, the conclusion which Gilliéron and Edmont drew from their research for the Atlas Linguistique de la France, published between 1902 and 1910, was that supposedly self-contained and geographically-specific "dialects" in fact show such a degree of overlap that they should be considered more as a linguistic continuum than as separate regional language forms. Writing after its completion, Meillet paraphrases some of the key theoretical points which were demonstrated in the Atlas:

Le problème du "dialecte" a trouvé sa solution. On s'était souvent demandé comment tracer les limites entre les dialectes. D'une part le dialecte apparaissait comme un ensemble offrant des caractères particuliers et s'opposant à d'autres dialectes. De l'autre, on n'arrivait pas à trouver aux dialectes des limites précises...Chaque fait linguistique a ses limites propres.

Meillet 1925: 66

Meillet's final phrase encapsulates the most important conclusions which had emerged from the pathbreaking theoretical work carried out by Meyer, Paris and by Gilliéron in his *Atlas*. Indeed, these advances in dialectology were to be taken up beyond France, notably by the Neolinguists in Italy who adopted Meillet's phrase about the limits of 'chaque fait linguistique' as one of their central maxims. Thus work on dialect carried out by leading theorists reflects the general hostility towards the natural which, as we saw in chapter one, characterises much of the work within language study as a whole in late-nineteenth-century France.

These ideas about dialect also had major political ramifications. And it is here that an overlap with the Republican vision of the nation can again be clearly discerned. Most importantly, and most significantly given the wider social context, the link between language and land had been clearly and decisively broken. Now that it was seen that the isoglosses relating to different sound changes each followed their own path rather than corresponding systematically to lines of territorial division, supposedly discrete and self-contained dialects were seen to merge imperceptibly into one another, and the very idea of tangible lines of demarcation between language varieties was suddenly called into question. This view that what we regard as a "language" represents an arbitrary structure superimposed on to what is in reality a spectrum or continuum has become familiar in modern linguistics. However, this should not lead us to overlook the context in which this theory was first formulated. For this view of language had clear political implications in the late nineteenth century.

Most obviously, as we have seen, the distinction between language and land was consciously emphasised in the debate over Alsace-Lorraine. For just as linguistic

lines could not be drawn to reflect territory, so could political and territorial lines not be drawn simply to reflect language. It was another theoretical weapon to be used against the language-based concept of nationality which the Germans invoked to justify their occupation of the provinces. If, as we saw above, language study generally became an arena in which Franco-German rivalry was played out after 1870, then we could argue that dialect study was actually born out of that conflict. For as Petyt (1980:38) points out, the first area ever to be rigorously investigated in a dialect survey was Alsace; carried out, significantly, in 1873, it was a choice surely prompted, at least in part, by the desire to boost the German claim over the province and to reinforce the link between language and land. The attempts of French theorists to undermine this same link can thus be seen as a concerted reply to this opening German salvo and as a contribution to the discourse of Republican patriotism.

But the overlap between theoretical advances in dialect study and the Republican concept of the nation went further still. For the severing of the link between language and land also reinforced the neo-Jacobin emphasis on linguistic unity which characterises the years of the Third Republic. What it confirmed was the impossibility of using language as a basis for political separatism. Any attempt to counterpose a supposedly authentic and independent regional identity based around language to the unifying modernising discourse of republican patriotism could now be easily discredited. Paris clearly recognises the vital political implications of this view of dialect:

L'idiome qu'on étudie est en contact avec d'autres: on peut chercher ce qu'il a de commun avec eux, ce en quoi il en diffère ... On reconnaîtra vite que les groupes qu'on est tenté de former se dissolvent ou se recomposent autrement suivant le criterium phonétique ou morphologique qu'on emploie à les constituer.

Paris 1888: 170

Paris goes further still in linking these findings to the dominant Republican discourse of nation. He underlines that this confused mass of linguistic continua and overlapping isoglosses nevertheless reveals a fundamental unity:

Le fait qui ressort avec évidence du coup d'oeil le plus superficiel jeté sur l'ensemble du pays, c'est que toutes ces variantes de phonétique, de morphologie et de vocabulaire n'empêchent pas une unité fondamentale et que d'un bout de la France à l'autre, les parlers populaires se perdent les uns dans les autres par des nuances insensibles.

Paris 1888: 163

Meillet believed that this fundamental unity of all the linguistic varieties on French soil was the conclusion which should be drawn from the research carried out by Gilliéron for his Atlas:

C'est la première fois qu'un grand domaine linguistique est décrit dans toute son étendue, et qu'on peut, d'un coup d'oeil, apercevoir la façon dont un élément linguistique ancien a été traité, indépendamment, sur des centaines de points différents. Grâce à l'Atlas, toutes les données recueillies soit auparavant soit depuis viennent prendre place dans un ensemble.

Meillet 1921: 307

The most fundamental division of all was not excepted from this picture. Mistral and his colleagues in the Félibrige movement were attempting to voice a specific Provençal identity and language; in fact Mistral was to be awarded the 10,000 franc Prix Jean Raynaud in 1890 for his French/Provençal dictionary, Lou Tresor dou Félibrige. However, two years earlier, Paris had argued that even this most ancient and fundamental of cultural divisions within French territory could not be supported with reference to language:<sup>21</sup>

Il ne faut même pas excepter de ce jugement la division fondamentale qu'on a cru, dès le moyen âge, reconnaître entre le 'français' et le 'provençal' ou la langue d'oïl et la langue d'oc... Cette muraille imaginaire, la science, aujourd'hui mieux armée, la renverse, et nous apprend qu'il n'y a pas deux Frances, qu'aucune limite réelle ne sépare les français du nord du ceux du midi, et que, d'un bout à l'autre du sol national nos parlers populaires

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<sup>21</sup> Writing in the first edition of Annales du Midi in 1889, Meyer argues that any notion of a discrete "langue romane" is an abstraction. Moreover, he adds that there is no historical precedent for separatism, claiming that Provence and the Midi "n'a jamais été constitué en Etat, et ses habitants n'ont à aucune époque formé une nation" (Meyer 1889:2-3)

étendent une vaste tapisserie dont les couleurs variées se fondent sur tous les points en nuances insensiblement dégradées.

Paris 1888: 163-4

As we see especially clearly in this extract, the discrediting of internal political divisions based on language served to underpin the emphasis on national unity so central to the discourse of Republican patriotism. Diversity is recognised and even celebrated, but what is made clear is that within this 'tapisserie' it is impossible to draw boundaries and hive off sections from the whole. In other words, language theory was reinforcing the message of language lessons: the nation was symbolised by its language, and both were *une et indivisible*.

Thus, in highlighting the arbitrariness of linguistic boundaries and severing the link between language and land, linguistic theorists such as Meyer, Bréal and Paris enhance the legitimacy of the official - and dominant - view of nation promulgated under the Third Republic. This is not to accuse them of forsaking their academic freedom to become cogs in the Republican propaganda machine. It is merely to underline that at a time when language debates were seen to have an unparalleled relevance to wider social issues, theorists must have recognised that the implications of their findings would stretch far beyond the world of linguistic theory. The fact that they went ahead with their pathbreaking work suggests at least a tacit endorsement of its potential and obvious links with the Republican discourse of nation. With the issues of Alsace-Lorraine and mass scolarisation so highly prominent, few French scholars of the late nineteenth century, least of all linguistic experts, would have deluded themselves into thinking that ideas about language were just about language.

In conclusion we can see that in France and Britain, ideas about dialect tied in closely with contemporary discourses of nation. In France, Rousselot's use of the nature paradigm displays clear links with the reactionary views of the nation being put forward by Maurras and Barrès. Conversely, in its attacks on the

notion of dialect as a natural and predetermined entity, the work on dialect carried out by theorists such as Meyer, Paris and Bréal reflects the general resurgence of Republican patriotism so characteristic of this era. In late-nineteenth-century Britain, which had not experienced anything like the trauma endured by the French in 1870, the subject of national identity did not generate quite the same degree of soul-searching and conflict. Few proposed alternatives to the dominant ruralist vision of the nation, partly because, as we suggested above, it was a vision which could offer variants to suit a wide range of political creeds. The dominance of this vision is reflected in the fact that it exerted such a powerful influence over the dialect study carried out during the period. In both countries discourses of dialect and ideas of nation were inseparable.

An analysis of dialect brings together the national and the local. Our next topic for discussion requires that we shift our focus upwards and look at the ways in which the national related to the global. For it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a distinction between these two dimensions. It was an era in which European nations, with Britain and France in the vanguard, extended their overseas empires on an unprecedented scale. Governments in Paris and London fell as a result of events in Tonkin and Khartoum. Against this backdrop, we turn our attention to the ways in which discourses of language and nation in Britain and France related to developments at imperial and global level.



## Chapter Three

### Language, Empire and Global Status

In the preceding chapters we have examined some of the ways in which developments within language study related to the wider social, cultural and political context. That context, however, was not merely national. On the contrary, ideas about language were also frequently linked to wider issues relating to the empire and the wider world. Examining these links is the object of this chapter.

The development of the material and ideological framework of nation in Britain and France was not a purely internal process. It was closely bound up with events outside the national borders. Both countries were world powers. They had struggled for supremacy in North America for much of the eighteenth century. It was a rivalry which was revived in a new bout of imperial expansion during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, though this time the continent which was in dispute was Africa. Given the scale of this expansion, in many ways the late nineteenth century can be defined as the age of imperialism. Against this backdrop, any analysis of ideas about the language at global level must clearly focus to some extent on the imperial context. However, it is important to underline that these ideas frequently related to the status of the language throughout the world, not just within the boundaries of empire. For example, the main focus of British concerns about the global position of English was a former colony rather than an existing one: the United States of America. Similarly, the French were worried less by what happened to the language within their empire than by developments outside it, over which they had far less influence. It is for these reasons that this chapter adopts the broadest possible perspective, going beyond debates about language and empire and analysing ideas about the status of the language throughout the world.

In previous chapters we have seen that an overview of the relationship between language and nation in Britain and France reveals both similarities and differences between the two countries. In this chapter more than any other, it is the differences which are of greater significance. A first glance at the long history of Britain and France as global and imperial powers may suggest otherwise. For example, the two countries often used similar means in order to extend their influence overseas: worthless treaties with indigenous peoples, missionary activity, or, all too readily, gunboat diplomacy. Both drew heavily on a shared ideology of racial superiority which ensured that the scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century was not merely tolerated but actively encouraged. Even when their rivalry was at its deadliest, British and French alike shared an unquestioned belief in the superiority of white European civilisation.

These similarities, though important, conceal fundamental differences. These differences will be examined in depth when we discuss the ways in which language debates reflected wider concerns about global status in each country. We shall argue that fears about the fate of the language throughout the world can be detected in both countries. The key point which will be demonstrated, however, is that the nature of those fears was very different. British concern centred around the prospect of losing control over a language that was spreading at astonishing speed; in France, in contrast, the principal worry was that the language was not spreading quickly enough, mainly due to a decline in the relative number of French-speakers throughout the world. We shall elaborate on this brief summary in our analysis of each country. But before focusing specifically on the different ways in which concerns about global status were reflected in ideas about language, it is worth spending some time at the outset pinpointing some of the broad differences between Britain and France in terms of their past and contemporary relationships with their empires and with the wider world. For without taking into account these specificities, explaining the nature

and content of the material on language and global influence would be impossible.

Some of the key differences between the two nations in their relations with empire and the world can be briefly listed. First, and most obvious, was the difference in the size of empire. Although both empires expanded on an unprecedented scale during the scramble for Africa, in absolute terms the British empire remained the largest and the most populous on the face of the earth. It seemed almost inconceivably vast in a way which the French empire, even at its height, never did.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see below, this seeming boundlessness of the British empire explains much about British concerns over loss of control which were made manifest in attitudes to language.

As well as being far bigger than its French counterpart, the British empire was also far less homogeneous; in terms of its subject peoples, certainly, but also in terms of its structure and framework. The bewildering variety of relationships between colonies and mother country illustrate this point clearly. The British empire included dominions such as Canada and Australia, which were essentially self-governing; Crown Colonies such as Jamaica and Ceylon, controlled by a governor appointed by the Colonial Office; Protectorates such as Uganda and Aden, which were usually run by indigenous authorities on behalf of the Foreign Office; Chartered Territories such as Rhodesia which were governed by private companies under government charter; and finally, in a category of its own, the dependency of India, which was itself subdivided, as with Vichy France, into an area controlled directly by the occupying power, British India, and a zone in which authority was nominally kept under indigenous control, the India of the Princes.

This range of different relationships between colonies and mother country leads to a third difference: the existence within the British empire of "dominions" such

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<sup>1</sup> The sheer size of the British empire was widely held to be its most striking feature. The description which caught the public imagination was that it was an empire on which the sun never set, a phrase popularised by John Wilson in 1829.

as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all of which were seen as racially, culturally and linguistically akin with Britain in a way which other colonies were not. These dominions were consistently represented as outposts of Anglo-Saxon culture, and as such allotted the prime position within the hierarchy of empire, almost on a par with the mother country. For France there was no real equivalent. After being defeated by the British under Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham in 1763, France had lost its chance to become the dominant power on the North American continent. Quebec would remain alone as a bastion of French-speaking European culture. There was no new world of emerging French-speaking "white" nations to compare with the British dominions.

The history of these dominions at the end of the nineteenth century exemplifies another difference between British and French empires. For the dominions were moving inexorably towards independence. In other words, the British had to face the threat of secession from their empire long before the French. Indeed, it was a threat which the British had faced before; if the secession of the United States was becoming a distant memory, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 provided a much more recent reminder of the fragility of imperial bonds. Past and present experience had given the British a much greater awareness of the fact that global empires develop centrifugal as well as centripetal tendencies. It was a lesson which France had yet to learn. It is this inability to perceive that colonised peoples may not welcome French rule which explains the supreme self-confidence of French colonialists in calling for the global export of French civilisation. Later, it was that same blindness to potential disaffection which helps explain why France's withdrawal from empire was so protracted and so painful, especially in comparison to Britain, which relinquished a much larger empire with much less bloodshed.

One final difference between the two countries in terms of empire relates to the ideology which was invoked in order to legitimise imperial expansion. All European powers saw imperialism as a means of spreading "civilisation". King Leopold of Belgium, who played a key role in triggering the scramble for Africa,

described it as 'a crusade worthy of this century of progress' (Pakenham 1993:21). But this belief that imperialism was not only a duty for the coloniser but a benefit for the colonised was particularly strong in France. France's imperial expansion was seen by its proponents as a continuation of the longstanding tradition of French universalism, in which France is portrayed as carrying out a *mission civilisatrice* to the rest of the globe. For our purposes, the most significant aspect of this tradition is its emphasis on extending membership of the French nation across the world. French colonialism was ostensibly about making people French, a view which, as we shall see below, helps explain the importance which the French, in contrast to the British, attached to the task of spreading their language throughout their empire. The reality was often very far-removed from these pious beliefs that colonised peoples and territories were integral and equal parts of the French nation, but that does not detract from the significance of this peculiarly French imperial rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

The differences listed so far have been related to the contemporary empires of France and Britain. Yet there is one further difference which relates to an old colony rather than an existing one. Indeed, it is the growing fear of the rise of this former colony which represents perhaps the most significant of all the differences between British and French outlooks on linguistic and political questions at global level. The former colony in question was, of course, the United States of America. Throughout the late nineteenth century, British cultural and political debates reflect the uneasy mixture of concern and admiration which was felt in the former mother country over the startling rise of the United States. One area of debate which reflects these reactions particularly clearly is language. As an English-speaking country, America's challenge to Britain incorporated a linguistic dimension which was absent in its challenge to other European powers, including France. Quite simply, there was no French equivalent to the British fears about American English: French observers had

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<sup>2</sup> Whatever the rhetoric, in reality universalism did not bridge racial divides. Thus in 1889, French nationality was extended in Algeria, but, crucially, only to other "European" peoples (Lanly 1962:13).

many worries about their language, but having their leadership of the French-speaking world usurped by a former colony was not one of them.

These differences should play an important part in any analysis of the history of France and Britain as world powers. They have an even more vital part to play in discussions which focus on the linguistic aspect of this history, and on the status and spread of English and French. For these differences shed valuable light on the very different ways in which language issues are linked to debates about global influence in each country. Having outlined the importance of differences in their colonial legacies and responsibilities, and in general ideas about global status, we now focus in turn on Britain and France, examining the ways in which these differences are reflected in debates involving language.

## **Britain**

### **The Expansion of English: the problem of control**

#### **Language and Nation: rise and fall**

Of all the transformations which occurred in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the most remarkable was the astonishing spread of the English language across the face of the planet. According to one estimate, the number of English-speakers around the world had increased from 20 million in 1800 to 80 million in 1875.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this remarkable expansion of the English language. It represents the most obvious difference between English and French. In addition, it is only by remembering the scale and pace of the expansion of English to the remotest parts of the globe that we can understand the specific concerns felt by British observers about the fate of the language.

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<sup>3</sup> Moore 1875:3

We shall focus on such concerns below. Before doing so, it is important to demonstrate that the growing linguistic hegemony of English was a phenomenon which attracted comment throughout the nineteenth century. Moore argued that the century had seen an 'unparalleled' increase in the 'desire for a common language'. Throughout the rest of his article, he underlines unequivocally that by far the most suitable language for this purpose was English:

This fusion of the human race into one great family can never take place until the world shall agree not only to be one in thought, but one in speech...Not the least remarkable circumstance to be noted is that neither the Latin nor the French appears to have been chosen for this purpose, but our own language.

Moore 1875: 3

In his paper, Moore appears to be doing little more than rephrasing, without acknowledgment, the earlier paper presented to the Philological Society in 1850 by Watts:

At present the prospects of the English language are the most splendid that the world has ever seen. It is spreading in each of the quarters of the globe by fashion, by emigration, and by conquest.

Watts 1850: 212

Watts's unbridled confidence can be attributed to the fact that he was writing at the moment which stands out as perhaps the zenith of British self-assurance. But a similarly unshakeable faith in the relentless global spread of the English language can be seen even before the tumult of Chartism and the "hungry forties" had given way to the age of equipoise:

[English] is rapidly becoming the great medium of civilisation, the language of law and literature to the Hindoo, of commerce to the African, of religion to the scattered islanders of the Pacific. The range of its influence, even at the present day, is greater than ever was that of the Greek, the Latin, or the Arabic; and the circle widens daily.

Guest 1838: 703

This boast was made in the first full year of Victoria's reign. Echoes of Guest's description of the global presence of English can be heard not only in Watts but also in the proud assertions made by Mackay towards the end of the Victorian era:

Our noble speech promises to be the predominant, though not perhaps the only language of the civilisation of the coming centuries, and is already heard like the morning drum-beat of British power in every part of the globe. It floats upon the wings of a widely pervading literature, and of a still more pervading commerce to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Mackay 1890: 132

In stating that English is 'not perhaps the only language of the civilisation of the coming centuries' Mackay introduces a qualifying note which distinguishes his analysis from the unbridled optimism about the unchallenged hegemony of English seen in the prophecies of Guest, Watts and Moore. Indeed, as we shall see below, this qualifying note provides one example of a growing sense of uncertainty about the global status of the language and nation at the end of the nineteenth century. The point to be underlined here, however, is the similarity rather than the differences in the views of English put forward by these commentators. For Mackay in 1890, as for Guest in 1838, the circle of the English language was continuing to widen daily. In short, the story of English throughout the nineteenth century is one of unmitigated expansion.

The same cannot be said, however, of the political and economic influence of its mother country. It is important that we are not misled by the continued expansion of the English language into believing that it necessarily reflects a parallel expansion in the global influence of Britain. As with French in the eighteenth century, linguistic supremacy is closely related to political supremacy. The spread of English can only be properly understood if it is considered in close relation to the spectacular rise of industrial Britain. But the key point to be reiterated here is that the correlation is not exact; it is a point demonstrated by developments in the last third of the nineteenth century. This was an era in



which the gap between English and other languages was widening; it was also the era in which, in political and economic terms, Britain's lead over other industrialising powers was narrowing. We have seen in previous chapters that worries about decline are one of the distinguishing features of the last third of the nineteenth century in Britain. In chapter one we suggested that the shift towards reaction and an idealised vision of nature within dominant cultural values is one symptom of this new anxiety; worries over the rise of Germany and the United States were suggested as major causes. In other words, worries about decline were seen, in part at least, as relating specifically to the demise of Britain as the leading global superpower.

The remarkable expansion of empire in the last third of the century appears to contradict the view that perceptions of British decline in the world were widespread. In fact, it serves to prove the point. The essential fact about imperial expansion was that, in the British case, paradoxically, it was a symptom of anxiety about status in the world. Hobsbawm has argued that, for Britain, the policy of "imperialism" amounted to a retreat: 'Britain exchanged informal empire over most of the developing world for formal empire over a quarter of it' (1979:50). And if the formal acquisition of new territories in the developing world was a symptom of new insecurities, those insecurities were being fuelled by a growing clamour for independence in the dominions. We shall look in more detail below at British reactions to the spread of nationalist sentiment in the dominions, and at the way in which language was seen by some British observers as a means of retaining the cultural integrity of the empire. The point to be underlined here, however, is the general climate of insecurity which underlies late-nineteenth-century perceptions of global and imperial status. The language continued its untrammelled expansion across the face of the globe; the nation, in contrast, was becoming increasingly concerned at the prospect of decline.

This dichotomy between awe at the rise of the English language and fears over the decline of British supremacy is a crucial point. It accounts for the nature of the fears which are revealed in attitudes to the global status of English at the end

of the nineteenth century, all of which can be seen as different expressions of one over-riding concern. This was the widespread worry that Britain was losing control and authority within the late-nineteenth-century world. This fear of a loss of control is arguably the central theme underlying many British contributions to the debate about the global position of the English language. We shall proceed to examine how many observers singled out the United States as the biggest challenge to British hegemony, threatening not only Britain's economic supremacy, but also her position as undisputed leader of the English-speaking peoples. First, however, we shall look at a more general expression of the same underlying fear of a decline in British authority. This was the growing insistence on the importance of boundaries which would make clear the extent of that authority; for this can in many ways be seen as symptomatic of the increasing sense of insecurity about Britain's pole position in the late-nineteenth-century world.

### **The Yearning for Boundaries**

A redrawing of boundaries can be seen as one of the defining characteristics of Britain's relationship with the rest of the world during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Of this the demarcation of formal empire in areas where Britain had once exercised informal control is obvious proof. Following Hobsbawm's point, cited above, it is important to underline that clarifying the boundaries of British hegemony in this way was a new development. For much of the nineteenth century, the most striking feature of Britain's mighty worldwide empire was precisely that it was informal and undefined. There were no major competitors against whom the British sphere of influence needed to be demarcated and protected: no other nation on earth had ever attained such a degree of global dominance. Consequently, there was little incentive for Britain to annex more territories and to take on greater political responsibilities. As Judd notes, 'dominion over untutored savages seemed less important than coastal influence and a dividend of 5% on investments' (1970:96).

The principal figures of the Manchester school such as Bright and Cobden were implacably opposed to the acquisition of new colonies. The extent to which such views formed part of the mid-century political consensus is seen by the fact that it was the young Disraeli who, in 1852, went so far as to describe even the existing colonies as 'a millstone around our necks' (Beales 1971:267). In short, there was little need to mark out boundaries, to take steps to transform areas of British influence into national possessions, and to insist upon their exclusively British character. The view that trade followed the flag belongs to a later era: during the age of equipoise and supreme national self-assurance it was trade alone which proclaimed British supremacy.

The advent of the age of imperialism in the last thirty years of the century represents a significant departure from this notion of empire as a hazy and indefinite expanse. In fact, it is only at this time that the word "imperialism" began to acquire its modern, political sense: Disraeli's Colonial Secretary, Carnarvon, remarked in 1877 that 'we have been of late much perplexed by a new word, "Imperialism", which has crept in amongst us' (cited in Shannon 1974:107).<sup>4</sup> The process of bringing areas of economic influence under direct political control can be traced back to 1857, when the Crown took over responsibility for India from the East India Company in the wake of the Mutiny. But it is in the last third of the century, especially after the scramble for Africa had been initiated in the late 1870s, that this process of establishing definite political boundaries begins to gather momentum. The clearest description of this development was provided in 1902 by one of its most eloquent contemporary critics, Hobson:

The tendency everywhere has been towards a closer and more drastic imperial control over the territories that have been annexed, transforming protectorates, company rule, and spheres of influence, into definite British states of the Crown colony order.

Hobson 1938: 26

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<sup>4</sup> The OED gives a range of quotes to show the use of "imperialism" in this sense; all are from the period 1878-1914.

Hobson clearly indicates the way in which the formalisation of empire was essentially a process of reasserting control. No longer an unbounded and hazy expanse, the empire was now definite in its extent, and definitely British in its character. It is not our concern here to look in detail at the reasons for this shift from informal to formal empire. We can just reiterate in passing that one principal reason is the prevalence of new anxieties about national status; as we have seen in previous chapters, these anxieties play a crucial role in shaping the dominant cultural ideas of the era. Britain's influence across the globe needed to be defined, it was felt, precisely because for the first time in over half a century it was now being challenged. But irrespective of the extent to which it can be seen as a symptom of increasing insecurities, the fact remains that one of the defining features of the age of imperialism was the emphasis on marking out boundaries. It is an appropriate point at which we can shift our focus towards language debates.

The shift from informal to formal empire is matched to a large extent by an analogous shift in attitudes to the English language. In much of the work in British language study dating from the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, an emphasis on boundaries is conspicuous by its absence. One example of this is the view that English was a mixed language. Rejecting any notion of English as an independent, indigenous and peculiarly national tongue, Watts underlines that the global spread of English has occurred precisely because it is a truly international language:

The English is essentially a medium language;-in the Teutonic family it stands midway between the Germanic and the Scandinavian branches - it unites, as no other language unites, the Romanic and the Teutonic stocks.

Watts 1850: 212

It was a view which was widespread within mid-Victorian Britain. No less a figure than Jacob Grimm had suggested that it was this all-embracing, cosmopolitan aspect of the English language which entailed that it could, 'with

all right be called a world-language'(Trench 1855:28). Grimm's views on this subject were cited with approval by the figure who stands out, as we have seen, as arguably the most influential commentator of his generation on matters concerning the English language: Archbishop Trench:

It would be difficult not to believe...that there are great things in store for the one language of Europe which is thus the connecting link between the North and the South; between the languages spoken by the Teutonic nations of the North, and by the Romance nations of the South;-which holds on to both, which partakes of both; which is as a middle term between both.

Trench 1855: 26

A similar point about the cosmopolitan origins and credentials of English is made by the writer who, as we saw in chapter one, so profoundly disagreed with Trench in the debate over the written and spoken word, Müller:

There is perhaps no language so full of words evidently derived from the most distant sources as English. Every country of the globe seems to have brought some of its verbal manufactures to the intellectual market of England.

Müller 1864: 78

In addition to the emphasis on heterogeneity rather than purity, mid-Victorian writers also reflect the lack of concern about boundaries in their attitudes to the global expansion of English. As we noted above, a succession of commentators throughout the century drew attention to the limitless spread of English across the globe. For mid-nineteenth-century observers such as Guest and Watts, the fact that the circle of the English language was 'widening daily' was a source of immense pride, and a further boost to a mood of national confidence which was itself boundless. In short, in attitudes to the spread of the language as much as the spread of empire, mid-Victorian Britain saw little need to worry about establishing boundaries.

However, as with ideas about the composition of English, this lack of concern over its diffusion across the face of the globe stands out as a clear contrast with the attitudes that were to become dominant in the age of imperialism. The contrast can clearly be seen in the uncertainty and worries expressed by Reeve:

The immense area over which the language now extends, in America, Asia, and Africa, removes it further from the centre in Europe, and whilst English tends to become the language most widely used and spoken in all parts of the globe, it is used and spoken by men less familiar than ourselves with the literary authority which determines its accuracy and fitness.

Reeve 1889: 349

For many observers who, like Reeve, were examining the state of English during the age of imperialism, the global expansion of the language, far from being seen as a source of pride, became a matter of grave concern. As Gibbon had remarked with reference to Rome, 'the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest' (in Sambrook 1990:97). In a climate of widespread insecurities about national decline, the spread of the English language across the globe was seen less as a proof of British supremacy than as a symbol of Britain's diminishing power and control. In this respect, English resembled that other great nineteenth-century British export, the railway. Both had once been seen as symbols of national power and success; but once exported overseas, both were increasingly felt to be strengthening Britain's rivals and contributing to national decline. In 1850 Watts had written with great confidence about 'The Probable Future Position of the English Language'. Sixty years later, in his analysis of 'The Future of the English Language', Montmorency views the global presence of English in a very different light:

The mere statement of the geographical and racial aspects of the problem overwhelms the mind. Can the personality of the tongue survive these stresses from every quarter of the globe? Will the resultant of all these variations lie along the lines of advance of a great language, or will English decay, as Greek decayed, into a jargon of commerce, or ... break up into half a hundred dialects to suit the needs of half a hundred peoples?

Montmorency 1911: 278

For Montmorency, as for Reeve, the extent of the English language is seen as a problem. The diversity of influences and borrowings from around the world which had been incorporated into English were no longer seen as assets which reinforced its global credentials. What Müller had seen as 'verbal manufactures' enriching the intellectual market of English were now becoming seen as 'stresses' which threatened to lead to weakening and, ultimately, to disintegration. Alford underlines the damage allegedly done to the 'personality of the tongue' as a result of its use overseas. What is particularly dangerous as far as he was concerned was the fact that these stresses were affecting the written language. This extract from Alford is cited in a review of his book, The Queen's English:

Vast quantities of printed matter now pour in daily from the very outskirts of civilisation; publishing travellers take great pleasure in reproducing with minute accuracy all the uncouth and barbarous jargon that they hear uttered; and when printing once intervenes, there is no saying where an expression may be carried, or what favourable accidents may enable it to strike root and flourish.

Anon. 1864: 53

What Alford is lamenting here is the loss of what he feels to be a much-needed boundary. In his view, it is when subject races cross that crucial rubicon and gain access to the written word that the danger becomes apparent. As with the subject classes in the domestic context, there was no saying what might happen 'when printing once intervenes'.<sup>5</sup> In short, the language was felt to have passed out of British control. In this sense, as with Reeve and Montmorency, Alford perceives the lack of boundaries not as proof of expansion and success, but as a worrying symptom of decline and failure.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the main debates of the era was about how to ensure that an increasingly literate working class did not read "unsuitable" material. See the following articles in Fortnightly Review, Salmon, G. 'What Boys Read', vol. 39 1886; Chisholm, H. 'How to Counteract the Penny Dreadful', vol. 58 1895.

It is important to underline that the shift in attitudes to the question of boundaries, though fundamental, was not all-embracing. In political terms, many observers opposed the formalisation of empire. Figures as diverse as Hobson and Freeman were defiant little Englanders. Another critic of the new imperialism saw it as a dangerous diversion at a time 'when opponents have to be faced in every one of the world's highways' (Girdlestone & De Haas 1898:9). Dissenting voices could also be found within language study. Just as writers such as Marsh and Alford were carefully circumscribing what counted as authentic English, so other commentators rejected this trend and proposed a view of English as a composite and cosmopolitan language which was global rather than national in its provenance. This view of English clearly undermined the boundaries between the supposedly "native" Anglo-Saxon component of the language and the alien remainder, an increasingly common distinction which we shall examine at length in our discussion of Anglo-Saxonism in chapter four. But more importantly still, the most famous and influential late-nineteenth-century expression of this view of English as global and cosmopolitan actually questioned the very possibility of defining boundaries at all. And it was ironic that the responsibility for illustrating the impossibility of definition should belong primarily to a lexicographer, James Murray.

For Murray, English was, unequivocally, a world language. In this respect he was far from unique; as we have seen, this view was shared by many nineteenth-century observers. But Murray's vital and groundbreaking contribution was to highlight the implications of the globalisation of English. He makes his point by taking up Guest's metaphor in which English was described as a 'circle widening daily'. Where Murray goes further than Guest is in suggesting that this process of widening serves not so much to expand as to call into question the boundaries of the English language:

The English language is not a square with definite sides containing its area; it is a circle, but a circle such as Euclid never contemplated, having as its centre a point which hath many parts, and nowhere bounded by any line called a circumference. It is a spot of colour on a damp surface, which



shades away imperceptibly into the surrounding colourlessness...The English language is a vanishing penumbra of French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Hindustani, Malay, Zulu, words, some of which are "English" to some Englishmen, and undreamt of to others. At which Englishman's speech does English terminate?

Murray 1880: 131

Montmorency had prophesied that the spread of English across the globe would undermine the 'personality of the tongue' and ultimately result in disintegration. Murray does not share Montmorency's obvious concern at this prospect, using descriptive rather than emotive terms. But these two observers, from very different standpoints, were drawing attention to the same phenomenon. Both were emphasising that the globalisation of English called into question the very notion of the English language as a self-contained and definable entity. In his preface to the NED, Murray reiterates his point about the impossibility of definition by drawing once again on the metaphor of the 'circle widening daily': 'There is absolutely no defining line in any direction; the circle of the English language has a well-defined centre but no discernible circumference' (NED 1888:xvii). In other words, for Murray, as for many of his predecessors from the mid-Victorian era, English is a language which knows no bounds.

It is precisely this view of English as a global language transcending boundaries which Murray was to enshrine in the NED. This provoked an angry response in many quarters, not just from die-hard Anglo-Saxonists. In his review of the first volume of the NED, Reeve protested against the inclusion of what he regarded as 'barbarous terms and foreign words', arguing that they represented a 'fatal sign of decay' (1889:348). Other commentators applauded the NED for rejecting the supposed boundaries between native and alien components of English:

All words that really belong to Standard English speech are admitted into its columns, no puristic distinction being made between the vernacular and the borrowed element.

Hoops 1914: 308

Hoops also underlines the extent to which the NED was a project which had a truly global significance:

Sir James and his devoted helpers...have already earned for their immense labour, ungrudgingly given, and for the enormous amount of learning incorporated in this great Word-book, the thanks of the British nation, and of all English-speakers and English-readers throughout the world.

Hoops 1914: 326

If the NED remains the most famous and enduring monument to the globalisation of English, the important point for our purposes is that this vision of English implies a refusal to endorse or to reinforce boundaries such as the distinction between native and alien elements. This reflects wider trends within late-nineteenth-century philology, many of which were led by the French theorists whose work we examined in previous chapters. Meyer was challenging the validity of synchronic boundaries between supposedly self-contained dialects; as we shall see below, Paris was calling into question the diachronic dividing line separating French from Latin. In short, in its skepticism about boundaries, the NED was perfectly in step with the most advanced linguistic theory of its day. The point to be underlined here, however, is that this also kept the NED firmly out of step with the dominant cultural and political values of the age of imperialism. Formalising, reinforcing and policing the boundaries which demarcate strictly national possessions was a major feature of those values. The startling message of the NED was that in the linguistic context, such an exercise was unnecessary, undesirable and ultimately futile.

Returning to the central theme underlying much of the British work on language at this time, the debate on the question of establishing boundaries can be seen as one product of a widespread belief that English was a language which had passed beyond British control. It was a belief shared by those who erected and policed linguistic boundaries, such as Alford, Reeve and Montmorency, and by those who, like Murray, demonstrated their futility. Moreover, it is this belief in shrinking British control over the language which underlies another area of

debate which merits close examination. This area of debate was more specific than the issue of boundaries; instead of being concerned in general terms with the expansion of English across the world, it revolved around the implications of the rise of English in one nation in particular: the United States of America. For supporters and opponents of the rise of America and American English, the last third of the nineteenth century seemed to represent the logical fulfillment of 1776. Having freed itself from the political control of Britain, America now seemed poised to declare complete linguistic independence from the one-time mother country, and possibly to usurp her position as the centre of the English-speaking world. Examining changing attitudes to America in general, and to American English in particular, is the task of our next section.

### **Condemning the upstart: reactions to the rise of American English**

Having recovered with astonishing speed from the traumas of the Civil War, the United States experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth in the last third of the nineteenth century. These were the years when the American interior was first opened up, an episode which retains much of its mythical and legendary aura in American folklore. But the West was finally won not so much by the pluck and daring of hardy pioneers as by the coming of the transcontinental railroad.<sup>6</sup> The overwhelming importance of the railways in North American history is underlined in unequivocal terms by Brogan in his account of what he calls the 'age of gold': 'it is scarcely too much to say that they underlay every new development, whether in politics, economics, culture or religion, in the middle and later years of the nineteenth century' (1985:388). Thanks to the spread of the railways, the American Mid-West became the bread-basket of the nation, and increasingly, of the world; indeed, this process contributed in no small part to the demise of British agriculture in this period, and the subsequent exodus from countryside to city. The phenomenal growth of cities such as Chicago was seen to symbolise the dynamism of the American nation as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup> The 'last spike' in the railroad which joined together the eastern and western rail networks was hammered in at Promontory Point, Utah, in 1869.

In short, America at the end of the nineteenth century was a society which had every reason to look towards the future with confidence and optimism.

The same cannot be said of contemporary Britain. Throughout our discussion we have highlighted the prevalence of worries about decline within late-nineteenth-century Britain. Indeed, the startling rise of the United States played a central part in fuelling such worries. Of course, America was not the only nation to be growing in stature and confidence. We have already underlined the influence of the growing power of Germany after 1870. British observers saw both these countries as serious threats to Britain's global supremacy. However, the threat which was perceived to come from America had an extra dimension. Not only did the rise of the United States threaten British industrial and political supremacy; it also called into question Britain's position as leader of the English-speaking world. On both sides of the Atlantic, language debates became a crucial touchstone for much wider cultural attitudes. For example, the growth in self-confidence visible in the United States is clearly reflected in the fact that an increasing number of observers were underlining the legitimacy of a specifically American form of English.<sup>7</sup> The Century Dictionary, begun in 1882 under the editorship of Whitney and Smith, stands out as a milestone in this respect, hailed by one reviewer as a 'unique and stupendous monument of American scholarship' (Anon. 1889-90:315). In an article entitled 'The English language in America', another writer emphasises the legitimacy of "Americanisms":

We have a proprietary right in the great common heritage of the English-speaking world. There is no divine right in matters verbal vested in English-speakers on the other side of the sea... Americanism in language ... has a right to exist, and must exist - a genuine product of the new soil.

Anon 1888-89: 797

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<sup>7</sup> The specificity of American English had been emphasised in the heady days after 1776. Webster, in 1789, foresaw "a language in North America, as different from the future language of England, as the modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from the German" (1967:22). By 1828, however, he was claiming that "the body of the language is the same as in England, and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness". The greater emphasis on "sameness" is reflected in the title of the famous book from which this excerpt is taken: American Dictionary of the English Language, not a dictionary of 'the American language', or even of 'American English' (McCrum, Cran and Macneil 1989: 241).

But the writer goes beyond this assertion of the legitimacy of American English. Exuding the self-assurance reminiscent, ironically, of mid-Victorian Britain s/he draws on fashionable Darwinian metaphors to predict that America will soon displace Britain as the acknowledged centre of the English-speaking world:

Americanism in our language has a better evolutionary chance of survival as *the* English of the future than has Britishism. The linguistic heritage of the past is common to both; in that neither has preeminence or advantage; the future however cannot belong to both equally, but the lion's share must fall to the stronger, and that we shall be the stronger we can hardly be expected to question.

Anon. 1888-89: 798

As this extract makes clear, what underpinned American self-confidence was the belief that America represented the future. This was more than a mere patriotic boast. It was a view shared by many overseas observers.<sup>8</sup> When Murray resigned from his position as editor of the NED in exasperation at the indecision and incompetence of the Oxford establishment, he wrote that 'the future lies in the United States' (Murray 1979:228). It was a belief which was shared by the millions of European emigrants who crossed the Atlantic throughout the nineteenth century; one of them was Murray's childhood friend, Alexander Graham Bell, who emigrated with his family in 1870.<sup>9</sup> Murray himself was tempted to join the brain drain; according to his biographer, after his resignation he seriously considered emigrating in order to pursue his work in the United States (Murray 1979:228). After all, as Murray recognised, American helpers had played a vital role in supporting his work on the dictionary, offering their services as readers. In addition, most of those who took the time to visit Murray at work in his "scriptorium" at Oxford were Americans and Germans (Murray 1979:185). In stark contrast to the enthusiasm of overseas visitors, the British cultural establishment, especially at Oxford, continued to view Murray's work

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<sup>8</sup> An early British exponent of the view that the future belonged to America was Cobden. As Young reports, his support for free trade was motivated in part by the fact that he saw it as a means of delaying - though not preventing - American predominance (1953:115).

<sup>9</sup> Bell, who had learned about electricity from Murray, was best man at Murray's wedding.

with indifference, even suspicion. There could hardly be a more graphic illustration of the wider dichotomy between British conservatism and American innovation which so profoundly marks cultural debates during this era.

This association of America with the future, and specifically with dynamism and innovation, can clearly be identified within language debates on both sides of the Atlantic during the late nineteenth century. Defenders of American English often reinforced its associations with innovation and novelty. In Modern English, published in 1874, the American writer Hall commended the dynamism and adaptability of English as it was spoken in the United States (Anon.1874:143). In an article written in 1880, Hall again celebrates the process of linguistic innovation, justifying it in terms which clearly evoke the vision of the nation and the constitution put forward by that champion of the fledgling American Republic, Tom Paine: 'Having ceased largely to think as our fathers thought, we can no longer, with justice to the change that has passed on us, write as they wrote' (Hall 1880:444).

In the eyes of those who were trying to uphold established cultural canons, (largely, though not exclusively, British observers), this dynamism posed a major threat. America was an obvious target for the hostility of an insecure generation of Britons, and it was attacked as well as praised on the grounds that it represented novelty. Indeed, the dynamism which Hall had commended in American English is seen as a major flaw by a reviewer of Modern English. The reviewer launches a blistering attack on American English, switching from condemning Americanisms as 'archaic' to attacking them because they are 'new-fangled'. The list of accusations against American English reads as follows:

lax and archaic constructions, obsolete idioms, harsh abbreviations, new-fangled terms and phrases, including reckless verbal ventures and base local coinages, combined in oral intercourse with an elaborately misplaced emphasis, and a curious combination of drawl and twang in pronunciation.

Anon. 1874: 143

Few attacks were as indiscriminating and inconsistent in their choice of targets as this broadside. Most focused their fire on the innovations which were seen to be so characteristic of American English. Graham's hostility is essentially a dislike of its supposed penchant for novelty:

The recklessness with which the Americans use the English language bids fair to flood it with many new and strange terms....they certainly must be regarded as interlopers - candidates for an office to which they are not yet, if they will ever be, entitled.

Graham 1869: 178-9

The dispute over the validity of innovation was often centred on two battlegrounds in particular. The first of these was that supposed symbol of novelty and innovation in language, slang. Enemies of American English frequently attempted to discredit all new linguistic coinages by labelling them as fickle and reprehensible slang. In an 1888 article in Cornhill Magazine, one writer describes the main features of what s/he calls 'the American language', claiming that it 'palpitates with actuality' and that, as a result, it displays a lack of 'definiteness and fixity' (Anon.1888b:364). Graham underlines that the products of this American penchant for linguistic innovation should remain outside the confines of legitimate and authentic English:

Such words as "secesh", "skedaddle", "recuperate", "rowdy", "rile", "stampede" etc, ... can in no sense be said to belong to our language. Nor is it likely that English writers of any pretensions to good taste will ever adopt them.

Graham 1869: 181

In contrast, some linguistic commentators found this dynamism invigorating. After all, as we showed in chapter one, the emphasis within philological study was shifting towards living language and away from 'fossil books'. In an article entitled 'Popular American Phrases', one writer argued that 'English slang grows fast in our days; but American slang grows infinitely faster, and has the merit of being a great deal more humorous and comic than the British article' (Anon.1870b:270). But in the eyes of another observer, the humour associated

with American English is clearly identified as its one and only redeeming feature: 'It is this that half redeems the American language from the nethermost depths of pure vulgarity, and gives it the little pinch of salt that keeps it from falling into the utterly putrid condition' (Anon.1888b:367).

Slang was not the only battleground. Another example of the American preference for innovation over continuity which featured prominently in linguistic debates takes us back to an issue which we examined in chapter one: spelling reform. As far as the enemies of American English were concerned, the most obvious of its 'reckless verbal ventures' was its supposedly new-fangled system of spelling. Although many of the modifications in American English spelling had been made half a century earlier by Webster, a chorus of British critics dismissed them as a relatively recent innovation, and as such unacceptable. Alford was a virulent opponent of spelling reform of any kind, but he singles out what he sees as the American 'omission of the "u"' in words such as "colour". As with Graham, he bases his objection on the grounds that the usage is new and that it disrupts continuity with the past:

The omission of the u is an approach to that wretched attempt to destroy all the historic interest of our language, which is known by the name of phonetic spelling.

Alford 1888: 9

Enthusiasm for phonetic spelling was widespread in American linguistic circles. The editor of the Century Dictionary, Smith, was also president of the Orthographic Union which spearheaded the campaign for spelling reform. Given the depth of American interest in the NED, the news that the dictionary was to use the established system of spelling was greeted with dismay:

One can hardly imagine that, as has happened on the other side, if our Philological Association were constructing a great English Dictionary...it would practically throw its influence in favour of the most conservative and certainly obsolescent orthography.

Anon. 1888-9: 799



Another American critic of the established orthography launches his attack in far more forthright and unequivocal terms:

I have yet to learn that, considering the difference of circumstances, there is among the most savage tribes any fetichism more senseless and more stupid than that which, with educated men among us, treats as worthy of respect or reverence the present orthography of the English tongue.

Anon. 1882-3: 283

Interestingly, one American writer attempted to justify spelling reform on the grounds that, far from breaking with the past, it would 'continue the good work of our forefathers...the real innovators are those who maintain the inviolability of our present spelling'(Matthews 1901:617). In general terms, however, American calls for spelling reform adopted a more radical and iconoclastic tone, reinforcing the perception of British observers that America was obsessed with linguistic innovation.

This link between America and innovation was the principal feature of the attacks upon American English launched at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The overriding point to be reiterated, however, is not so much the features of this attack as the concerns which prompted it in the first place. For what lay behind the hostility to American English was the same fear of a loss of control which had prompted the more general concerns over the boundless expansion of the language. Indeed, in many ways, the hostility to American English can be seen as one specific example of these general concerns. The English language was increasingly felt to be something over which Britain no longer exercised control; the nation which was felt to be most likely to take Britain's place as the centre of the English-speaking world was America. These were points on which most contemporary observers could agree. More importantly, they were points which clearly tie in very closely with wider worries about Britain's global status at the end of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>10</sup> Democracy was one innovation linked with America. In the 1860 debates leading to the Reform Act, Disraeli accused Gladstone of wanting an "American" constitution (Shannon 1974:63).

Before shifting our focus towards France, it is important that we should examine one final respect in which ideas about language related to wider questions about the decline in Britain's global authority. Some, like Murray, appeared relatively unconcerned about the fact that English had broken free of its mother country. But for those who saw the globalisation of English as a problem, believing that it provided evidence of a weakening of British influence, the English language could also be seen, from a different and more reassuring perspective, as a means of shoring up that influence and of retaining a measure of control over restless colonies and over the United States. For at a time when Britain's political authority over many of her past and present colonies was crumbling, the English language could be used as a much-needed symbol of a cultural unity which was felt to be deeper and more enduring than political ties. In short, the political bonds of empire had started to give way, but they could be replaced by an emphasis on the cultural links uniting the English-speaking peoples.

### **The Fall of an Empire, the Rise of the English-speaking peoples**

While Britain was establishing political control over new colonies in the developing world, it was in the process of losing control over the largely English-speaking parts of its empire. Canada had become independent in 1867. Growing nationalist sentiments would prompt Australia to follow suit in 1900. Writing in 1895, Mahaffy described the growing antipathy towards British imperial rule in these dominion territories and in Ireland:

Patriotism for the Empire is waning very fast...it is being replaced by a local patriotism...The leading form is now, Australia for the Australian, Canada for the Canadian, Ireland for the Irishman, and so forth.

Mahaffy 1895: 1029

Two years later, at the 1897 Colonial Conference, the growing divergence between dominions and mother country was made painfully clear when the

colonies, anxious to protect their fledgling industries from British competition, flatly rejected the attempt made by Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, to remove trading barriers within the empire. 1897 can be seen as a key turning point, but the prospect of imperial fragmentation had long haunted British observers. Consider Merivale's doom-laden prophecies of 1870:

There exists, no doubt, a prevalent feeling that, in a certain sense, the doom of Athens is already ours. Our power to conquer, or to hold by force, trans-marine empire, in most quarters, may be the same; but that empire itself is not the same. The ties which held it together are not the same. We feel them weakening and loosening around us.

Merivale 1870: 153

In other words, the events of 1897 confirmed existing fears; throughout the last third of the nineteenth century, the political bonds uniting the empire were felt to be under threat. Merivale suggested that 'the ties which held it together are not the same'; one of the most pressing issues of the period was the need to find a new form of relationship between Britain and the constituent parts of the empire. One solution to the problem of imperial fragmentation was to reassert the political bonds uniting the empire with renewed vigour. Such was the objective of the Imperial Federation League, founded in 1884, and counting Chamberlain and Rhodes as its most powerful advocates.<sup>11</sup> However, political links with the mother country were precisely what the dominions were challenging; the prospect of those links being further reinforced was less likely to calm than to fuel separatist feeling. The Colonial Conference of 1897 underlined the fact that as a solution to the problem of dissolving political bonds, imperial federation was a non-starter. Another solution, which recognised the reality of political divergence, was required.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rhodes took the idea of political federation to its extreme, proposing the annexation of all African territory along a line from the Cape to Cairo (the "All-Red route"). In his will he even claimed that the United States should eventually be re-incorporated into the British empire (Pakenham 1993:377).

<sup>12</sup> The reality of divergence became inescapable in the 1900s. Canada sent her own minister to Tokyo in 1907 and began to build her own navy in 1909. Australia set up her own External Affairs department in 1901 (Anderson 1972:222).

One such solution, advocated by a wide range of observers, was to emphasise the importance of cultural links. If political bonds joining the dominions to the mother country were 'weakening and loosening', cultural bonds provided a useful substitute. And the most important of these cultural bonds was the shared English language. In chapter four we shall look at the way in which discourses of English national identity at the end of the nineteenth century were to become based on cultural factors. For the moment our interest remains focused on a similar shift which took place at imperial level, joining together the English-speaking peoples.

Throughout the age of imperialism, visions of the unity of the dominions became increasingly based on cultural rather than political factors. As Judd argues:

The realistic course was to fasten on to those links that already existed rather than to forge new ones. The existing bonds of Empire, though unrestrictive, were not without strength. A common monarch, a shared history, a common law, similar institutions and a sense of cultural identity were the bones of the body imperial.

Judd 1970:127

Judd's account, though accurate, remains inadequate. He fails to mention the importance of a shared racial identity. For these ideas of cultural unity were applied exclusively to the "white" dominions. This is a vital point to bear in mind as we consider the ways in which language was often promoted as the basis of this cultural unity. The fact that race is not mentioned in the extracts which follow is not evidence that it was not important, but a sign that it was taken for granted.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the heavy emphasis on language should not be taken at face

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<sup>13</sup> It was race rather than language which was the most important category as far as the two most zealous advocates of empire, Rhodes and Chamberlain, were concerned. Both stressed the deep-seated racial kinship between two nations with different languages, England and Germany. Chamberlain fantasised about the prospect of the world being governed by a triple alliance of the Teutonic races, England, America and Germany. Inspired by a similar view of Germanic unity, Rhodes originally stipulated that the scholarships he founded at Oxford should be for the benefit of German as well as English and American students. Pro-Germanism in narratives of identity is discussed in chapter four.

value; being English-speaking alone was not enough to guarantee membership of this worldwide cultural community. Arguably the most important (if often unstated) criterion was that you had to be white.

With this vital qualification in mind, we nevertheless turn our attention to the role played by language. Again, Judd omits language in his description of the emphasis on the 'links that already existed'. Yet it is plausible to argue that the English language was increasingly being promoted as the most fundamental of the cultural bonds uniting dominions with the mother country. As with visions of Englishness at the national level, language acquired a position of unprecedented prominence as the symbol and proof of the unity of the empire. Grey sees language as the single most important basis for imperial unity, as is seen in the title of his 1894 article 'The Federation of the English-speaking people'. Grey was not alone. The notion that the empire was based first and foremost on the fact that its members were "English-speaking" became widespread during this era. It was this same vision of a global community united by language which inspired projects such as Astley Cooper's plans for international sporting events to bring together the supposed members of this community from all parts of the globe. In an article written in Nineteenth Century he proposes the establishment of an 'Anglo-Saxon Olympiad', which he sees as a 'periodic festival for the English-speaking races'(1892:380). The emphasis on language as the common bond is clear in his explanation of the project:

Such an institution .. would keep the feeling of kinship among those who speak the same language and have inherited the same customs...The principle of the scheme is based essentially on that of the family; it involves no artificial ties; on the other hand it is the embodiment of free and unfettered gatherings ...a recognised sign of the unity of the English-speaking race, scattered throughout our ocean commonwealth.

Astley Cooper 1892: 381<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The OED gives 1884 as the date of the first recorded use of the term "Commonwealth" in relation to the territories of the empire. It became widespread after the First World War and was given formal legal expression in the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

This extract also illustrates how language was seen as a common imperial bond which was more enduring than the 'artificial ties' of political unity. In an article in the Fortnightly Review entitled 'Imperial Federation', Farrer claims that 'a common origin, common speech and history, make an indestructible moral federation and render a political federation unimportant'(1885:343). Like Astley Cooper, Farrer combines this emphasis on cultural rather than political unity with an insistence on the central role played by language. He writes of his

...dream of a greater Britain, of an English Empire coterminous with English speech, cemented, not by unnatural and galling political bonds, but by the sympathies of free communities, and by the affections of equal allies.

Farrer 1885: 343

This vision of a global union of English-speaking peoples was also a useful way of retaining links with America. We have seen that one reaction to the rise of America which featured in language debates was outright condemnation. An alternative reaction was to underline the strength of the existing cultural bonds which united Britain and America, especially language. This attempt to reassert transatlantic cultural ties can be seen in the words of Pearsall Smith:

When the 2 branches of the same race were separated politically in 1784, the Republic of letters was not severed. Both nations have the same language, the same standards in ethics, religion, and taste, are members of the same commonwealth of literature.

Pearsall Smith 1887: 610

The extent to which America was portrayed as essentially English in its cultural identity is revealed in the words of Dilke, writing in 1875:

In America the peoples of the world are being fused together, but they run into an English mould; Alfred's laws and Chaucer's tongue are theirs, whether they will or no.

cited in Moore 1875: 4

Dilke argues not that America is exclusively English, but that it is essentially English. A similar emphasis on the identity of England and America can be seen in the words of Griffin:

England, who has girdled the earth with empire, and the roots of whose national oak lie, like those of the mystic tree in Norse sagas, among the hidden bases of the world, can look without fear, or distrust, or envy, but rather with a glad and generous pride, at the development of the great American people, bone of her bone, and blood of her blood.

Griffin 1884: 401

What is of particular interest for our purposes is the way in which language was invoked as the symbol and proof of this vision of cultural identity. Ignoring the differences between the linguistic varieties spoken on either side of the Atlantic, Marsh argues that both nations share what he calls a 'common Anglian dialect' (1860:87). In another article on the importance of sporting competitions for forging unity, Astley Cooper suggests that the influx into America of what he calls 'non-English people' will not so much threaten as reinforce the identity of the English and American versions of the one common language:

It may be regarded as certain that, whatever happens, the English-speaking man is going to dominate the US, and the more non-English people come into the country, the more will the dominating English-speakers feel themselves bound to make common cause with those who speak the English language outside the political and geographical boundaries of the great republic across the Atlantic.

Astley Cooper 1908: 1012

As with Marsh, Astley Cooper is attempting to underpin cultural unity by referring to identity of language; in this vision of a single Anglian language spanning the Atlantic Ocean, diversity and differences between linguistic varieties are all but ignored.

Other critics who shared the aim of Marsh and Astley Cooper in wishing to underline the identity of England and America adopted a different approach.



Rather than ignoring differences between the varieties of English on either side of the Atlantic, they actually enlisted those differences to help reinforce their point. Paradoxically, superficial linguistic differences were used as evidence of fundamental linguistic and cultural identity. This was accomplished by emphasising that such differences as could be observed in American English had arisen because it was at a different diachronic stage compared with English in the mother country. In this definition, American English was seen as preserving forms and usages which had died out in England. Marsh underlined the ancient pedigree of words which were commonly thought to be Americanisms (1860:181). In a similar vein, another writer points out that words such as "chore", "sick", "right", and "pretty", used in the American sense, were survivals from the language spoken in Elizabethan England (Anon.1888b:364). As in the case of rural dialect, underlining the ancient pedigree of Americanisms accorded them a significant degree of legitimacy.

For one writer, however, the fact that phrases such as "I guess" were good old English did not mean that they were 'good new English' (Fowler 1954:33). Fowler stressed not the identity but the separateness of British and American English. He makes his view graphically clear in his section on 'Americanisms' in The King's English, originally published in 1906: 'Americanisms are foreign words, and should be so treated' (1954:33). Although he immediately pleads that 'this is not to insult the American language', the fact that he then warns about 'the danger of our literature's being americanized' testifies to the widespread fear of increasing American influence over British life and language: 'every one knows an Americanism, at present, when he sees it; how long that will be true is an anxious question' (1954:33-35). The point to be reiterated, however, is that many writers did not share Fowler's view of American English as separate, and emphasised its underlying identity with the language of the former mother country. Trench had reasserted this identity in 1855: 'it has sometimes been asked whether a day will ever arrive when the language spoken on this side of the Atlantic and on the other, will divide into two languages, an old English and a new. We may confidently answer, No.' (1855:94). In the very different



circumstances of the last three decades of the century, few observers shared Trench's confidence. As we noted in the extracts from Century Magazine cited above, the prospect of America declaring its linguistic independence was becoming increasingly likely. In this sense, the emphasis on reasserting identity can be seen in the same light as the vitriolic diatribes against Americanisms, cited above. They were different responses to the same phenomenon: the increasing linguistic and cultural divergence between Britain and its former colony.

The example of America thus provides another illustration of the way in which an emphasis on cultural unity can be seen as a response to the threat of separation and divergence. It was an emphasis which was increasingly common towards the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed one critic positively welcomes 'The End of Imperialism'. He foresees a future in which the unity of colonies with the mother country would, paradoxically, be reinforced, by being rooted all the more deeply in a shared cultural identity:

A family of sister nations bound together by "ties light as air but strong as iron", it stands sentinel around the seven seas, speaking one language, acknowledging one crown, united in the sacred memories of a glorious ancestry.

Gardiner 1911: 116

As we see here, the response to the threat to political unity was the claim that political unity did not matter. The message was that the links between Britain and her dominions were based on a common cultural inheritance and a common language. For language was felt to provide the aura of permanence and continuity which was precisely what was needed at a time when political ties were manifestly dissolving. Invoked by many as the perfect symbol of imperial unity and identity, the English language was used to conceal divisions and to assuage worries about imperial disintegration and national decline.

Ultimately, the emphasis on the cultural unity of the English-speaking peoples returns us to the central theme of diminishing British control in the late-nineteenth-century world. In the fears about the rise of America and in the insistence on the need for boundaries we see language being invoked as a symptom of the problem. In the notion of the English-speaking peoples, we see language being touted as the basis of a solution. In all three of the areas we have examined, the issue is one of control.

Britain may have been alone in facing a serious threat from a former colony. But Britain was certainly not the only country to be preoccupied with worries about decline. The very nation whose role as the major European power had been usurped by Britain was experiencing fears about a further fall in status after its defeat by Germany in 1870. France too was a nation for whom the late nineteenth century was an age of insecurity; like Britain, one of the ways in which France sought to soothe these anxieties was by turning towards empire. Nor do the similarities end there. As in Britain, the worries about France's status which had led to the scramble for empire in the first place were closely bound up with ideas about language. After all, the French language had traditionally symbolised the *rayonnement* of French civilisation to a far greater degree than the English language had symbolised the global overlordship of Britain. Examining the ways in which language featured in contemporary debates about France's global role is the task of the second half of this chapter.

## **FRANCE**

### **The Demise of French: the problem of numbers**

Despite the undoubted similarities, the nature and history of French relationships with the wider world and with empire are profoundly different from the British experience. It is important not to lose sight of these differences in any analysis of the interaction between France and the rest of the world during the late nineteenth century; in focusing on the way in which that interaction was itself related to linguistic concerns, retaining an awareness of those differences is vital. Some of the principal ways in which the French experience as a global and imperial power differs from that of Britain were outlined at the start of this chapter. However, now that we have examined the British context, the two most significant contrasts should be reiterated. First, France had no reason to fear loss of its position as undisputed leader of the French-speaking world. We have seen that British concern was focused on the United States; France faced no such threat to its right to be considered as the fountain-head of the French language. Second, though the extent of France's empire multiplied nine times over during the scramble for Africa, it remained far smaller and far less populous than the British empire. Without going so far as to claim that a smaller empire in itself meant fewer worries and responsibilities, the French empire was never as unwieldy, as heterogeneous and as overwhelming in its scale as the British empire. In short, it was far more manageable. Consequently, the fear of losing control, increasingly widespread in Britain, was never as prevalent in France.

But France had its own concerns about empire and global status. In one sense, for the French as for the British, it was size which was the problem. But France's main concern was the exact opposite to that of Britain. As we have seen, for many British observers, English was spreading almost too quickly, threatening to pass beyond the mother country's control; for France, in contrast, French was not spreading quickly enough to keep up, portending a decline in the

global status of the language. The widespread desire to bolster the number of French-speakers throughout the world will be examined in depth below. The important point to be underlined here is that this difference is fundamental to an understanding of the nature and direction of French concerns about the language at global level. Indeed, it is this urgent need to increase the number of French-speakers which partly explains another striking difference between France and Britain: the importance attached to language within the discourse of French colonialism. This is another subject which will be analysed below. Having underlined the specificities of the French context, and highlighted the overriding concern with numbers, our first task is to provide a brief historical sketch of French as a world language. For here too, the contrast with Britain and with English is striking.

### **L'Universalité de la langue française: an overview**

The most immediately obvious difference between the global positions of French and English in the nineteenth century was that while English was enjoying a remarkable rise, French was experiencing a protracted fall. For it was French which had occupied the position of universal language to which English was now laying claim. Schoell (1936) has shown that French emerged as the unchallenged universal language throughout Europe as far back as the seventeenth century. He identifies several important factors which lay behind this development. First, and most important, was the decline of Latin as a universal language (though this could also be seen less as a cause than as an effect of the rise of French). A second factor was the growing strength of the French economy. A third was France's demographic superiority within Europe at that time; as we shall see below, changing population distribution lay at the heart of concerns over the decline of French in the late nineteenth century. Schoell also underlines the important role of the writers and other scholars which France produced in abundance at that time. Finally, he highlights the way in which French was exported overseas by Huguenot emigrés after they had been expelled from France when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

The Port-Royal grammar of 1660 can be singled out as perhaps the first major example of the way in which the French language was also being seen as universal by seventeenth-century observers. Drawing solely on French to illustrate their claim that the structure of speech mirrors the structure of thought, Arnauld and Lancelot clearly assume that what applies to French also, by definition, applies to all other languages; in other words, the particular is equated with the universal.

By the eighteenth century, when French hegemony within Europe was at its zenith, equating France with the world seemed more plausible still. By this time French had replaced Latin as the universal language of diplomacy, though it is important to reiterate that the rise of French can be largely attributed to the fact that it was seen as the heir to the Latin legacy.<sup>15</sup> It is at the end of the eighteenth century that we find the clearest and most celebrated exposition of the universality of French. This was Rivarol's prize-winning essay of 1784, De l'Universalité de la Langue Française. In this essay, Rivarol underlines the extent to which French had succeeded in establishing global linguistic hegemony as Latin had done in the Roman era: 'Le temps semble être venu de dire le monde français, comme autrefois le monde romain' (1930:168). As Rickard (1989:118) notes, what is significant about the choice of this topic for the Berlin Academy's competition is that it was intended to stimulate debate about the reasons why French was universal. In other words, the question as to whether or not French was or should be universal was assumed to be beyond dispute. That such assumptions were unquestioned is itself an indication of the strength of this tradition. Indeed, Rivarol's essay, and the competition which prompted it, remain the most powerful expressions of this longstanding universalist tradition in which France in general, and the French language in particular, were equated with the world.

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<sup>15</sup> The first treaty in French was Rastatt in 1714, though with a caveat that this was not to be a precedent. This caveat was finally dropped in the Treaty of Hubertusburg (1763) (Rickard 1989:117)

If the eighteenth century saw French political and linguistic hegemony rise to its zenith, the nineteenth century was an era of relative decline for France and for French alike. In many ways, Waterloo symbolised the transition from French to British ascendancy in the military, political and economic spheres. It would be wrong, however, to identify 1815 as the moment when English superseded French as the most plausible universal language. There is little evidence that defeat at Waterloo sparked off widespread concerns about the prospect of French losing its global linguistic hegemony to English. As Schoell argues:

Si au point de vue politique la France ou bien ne songe pas ou bien ne parvient pas à restaurer son hégémonie antérieure en Europe, la langue et la littérature françaises, voire la presse française conservent néanmoins un grand ascendant pendant la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle.

Schoell 1936: 21

In other words, even with its army routed on the battlefield, the cultural dominance of France and of French remained relatively secure; indeed, Wellington himself, having smashed France's military supremacy, proceeded to reinforce her cultural and linguistic primacy, speaking to captured officers in the fluent French habitually used by the upper classes throughout Europe.

As Rickard (1989:117) points out, it is important to appreciate that French was "universal" only amongst the upper classes in other countries. Indeed, the whole tradition of French universalism originates in the pre-democratic world of the seventeenth century. The universality of French was based less on the absolute number of people across the world who used it than on the fact that it was used by elite groups in many different countries. This helps explain why it was not until the last third of the nineteenth century that fears about the threat posed by English start to become widespread; it is only with the advent of democratisation that numbers start to matter. In short, with French and English we are dealing with two very different conceptions of universality. French was felt to be universal because it was the language of the influential few; English, in contrast, because it was the language of the innumerable many. Writers such as Watts,

Mackay and Guest all base their predictions about the universal status of English on the ever increasing numbers of people who spoke it, and on the sheer extent of its distribution across the face of the globe. Given these differing perspectives, there was no reason for rivalry. French writers accustomed to a tradition of French linguistic hegemony in which the number of speakers was irrelevant had no particular cause to view the global spread of English as a threat. And even if the number of speakers was seen as the principal criterion, French continued to hold the advantage over all other European languages in that respect until the 1860s.

This relative absence of concern about potential threats to French linguistic hegemony for much of the nineteenth century reflects a more general sense of complacency about France's global status. The belief that France remained dominant was given credence in the Crimea, one of the few occasions between Waterloo and 1870 when large-scale conflict broke out between rather than within the nations of Europe. If the Crimea proved anything it was the military incompetence of France's only potential challenger for European primacy, Britain.<sup>16</sup> But just as war could reinforce illusions, so it could brutally shatter them. If the Crimea and even Waterloo did not give rise to widespread concerns about the global position of the language, the same could certainly not be said of the rout at Sedan. Together with the advent of a more democratic era in which the number rather than the status of speakers was the decisive factor, it was this catastrophic defeat which acted as the trigger for worries over decline in the global status of France and French. Examining those worries is our next task.

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<sup>16</sup> The incompetence of the British army in the Crimea was shown not only by the communications fiasco which led to the charge of the Light Brigade, and by the inadequate supplies which prompted frost-bitten troops to improvise their own apparel (hence "balaclava" and "cardigan"), but also by the fact that the Commander-in-Chief, 65 year-old Lord Raglan, continually referred to the enemy as "the French" (Mosse 1974:134)

### Language and Global Rang:

Throughout our discussion of the French context in the years after 1870 we have repeatedly underlined the enormous impact of the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. We highlighted the way in which 1870 sparked off an unprecedented degree of dispute about questions of nationality, history and identity. Like the uprisings of 1830 and 1848, the bloodshed of the Commune in many ways represented another battle in the war between differing interpretations of the legacy of 1789. Moreover, as we saw in chapter two, the trauma of 1870 prompted many influential observers such as Maurras and Bourget to go so far as to reject the tradition of 1789. In other words, such was the extent of the angst and trauma prompted by defeat at Sedan that even the unquestionable was now being called into question.

One of the certainties which was increasingly called into question after 1870 was France's continued status as a global power. Cultural and political debates from the era are saturated with anxieties about the prospect of France losing what was usually referred to as her *rang* in the world. France's national identity was inextricably bound up with a tradition of universalism; thus it is hardly surprising that the bitter experience of defeat should fuel concerns in both these areas. Indeed, some observers responded to the defeat by turning away from universalism altogether and by implying that global status was irrelevant. In many cases, notably Clemenceau and Deroulède, those who turned their attentions away from the world stage did so in order to focus more effectively on the enemy across the Rhine. In other words, even the most introspective of isolationists could not shut themselves off completely from the world beyond the national borders. The difference is that instead of being concerned about *rang*, they were usually transfixed by the desire for *revanche*.

Our concern, however, is with those for whom France's global status was seen as a matter of vital significance. Instead of reacting to the defeat by attacking the tradition of universalism and professing indifference to France's prestige as a



world power, many responded by reiterating the need to maintain France's *rang* within the world. The chief advocate of this view was Ferry. The extract below is taken from a key parliamentary debate on colonial policy, but it serves here as an illustration of the extent to which Ferry's political philosophy in general is founded on a view of France as a global power which must at all costs retain its influence and its *rang*:

Rayonner sans agir, sans se mêler aux affaires du monde, en se tenant à l'écart de toutes les combinaisons européennes, en regardant comme un piège, comme une aventure toute expansion vers l'Afrique ou vers l'Orient, vivre de cette sorte, pour une grande nation ... c'est abdiquer, et dans un temps plus court que vous ne pouvez le croire, c'est descendre du premier rang au troisième et au quatrième.

cited in Rambaud 1903: 392

Ferry's belief that France could only maintain greatness by looking beyond her own frontiers is revealed not only in his imperial designs, but also in his reference to 'combinaisons européennes'. In short, Ferry was pointing to the need for European allies to counter the influence of Germany. As Morse (1978:130-37) argues in his historical account of French foreign policy, 1870 paradoxically served both to fuel the nationalistic desire for an independent policy, and to create a new awareness that such a policy of splendid isolation was ill-advised in a Europe now dominated by Germany. But strategic considerations, though vital, formed only one part of Ferry's vision of a nation which remained outward-looking, in keeping with the universalist tradition stretching back to the seventeenth century:

La France...ne peut pas être seulement un pays libre; elle doit aussi être un grand pays, exerçant sur les destinées de l'Europe toute l'influence qui lui appartient...elle doit répandre cette influence sur le monde, et porter partout où elle le peut, sa langue, ses mœurs, son drapeau, ses armes, son génie.

cited in Girardet 1966: 107

Clearly this vision of French global grandeur is far-removed from the more isolationist philosophy of Barrès, Maurras and the *revanchistes*. For Gambetta

and Ferry, narrowing horizons from the global to the strictly national level would undermine the very basis of French power, wealth and prestige, leaving the field open to France's competitors. Such views were shared by Ferry's close political ally and future biographer, Rambaud, as seen here in his warning about the dire consequences if France were to abdicate her global role. Significantly, this extract is taken from his introduction to the French translation of Seeley's eulogy to English imperialism, The Expansion of England:

Le jour où son pavillon s'éclipsera devant le pavillon  
britannique, allemand ou américain, où les traités conclus par  
elle manqueraient d'une sanction effective, où sa langue  
cesserait de compter comme langue de trafic et de  
commandement, c'en serait fait à la fois de sa richesse et de  
son prestige.

Seeley 1885: xxxvi

The emphasis on maintaining France's *rang* is thus a key theme in the political and cultural debates of the late nineteenth century. What is also revealed in the extracts cited above is the extent to which post-1870 reassertions of French universalism, though prompted by military defeat, frequently referred as much to cultural as to political or military supremacy. Ferry and Rambaud both wish to see the global spread not merely of France's army and flag, but of French manners and, as we shall discuss below, the French language. Dumont-Wilden also reasserts France's traditional role as a centre of cultural influence; like Ferry, he clearly sees this position as linked to the wider question of maintaining France's position in the world:

Il faut que ses amis de l'étranger, les plus éclairés au moins,  
s'en rendent compte; pour qu'elle continue à représenter avec  
éclat la culture la plus raffinée, la plus aristocratique et la plus  
humaine qu'il y ait en Europe, il faut qu'elle garde son rang.

cited in Agathon 1913: 130

As we saw above, the examples of Rivarol and the Port-Royal grammar illustrate that cultural and linguistic hegemony had long been a central feature of France's pretensions to universalism. Moreover, in many ways 1870 had demonstrated

the brutal fact that cultural authority was all that France had left. It had become the only sphere in which France could still plausibly claim to exercise undisputed global leadership; economic dominance had long since belonged to Britain, and political and military supremacy on the European continent was now in the hands of Germany. In other words, it was the legacy of the past combined with the harsh realities of the present which explains why so many of those who raised the issue of France's global *rang* drew so heavily on cultural and linguistic evidence. In keeping with our chief concerns, we shall focus specifically on language. We shall proceed to examine some of the ways in which French writers pointed to the example of language in order to try and calm worries about France's status in the world. However, we shall first consider extracts from observers who saw the position of the French language less as a reassurance than as a confirmation of the inexorable decline in France's global *rang*.

In his account of the history of French as a universal language, Schoell argues that 1870 can be seen as the beginning of an era of decline: 'Depuis 1870 jusqu'à la guerre mondiale, le français perd graduellement du terrain en Europe' (1936:22). The attempts to export the French language outside Europe will be examined below. The point to be reiterated here is that many contemporary observers shared Schoell's view that 1870 heralded the demise of French as a universal language; indeed, imperial expansion can be seen as proof of this point in that one of the reasons behind it was the urgent need to bolster the number of French-speakers across the world. The question of numbers was becoming vital. Throughout late-nineteenth-century Europe, demographic issues were high on the agenda, nowhere more so than in France.<sup>17</sup> The defeat of 1870 had fuelled a range of concerns about national decline, but the problem of France's sluggish birth rate was central.

France had long been the most populous nation in Europe; Duquesne (1991:17) points out that in 1700 it had accounted for 40% of the population of the entire continent, a fact which sheds further light on the emergence of a universalist

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<sup>17</sup> The term "démographie" was coined by the Frenchman Guillard in the 1850s (Larousse).

tradition during that era. In 1800 the French population, at 28 million, was still far higher than that of its enemies in the Napoleonic wars: Britain (16 million), and the combined states of Germany (22 million). By 1860, France's lead was under threat, with its population of 37.4 million almost matched by the 36 million inhabitants within the Austrian Empire. The watershed, however, was the emergence of a united Germany in 1871. It ended French predominance not only in military and political terms, but also in the matter of population. The new Third Republic had 37 million citizens; but the new German state had 41 million. By 1910, the gap had widened further, with a French population of just under 40 million outnumbered not only by 65 million Germans but also by 45 million Britons.<sup>18</sup> Such statistics help explain why the problem of slow population growth was felt so keenly in France in particular in the last third of the nineteenth century. In 1900, only 12% of Europeans were French; set against the figure of 40% for the year 1700, it is hardly surprising that the universality of France and of French was perceived to be in steep decline.

It is against this backdrop of population stagnation that we should consider the growing emphasis placed on increasing the number of French speakers as a means of arresting the decline of the language. We have seen that the historical basis of French universality had been the status rather than the number of its speakers. It was a view which was becoming increasingly untenable with the advent of a Republican regime committed to democratic principles. Outside France, the French language was suffering from its associations with the elite. As we noted with reference to Britain in chapter one, the democratising trend throughout much of Europe was closely related to the establishment of the national vernacular as the basis of cultural authority, replacing languages which were perceived as being both elitist and foreign. In Britain the language in question was Latin. For many countries the language of the elite was French. As Schoell argues:

La vraie diminutio capitis que subit la langue française est que,  
demeurée la langue auxiliaire de l'élite mondaine en Europe,

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<sup>18</sup> All figures taken from 'Birth and Death', in Zeldin 1981:184-218.

elle cède nécessairement du terrain comme langue de culture à toutes les langues nationales au fur et à mesure que les Etats se démocratisent en fait.

Schoell 1936: 23

In short, the traditional basis of French universality was being undermined. In this democratising era, the most important criterion for a would-be universal language was not so much the status of the speakers as their quantity.

The growing concern over the relative decline in the number of French-speakers can clearly be seen in Foncin's introduction to the Alliance Française's brochure for the 1900 Paris Exhibition:

Jusqu'au début de ce siècle, la langue française était, par le nombre, la première des langues européennes. Elle n'occupe plus aujourd'hui que le quatrième rang.

Foncin 1900: xv

Foncin argues that the number of speakers is not the only factor to take into account in trying to reverse this decline:

Ce sont les langues supérieures qui l'emportent sur leurs rivales, et cette supériorité résulte de toutes sortes de conditions. Le nombre est l'une de ces conditions: il n'est ni la seule ni la plus importante.

Foncin 1900: viii

However, the true importance of the question of numbers is revealed towards the end of Foncin's report. The first of his proposed solutions to the decline of French is to increase the birth rate:

Pour que la langue française conserve son rang, progresse et regne un jour dans le monde, il faut que la France le veuille...Si elle le veut elle aura des enfants.

Foncin 1900: xxxii

Rimbaud warns that a stagnant population would result in a decline in the status of France and of French. He suggests that France could find her political influence reduced to the level of that of Belgium:

Nous, français, dans ce débordement des populations anglo-saxonnes sur les nouveaux mondes, de populations allemandes ou slaves sur l'ancien monde, nous disparaîtrions, état et race. Comme importance politique avec nos quarante ou cinquante millions de congénères, nous aurions celle qu'a aujourd'hui la Belgique; notre langue dans le monde des affaires compterait à peu près autant qu'aujourd'hui la race batave.

Seeley 1885: xxxi

Not all observers saw the decline in population as a cause for concern. One optimistic critic managed to argue that far from being a symptom of national decline, a falling birth-rate actually proved French superiority:

Lorsque les peuples n'ont pas beaucoup d'enfants, c'est parce qu'ils ne veulent pas en avoir et non pas parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas en avoir. La limitation de la progéniture indique la prédominance de la raison sur l'appétit.

Novicow 1911: 24

Novicow, however, remained an exception. In general, increasing the number of French-speakers around the world became an issue of serious concern in the last third of the nineteenth century. Numerical superiority, increasingly, was what mattered; yet it was that which France so manifestly lacked.

In addition to the question of numbers, the evidence provided by language reinforced perceptions of decline in other ways. French was felt to be falling behind in terms of its position and prevalence within certain key sectors of activity. In the extract above, Rimbaud refers specifically to the danger that French will lose its status in the world of business. He presumably has German and English in mind as the main competitors in this instance. And it is these two languages which are also seen as responsible for depriving French of its pre-eminence in another crucial sector, science:

Dans la concurrence que se font les langues scientifiques, le français...est descendue de la première place, qu'il occupait il y a cent ans, à la troisième, fortement distancé par l'anglais et l'allemand.

Laloy 1913: 467

Thus we have seen that throughout the late nineteenth century, many observers were expressing serious concerns about the global decline of the French language. These concerns lay behind the founding of the Alliance Française in 1883, an initiative which, as Schoell argues, can be seen as a 'grand aveu de faiblesse', and a recognition of the need to arrest the declining status of French (1936:23). We shall look in more detail below at the work of the Alliance in promoting the use of the French language around the world, and especially in the empire. The important point to be underlined here is that concern over the decline of French was widespread. Such concerns clearly tie in with wider worries about France's global *rang*, and with a whole climate of uncertainty which, as we have seen in previous chapters, pervades French cultural and political life at this time. It would be reductive to relate these anxieties exclusively to the trauma of 1870; after all, similar concerns were being expressed in Britain and elsewhere during this fin-de-siècle period. However, it is clear that this surge in anxiety about the global position of France and of French cannot be understood without reference to the catastrophe of 1870. Indeed, Laloy refers back to 1870 to warn that France should beware of the danger that the loss of global prestige and status in military and political terms could be repeated in the linguistic sphere:

Il ne faut pas se faire d'illusions; si nous persistons à laisser des choses suivre leurs cours naturel, la génération actuelle pourrait peut-être assister à la 1870 de la langue française, comme la génération précédente a douloureusement vécu celui de notre gloire militaire et de notre situation politique.

Laloy 1913: 469

In expressing grave concerns about the future of French as a global language, and in using 1870 as a synonym for catastrophe, Laloy provides the most concise

example of attitudes to the global status of the language and nation which were widespread in late-nineteenth-century France.<sup>19</sup> In the eyes of many observers, the evidence provided by language confirmed the fears about political and military decline. France appeared to have lost its global *rang*; of this the supposed demise of French was seen as irrefutable proof.

Not all observers shared this gloomy prognosis. Some looked to the French language and found welcome reassurance that France had retained its global *rang*. We have seen how the impact of the military defeat of 1870 was so profound that it gave credence to perceptions of decline in many other spheres, including language. But some commentators warned against the dangers of giving undue significance to defeat at the hands of the Prussians. Dauzat reminds his readers that there is no necessary correlation between the global prestige of the French language and the military prowess of the French army:

L'époque où le français a atteint jadis l'apogée de sa  
suprématie n'est pas celle où la France a joué par les armes le  
rôle le plus brillant: il suffit de rappeler le règne de Louis XV  
et la guerre de Sept ans.

Dauzat 1912b: 303

Although his example was taken from the eighteenth century, the analogy with the contemporary situation was clear. The reassuring message was that what applied to the past continued to apply to the present. Novicow also emphasises continuity. In his view, the prestige of the French language was rooted far too deeply to be wiped out by one military defeat.

En réalité, le prestige du français est encore très grand à notre  
époque. La plupart des Européens se montrent offensés si, dans  
une réunion internationale, on les suppose ignorer cette langue.  
On peut être un homme du monde accompli, au XXe siècle,  
sans savoir l'anglais et l'allemand; on ne peut pas l'être sans  
savoir le français.

Novicow 1911: 123

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<sup>19</sup> Like "1870", the term "Sedan" came to denote any kind of catastrophe or defeat. The exhibition of German industrial might at the Paris exhibition of 1900 prompted fears about an imminent "Sedan industriel" (Duquesne 1991:15).



In other words, despite the frenetic worries about decline, French retained its position of prestige. The emphasis on continuity can also be seen in Dauzat's reassertion of the universalist credentials which, as we noted above, had been associated with French since the seventeenth century:

Le français est le seul parler qui ait hérité de l'universalité du latin; c'est le creuset dans lequel se sont élaborées toutes les grandes conceptions de la pensée humaine; c'est ce langage qui a traduit, depuis la Renaissance, toutes les aspirations de l'homme vers la justice, la liberté, le règne de la raison - langue qui est pour tous... 'universellement ou partiellement nationale'.

Dauzat 1912b: 255-6

Thus in all these extracts we see an attempt to minimise the impact of contemporary change by setting it within a broader context of historical continuity: as we shall see in chapter four, emphasising reassuring continuity in this way was a widespread practice throughout this era of phenomenal change. The conclusion drawn by Novicow and Dauzat was clear: French continued in its traditional role and retained its global *rang* as the universal language.

Emphasising a reassuring continuity with the past was not the only way in which Dauzat and Novicow attempted to calm worries about the global status of the French language; they also strike a definite note of optimism about the future. In their view, the French language was in a strong position not merely to retain but also to enhance its role as the international and universal language. Both writers underline the universalist credentials of French, especially in relation to the various artificial languages which were devised during the period, of which Esperanto, Ido and Volapuk were the most famous.<sup>20</sup> Many artificial languages were proposed by their inventors as possible international languages, and it was in response to these claims that Dauzat and Novicow published their respective paeans to the universality of French. Dauzat in particular launches a bitter attack on artificial languages. Linking them contemptuously to the internationalist

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<sup>20</sup> Volapuk was devised in 1880, Esperanto in 1887, and Ido in 1907.

socialism which was so demonised by the emerging nationalist movement, he claims that they represent 'un des articles du programme collectiviste révolutionnaire' (1912b:248). But in keeping with the general thrust of nationalist rhetoric, the threat was seen to come primarily from within. Maurras had inveighed against the 'étrangers de l'intérieur', Barrès had attacked the cosmopolitan 'déracinés'; in a similar vein, Dauzat was particularly incensed by the high degree of support given to what he saw as unpatriotic artificial languages by his compatriots. Of course, it is ironic that this support for artificial languages can itself be seen merely as a different expression of the traditional French discourse of universalism which Dauzat himself was claiming to uphold. The difference was that in Dauzat's view, universalism could only be achieved through French. This nationalistic interpretation of the French universalist legacy was shared by Novicow. Like Dauzat, he pours contempt on artificial languages:

La langue artificielle est une des nombreuses aberrations de l'esprit humain, comme la quadrature du cercle, l'astrologie, la phrénologie et l'alchimie. Par cette voie, on n'atteindra jamais le resultat désiré. Il faut s'adresser à une langue vivante.

Novicow 1911: 75

Although Novicow was a Russian, the 'langue vivante' in question was French. Like Dauzat, Novicow argued not merely that French retained its universalist legacy despite the post-1870 perceptions of decline, but also that this legacy made French by far the most suitable candidate to fulfil the role of what was described as the international "auxiliary" language:

Les Germains, les Latins, et les Slaves ont plus de penchant pour le français que pour l'anglais, les anglo-saxons plus de penchant pour le français que pour l'allemand. Par suite de cette circonstance, c'est le français qui a le plus de chances de devenir la langue auxiliaire du groupe européen.

Novicow 1911: 124

For Novicow, no other language can compete with French in fulfilling this function. In other words, French had not merely a glorious past but also a

promising future as a language of the highest possible status across the globe. It was an optimistic message, and Novicow expressed it in the clearest possible terms:

Nulle part le français ne cède du terrain à une autre langue auxiliaire internationale; il en cède seulement aux langues nationales. Il ne peut donc être question ni de recul du français, ni de sa défaite, ni de motifs de désespérer de son avenir.

Novicow 1911: 117

Such sentiments are clearly far removed from Laloy's gloomy prediction that the '1870 de la langue française' was close at hand. In other words, what is clearly illustrated in the work of Novicow and Dauzat is that the evidence provided by language was invoked in order to lessen as well as heighten the concerns about France's global status which were becoming increasingly widespread at the end of the nineteenth century. There were few, however, who shared the confident vision of the future of French put forward by these writers. The most important point to be underlined is that worries over the future of French as a world language were widespread. The fact that some observers took pains to alleviate those worries is itself proof of the extent to which they had become a major topic of debate in late-nineteenth-century France.

Before proceeding further with our discussion of the position of French across the world, the overriding point which has emerged thus far can be briefly reiterated. In short, in our comparison of Britain and France, we have identified a broad similarity which, when analysed more closely, reveals striking differences. In both countries, what was happening to the language around the world was an issue which prompted serious concern. The nature and direction of those concerns, however, were very different. We have seen that British fears about English around the world were mainly related to the question of retaining control over the development of the language; such fears, as we have seen, were focused on the threat posed by the United States in particular. In France, in contrast, the main concern was that the language was not spreading quickly

enough to keep up. Retaining control was less important than boosting the number of French-speakers around the world.

The picture of broad similarities veiling more fundamental differences also applies to the initiative which can be seen in many ways as a common response to these shared concerns about global status: the expansion of empire. French imperialism, like its British counterpart, was to a large extent conceived as a solution to perceived decline. Yet here again a closer look at the imperialist discourses of France and Britain reveals important differences. Some of these have already been outlined. However, there is one crucial difference which we have not mentioned thus far, but which needs to be pinpointed before we turn our attention to the expansion of the French empire. This is the central role played by language within the legitimising discourse of French colonialism. In short, language played a far more important part in French than in British colonialism. We shall expand upon this point below, examining the French context. At this stage, we can just note the extent to which the emphasis on language represents a clear contrast with British colonial discourses. This is not to say that the expansion of the British empire in no way touched on linguistic matters. Our discussion in the first half of this chapter demonstrates that this is not the case. The point is that spreading the English language to colonised peoples was not felt to be an integral and important part of British overseas expansion.<sup>21</sup> In some ways we return to the gap between discourse and reality which we addressed in the introduction. No-one could doubt the phenomenal spread of English across the globe. But what is significant for our purposes is that this was seen as having occurred almost by accident rather than design; imposing the English language played a relatively small part in the discourse of imperialism, partly because of the long-established English suspicion of any attempt to plan or to legislate in linguistic matters. British imperialism, in short, was not promoted as

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<sup>21</sup> The Macaulay minute of 2 February 1835, which extended the use of English in India, may appear to contradict this view. The point about this policy, however, is that it was not prompted by anything other than the utilitarian desire for more efficient government. It was not intended as a means of teaching English to every Indian; on the contrary, its objective was simply to create 'a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern' (Macaulay 1972:249).

a means of creating new English-speakers, still less of extending British nationality to colonised peoples. In both these respects, it contrasts markedly with the discourse of French colonialism.

Our principal tasks in the final part of this chapter are to examine and to try and explain the importance attached to language within the legitimising discourse of French colonialism. Before focusing on language, however, it is important that we should put linguistic debates into their context, and provide a brief overview of the remarkable expansion of the French empire during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. For in France as in Britain, one of the most significant features about this era was that it was, without doubt, an age of imperialism.

### **Language and the New French Empire**

French imperial expansion did not begin with the Third Republic. As with the tradition of universalism which we examined above, its origins lay in the seventeenth century. Champlain founded his settlements at Quebec between 1600 and 1610. Territories in the Caribbean such as Guadeloupe, Haiti and Martinique were colonised later in the century. For much of the eighteenth century France continued to vie for predominance within the Americas with Britain, before losing a large measure of her influence and her territory to the British and Spanish at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. The empire was to shrink further in the aftermath of the Revolution. Haiti broke free in 1802 under the leadership of Toussaint l'Ouverture. A year later, Napoleon, having had his plans for a new French empire in Egypt and the East smashed by Nelson at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, effectively ended France's presence and interest in North America by selling Louisiana to the United States for \$15 million. By 1815, France's first overseas empire had all but disappeared.

It is plausible to suggest that the task of building a new French empire began soon after Waterloo. Algeria was conquered in 1830. Napoleon III launched several abortive colonial ventures, notably the Mexican fiasco of 1861. But it is

only with the establishment of the Third Republic that a policy of imperial expansion began again in earnest. A nation concerned over its global *rang* acquired a worldwide empire of immense proportions. As in Britain, the sheer pace and scale of the expansion were breathtaking. Between 1880 and 1895 the area of the earth's surface controlled directly by France increased from 1 million to 9.5 million square kilometres (Magraw 1983:235). In many of the newly-conquered territories, there was little or no previous record of French influence. For example, apart from any influences resulting from her presence in neighbouring Algeria, France had had no significant involvement in Tunisia before establishing a protectorate there in 1881. The same was true of many of the other territories annexed by the Third Republic, including Sudan, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Djibouti, Dahomey, and the territory known as Afrique Equatoriale Française (incorporating Gabon, Chad and the mid-Congo region). In many other cases, colonisation followed the British pattern and entailed the establishment of political control over areas which in practice were already effectively controlled by French commercial or diplomatic interests. An example of this was the amalgamation in 1887 of Cochin China, Annam (the future north Vietnam), Tonkin and Cambodia, all of which had been brought under varying degrees of French control from the 1860s, into the single entity of French Indo-China. It is the sheer scale of this expansion which is the key point to be reiterated here. In short, having jettisoned the Second Empire at home, the French under the Third Republic set about constructing a colossal empire overseas.

It is not our concern to give a more detailed analysis of the expansion of the French empire at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> It is important to point out, however, that enthusiasm for empire should not be overestimated. As Ageron (1978) has noted, the enormous scale of the expansion does not reflect a surge in nationwide imperialist fervour so much as the success of a small but influential colonial lobby with members in key positions. There were many in France who

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<sup>22</sup> Aldrich (1996) gives a detailed examination of nineteenth-century French colonialism. Broader overviews can be found in Brunschwig (1960), Girardet (1972), Ageron (1978).

were implacably opposed to colonial expansion. Some opposed it on the grounds that it wasted 'ces choses precieuses, l'or et le sang de la France'.<sup>23</sup> Others, such as Pelletan, opposed colonialism on ethical and humanitarian grounds. But for the majority of its opponents, a forward colonial policy was seen as a distraction from the task of recovering the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. As Déroulède put it: 'J'ai perdu deux soeurs, et vous m'offrez vingt domestiques' (Girardet 1972:67). In a similar vein, Clemenceau spoke for many in his response to Ferry during the key parliamentary debate on colonial policy in July 1885: 'quant à moi, mon patriotisme est en France'.<sup>24</sup> Having sounded this note of caution about over-emphasising the degree of support for colonial expansion, we shall now proceed to look specifically at the way in which this process of expansion interacted with debates about language.

Writing in 1900, Foncin underlines both the general historical significance of the new French empire, and the way in which the empire was closely bound up with questions relating to language:

La fondation d'un nouvel empire colonial français est un des grands faits de l'histoire contemporaine, et il est d'une portée linguistique considérable.

Foncin 1900: xvii

To describe the linguistic facet of colonialism as 'considérable' is, if anything, to understate the case. In many ways language can be seen as playing a central role within the colonial project. Its importance is recognised in this extract from a speech given at a conference of the Alliance Française at Albi in 1884:

L'Alliance a bien raison de songer avant tout à la diffusion de notre langue; nos colonies ne seront françaises d'intelligence et de coeur que quand elles comprendront un peu le français...Pour la France surtout, la langue est l'instrument nécessaire de la colonisation.

cited in Ageron 1978:156

<sup>23</sup> Remark attributed to Passy, centre-left deputy in the Assemblée, (Girardet 1966:112).

<sup>24</sup> See Girardet 1966:108.

The extent to which such sentiments formed part of the political mainstream at this time is shown in the fact that these words were spoken by a lecturer at Albi who had not yet abandoned the centrist Republicanism of his youth in favour of the fully-fledged internationalist socialism with which his name was to become forever associated: Jean Jaurès. Jaurès was ultimately to renounce colonialism. But at this point in his political odyssey it remained a project which he wholeheartedly endorsed, seeing its success as dependent to a large degree on the diffusion of the French language.<sup>25</sup> Of course in this respect, Jaurès was at one with his fellow members of the Alliance Française. Although the Alliance was established in order to promote the status of French across the world, the colonies featured prominently in its work. Indeed, they were specifically mentioned in the description of its aims: 'L'Alliance Française a pour but de propager la langue française dans les colonies et à l'étranger'(Alliance 1888:4).

The importance attributed to language within French colonial discourse can be seen in the legislation imposing French as the principal or sole language in the educational systems of the colonial territories. The trend was set by the decree issued in relation to the use of Arabic in the North African empire on 13 February 1883, during a period of intense legislative activity in the field of educational policy: 'l'arabe ne pourrait être enseigné qu'en dehors des heures de classe'(Lanly 1962:18). This decree was a logical extension of the policy applied in the domestic context; just as dialect was to be banished within the schools of metropolitan France, so Arabic was to be excluded from the schools which were set up as part of the same educational policy in France's overseas territories. In both cases the message was clear: the future belonged, exclusively, to French. It is important to appreciate that this policy of excluding Arabic can be seen in some ways as a new development. Earlier in the century, indigenous languages had not been dismissed in quite the same contemptuous manner. As Said points out, during his Egypt campaign, Napoleon exhorted his troops to respect Islamic sensibilities and ensured that 'everything he said was

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<sup>25</sup> Jaurès initially supported Ferry's colonial policy, referring to the "touching union of the family of France" (cited in Zeldin 1979:398).



translated into Koranic Arabic' (1987:82).<sup>26</sup> Girard and Morieux (1979:316) have shown that until the 1870s, many French settlers in Algeria learned to speak Arabic. Faidherbe, the indefatigable French governor of Senegal during the 1860s, was a fluent speaker of Arabic and of Wolof, the indigenous language of the area under his control. The perception that things had changed with the advent of the Third Republic was shared by the Muslim insurgents who, during an uprising in 1871 against the incorporation of Algeria into France, lamented the fact that they were no longer governed by the supposedly more sympathetic and tolerant regime of Napoleon III, "le bon sultan".<sup>27</sup>

The change in the way in which indigenous languages were treated can clearly be seen in Tunisia. Riguet (1984:14) has shown that Tunisia had a well-developed educational system in the 1870s, before the French established their protectorate. He cites as an example the Collège Sadiki, founded in 1875, in which French and Arabic were both used as languages of instruction. The way in which French occupation from 1881 onwards began to tip the balance towards the increasing use of the French language alone can clearly be seen in an 1885 report on the progress of educational policy within Tunisia, taken from the journal Afrique Explorée et Civilisée:

A Kairouan a été fondée une école, annexe de celle de Tunis; à part les sciences touchant à la religion, et qui sont naturellement enseignées en langue arabe, toutes les autres branches d'enseignement y sont professées en langue française.

Afrique 1885: 153

It was a trend which culminated in the decree of 15 September 1888, stating that French was to be taught in all primary and secondary schools throughout Tunisia (Riguet 1984:15). In other words, in Tunisia, as elsewhere, French colonialism was closely bound up with the diffusion of the French language. More

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<sup>26</sup> In stark contrast, the treaty imposed on the Bey of Tunis after the French army had invaded in 1881 was written entirely in French. The Bey had to ask for a translation (Pakenham 1993:119).

<sup>27</sup> For details of Napoleon III's pro-Arab sympathies, see Zeldin (1981:162). Also see Cobban (1961:174) and Picoche and Marchello-Nizia (1989:87).

accurately, as Jaurès expressed it, for France, the French language was the very instrument of colonisation.

How are we to explain the fact that language was given such an important role by advocates of French colonialism? The remainder of our discussion in this chapter will be aimed at finding an answer to this question; and in suggesting explanations we shall also encounter further examples of the centrality of language within the colonial project.

Three principal reasons for the emphasis placed upon language within the discourse of French colonialism can be identified. The first returns us to the major point underlined in our analysis of attitudes to the global position of French: the extent to which French worries about the decline of the language were focused on the question of numbers. Boosting the number of speakers was a far more pressing concern in France than it was in Britain. Imperialism was seen by many French observers as providing an ideal solution to this urgent problem in that it provided millions of potential new French-speakers. This belief can be seen in the words of one of the earliest advocates of a forward colonial policy, Prévost-Paradol. He was writing in 1868, as the question of population decline was becoming ever more prominent:

80 à 100 millions de français fortement établis sur les deux rives de la Méditerranée, au coeur de l'ancien continent, maintiendront à travers les temps le nom, la langue et la légitime considération de la France.

Prévost-Paradol 1868: 418

Of course it would be wrong to claim that empire-building was exclusively or even primarily a linguistic exercise. Nevertheless, at a time when the falling number of French-speakers was an issue of major concern, appearing to portend a much more general decline in France's influence in the world, the linguistic benefits which imperialism could provide were one of the most powerful arguments in its favour. In short, to teach the language to French colonial subjects was to help alleviate what was felt to be one of the most serious

problems facing late-nineteenth-century France. Therein lies one important reason for the emphasis placed on language within the discourse of French colonialism.

The second reason for the importance allotted to language is bound up with the legacy of the past. From the seventeenth century onwards, the French language had consistently been seen as a powerful symbol of the global *rang* and the universalist credentials of the French nation. The new colonialism was often portrayed, especially by Ferry, as a continuation of that universalist tradition: it appeared logical that a nation which had historically been seen as a centre of global influence should acquire a formal worldwide empire. Just as language had been both symbol and proof of French universality in the era of Port Royal and Rivarol, so would it fulfil the same role in the nineteenth century. In other words, there was a powerful and deep-rooted tradition of underlining the prestige of France by pointing to the glories of the French language. It was a tradition which could be usefully exploited by advocates of empire in their attempts to find historical precedents for the policy of expansion.

The third reason for the importance allotted to language is at once the most complex and the most significant. It is complex in that it touches as much on discourses of nation as on questions of language. It is particularly significant for our purposes as it goes to the heart of the differences between French and British notions of empire. In brief, French colonialism was portrayed as a project aimed at making people French; and one crucial way of achieving this objective was by means of the French language. We have already seen that a distinctive feature of French colonialism was the emphasis placed on the notion of the *mission civilisatrice*. The stated objective was to go beyond establishing economic and commercial dominance and to effect what was frequently described as a “conquête morale” amongst the colonised peoples, transforming them into French citizens. Indeed, this moral conquest was seen not merely as a duty but as a pre-requisite for stable and effective colonial rule. The creation of educational systems, the most obvious agencies through which a moral conquest of colonised

peoples could be achieved, was certainly prompted in part by an altruistic desire to bring "civilisation" to the colonies. However, educating colonial subjects was also a political imperative which one writer describes as a

question vitale s'il en fut, à notre époque, car c'est d'elle que dépendent la fusion des races et la conquête morale d'un pays, sans lesquelles il n'y a pas de conquête matérielle durable.

Anon. 1885: 166

In other words, a 'conquête matérielle' could only be achieved by bringing about a 'conquête morale'. This message can also be seen in an extract from a report produced by the Alliance Française. More significantly, the report reveals the crucial next step in this line of reasoning:

La conquête matérielle n'est rien sans la conquête morale et les indigènes placés sous notre protectorat ne pourrait devenir français de coeur que s'ils ont appris à parler notre langue. Encourager l'enseignement du français aux indigènes des pays coloniaux est une des tâches essentielles de l'Alliance Française.

Alliance 1888: 13

As we see clearly in this extract, it was the spread of the French language which would most effectively bring about a thoroughgoing 'conquête morale' amongst the inhabitants of the expanding French empire. French was seen as the most important vehicle for wider ideas about "civilisation" which needed to be instilled into the minds of colonial subjects. Foncin describes in glowing terms the work carried out by teachers of French in the Berber areas of the North African colonies:

Non seulement ils y enseignent notre langue...ils font pénétrer dans des cerveaux berbères des lueurs de plus en plus vives de dignité et de moralité. Ils servent à la fois la cause de l'humanité et celle de la France. Ce sont de merveilleux agents de civilisation.

Foncin 1900: xx

This belief in the key role played by the French language is also revealed in another Alliance Française report:

Nous avons encouragé la propagation du français en Algérie, en Tunisie, à Madagascar, en Indo-Chine, dans les colonies, et travaillé ainsi à la conquête morale des indigènes placée sous la protection de la France. Le seul rôle digne d'une grande nation est de conquérir jusqu'à l'âme des peuples qui s'abritent sous les plis de son drapeau.

Alliance 1888: 8

In these previous two extracts, the role of the French language as a means of extending French civilisation and of bringing about a 'conquête morale' is made graphically clear.

Spreading the French language was therefore seen as the most important way in which France could fulfil its *mission civilisatrice*; therein lies the third, and most significant, reason for the importance attached to language within the discourse of French colonialism. Together with the need to increase the number of French-speakers, and the enduring influence of the tradition of French universalism, it is this deep-rooted belief that colonialism was about diffusing civilisation, and that civilisation was synonymous with the French language, which explains why, in the words of Jaurès, 'pour la France surtout, la langue est l'instrument nécessaire de la colonisation'.

The 'surtout' in Jaurès's claim is significant. It indicates that he saw this emphasis on language as a distinguishing feature of French colonialism. As we have seen, it certainly distinguishes it from its British counterpart, a point which has also been made by Calvet (1974:84).<sup>28</sup> In other words, in looking at the importance attached to language within French colonial discourse, we are

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<sup>28</sup> Contemporary observers in both countries recognised this difference. The French senator Lenoël remarked in 1892, 'La France considère ses colonies comme partie intégrante de son territoire, tandis que l'Angleterre les considère comme des pays étrangers' (Ageron 1978:195). In 1926 a British minister noted that in colonial matters 'we are apparently by nature the exact opposite of the French [who] have no doubt that the more French they can make French Africa in language, sentiment, custom, and outlook, the better. We cannot help doubting whether any persons not of our race can really become British in this way' (Wright 1992:364).

reminded once more of fundamental differences between Britain and France in terms of the way in which they conceived of their relationship with empire and with the world. It is an apt conclusion to this chapter. Throughout our discussion, and despite the presence of similarities between Britain and France concerning their relationship to the wider world and the global position of their languages, it is the differences which have been more striking. Both nations were experiencing fears about a threat to their global linguistic hegemony. However, as we have seen, the threats were quite different. There is no French equivalent to the British fears about American English: Britain had nothing to compare with the catastrophic wound to national and global status which the French suffered in 1870. These are important differences, and they explain much about the differing ways in which worries about the global status of the language and nation were expressed in each country.

In the course of this chapter we have ventured far beyond the geographical borders of Britain and France. In our final chapter we shall, in one sense, be passing beyond the historical boundaries of the period between 1870 and 1914. For in both countries one of the most striking aspects of linguistic scholarship during that era is the proportion of work devoted to charting the development of what was seen as the national language. Examining this work within language study, and relating it to the various narratives of ancestry and identity which were being promoted within each country are our principal concerns in the fourth and final chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Narratives of Language, Identity and History

In Britain and France, one of the most striking aspects of linguistic scholarship in the last third of the nineteenth century is the proportion of work devoted to the history of the national language. Perhaps the most famous and enduring legacies of this work are the dictionaries which were to become established as not merely guides to usage, but also as the authoritative chronicles of the evolution of the language: Littré's Dictionnaire de la langue française, first published in 1863, and Murray's New English Dictionary, the first volume of which appeared in 1888. These were not the only expressions of the surge in interest in the history of English and French. In 1864 a miscellaneous collection of linguistic and literary scholars founded the Early English Text Society (EETS). In France, Paris founded the Société des Anciens Textes Français (SATF) in 1875. Both societies were to play a leading role in expanding scholarly knowledge about manuscripts and glosses which shed light on what was seen as the early history of the national language. Popularised in school textbooks and countless historical grammars, this research into the history of the language overlapped with wider ideas about the history and identity of the nation. Examining this overlap between narratives of language, identity and history is the object of this chapter.

It is worth highlighting at the outset that the interest in the history of the language formed part of a much more general resurgence of interest in the past which can be identified in the cultural values of late-nineteenth-century Britain and France. The prevalence in Britain of nostalgic images of nation harking back to an idealised rural past, which we examined in chapter two, provides one obvious example. The importance allotted to the teaching of history within the school curriculum in both countries provides another. In both cases, as in other

examples of the increased interest in historical matters, the past takes on a new importance largely because it was felt to provide a sense of stability and continuity to societies which were being transformed at an increasingly rapid pace. It is this pressing need to come to terms with unprecedented change by emphasising continuity which explains why the epoch of the industrial revolution is also the heyday for invented traditions. Paradoxically, the scale and pace of social change was matched in its intensity only by the attempts to demonstrate continuity with the past. Consequently, in both countries, questions of national history were high on the agenda.

The renewed interest in the past in general, and in the history of the language in particular, thus represent areas of broad similarity between Britain and France. We shall now look in more detail at each country and at the ways in which accounts of the history of the language were related to accounts of the history of the nation.

## **Britain**

### **Anglo-Saxons and Britons**

#### **Exploring the linguistic past**

The sources of the Nile are esteemed an object worthy of the money, the attention, nay the lives of Englishmen; are the sources of English literature so much less in value to English eyes? Surely it is time for our countrymen to set resolutely to work at this task of doing justice to their ancestors, of tracing their language and the course of their thoughts back step-by-step to its rise in Anglo-Saxon days, that so the progress of the mind and tongue of England may be known.

Early English Text Society 1868; 207

This extract provides some revealing insights into the growth of interest, seen during the last third of the nineteenth century, in the origins and history of the



English language. The most important is the reference to 'its rise in Anglo-Saxon days'. In clearly underlining the Anglo-Saxon provenance of English, this extract typifies much of the contemporary work on the history of the language. Moreover, the emphasis on Anglo-Saxon origins was not merely a discourse of language; as we shall see below, at the end of the nineteenth century it was also an extremely powerful discourse of national identity. Anglo-Saxonism will be the main focus of our discussion of the British context in this chapter. In addition, we shall briefly discuss an alternative and less Anglocentric vision of national identity which also drew, though of necessity in a very different way, on the evidence provided by language. However, before focusing on these different discourses of identity, we shall first examine some of the other important insights into contemporary work on the history of English which can be gleaned from the EETS extract cited above.

First, and perhaps most surprisingly, the extract indicates that scholarly interest in what was seen as the infancy of the national language was a new phenomenon. The fact that the author should be urging scholars to 'set to work' clearly shows that, as late as 1868, the history of the language was not a subject which attracted much academic interest. Yet this was not the first impassioned plea for more time and attention to be devoted to the history of English. Gil had launched a similar plea as far back as 1619:

O you English, you I appeal to in whose veins flows that  
ancestral blood; retain, retain what hitherto remains of your  
native tongue, and follow in the footprints of your ancestors.

cited in Macdougall 1982: 49

Nineteenth-century scholars were in a far more fortunate position than Gil in that they could benefit from the enormous advances in method and materials which had occurred as a result of the pioneering work of the founders of comparative philology at the start of the century. Driven by the Romantic fixation with recovering the lost past, scholars such as Rask, Bopp and Grimm had succeeded in pushing the frontiers of linguistic scholarship back ever further into history,

using new methodological principles to shed light on the development of language through the centuries. But what prompted the call made by the EETS in 1868 was the sense that British philology had not taken full advantage of the important breakthroughs made by the early comparativists. In short, the fear was that Britain was being left behind.

This leads us to a second insight which the extract from the EETS provides into contemporary work on the history of the language: its pronounced national and patriotic dimension. The EETS plea is not merely a suggestion for possible future research; it is a patriotic call to arms, the rhetoric of which again shows similarities with Gil's plea of 1619. And as with so many of the fears about being left behind which begin to appear throughout British cultural and political debates from the 1860s onwards, the focus of much of the concern was Germany. As Young described it, the fear was that 'Germany was abreast of the time, England was falling behind' (1953:164). It was this anxious desire to keep up with the Germans which lay behind the pleas issued by the EETS, and which prompted its establishment in the first place. The opportunities afforded by the new philology had been fully exploited in Germany, a fact recognised elsewhere in the EETS report; 'If Germany can print all its early literature, why cannot we?' (1868:207). Moreover, German scholars had not confined themselves to work on their native language. The dominant figure in British philology during the 1860s was a German: Müller. And for much of the nineteenth century, research into the earliest periods of English language and literature was carried out almost exclusively by German scholars. In 1867 another article on the EETS had put the point in the clearest possible terms: 'The Germans seem to have a much clearer idea of the value of our language than we have ourselves' (Anon. 1867:638). In 1904, the extent to which Britain followed the German lead was underlined by Wyld: 'It is a melancholy fact for us Englishmen to reflect upon, that English philology is not a home-grown product, but has been imported from Germany' (1904:30). Against this backdrop, the enormous expansion of work on the history of the English language, which the EETS had both urged and led, can be seen to a large extent as an attempt to ensure that British philology

was a match for the Germans. In this respect, the new interest in the history of the language displayed clear national - if not nationalistic - overtones.

If this marked national dimension can be seen as a response to concerns about Germany, it also represents a reaction against the scope and focus of previous work in the field. Nineteenth-century philologists enjoyed unparalleled access to linguistic varieties from across the globe, compiling dictionaries, grammars and histories of languages which were geographically and historically far removed from nineteenth-century Britain. The briefest of glances at the bewildering range of subjects covered by the Philological Society, founded in 1842, will confirm this point.<sup>1</sup> In the reference made in the EETS extract to the interest in the sources of the Nile, we see an early sign of what would become a widespread sense that for too long the national past had been neglected. It is this sense that British scholars had spent too much time investigating the empires of the ancient world rather than the treasures of their own nation which prompted Lubbock to make this plea for the preservation of ancient national monuments:

No-one regrets the sums which have been spent on the Assyrian, Egyptian and other treasures which adorn our museums; but it is surely remarkable that we should take so much care of the monuments of other nations, and yet entirely neglect those of our own country.

Lubbock 1877: 265

Lubbock's call was to be answered in the same year when Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. An editorial in the Gentleman's Magazine, arguing that the EETS alone could not rescue English from neglect, called for the founding of A Society for the Protection of the English Language: 'Possessors of one of the noblest and richest tongues that man has devised or obtained, we treat it with neglect equally incomprehensible and shameful' (Anon.1901:207).

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<sup>1</sup> The diversity of sounds encountered by philologists prompted calls for a common system of phonetic transcription. The first version of the International Phonetic Alphabet was published in 1888.

Further examples of this growing awareness that matters relating to the nation had been neglected include the pioneering sociological research carried out by social explorers such as Booth, Masterman and Rowntree. A recurring theme in the work of these largely middle-class observers was the irony that so much time and effort should be devoted to exploring the empire while many poor and working-class districts in British cities remained uncharted territory.<sup>2</sup> Sims's views on tenants in the East End of London are typical:

That they should be left to be thus exploited is a disgrace to the legislature, which is never tired of protecting the oppressed of all races that on earth do dwell, except those of that particular race who have the honour to be free-born Englishmen.

cited in Keating 1981: 73

This shift in focus from the global to the national dimension can also be seen in historiography. The late nineteenth century sees an explosion of interest not so much in history in general terms, but in the study of the history of the nation. We shall proceed to discuss narratives of national history in more detail below. The point to be reiterated here is that they were attracting an increasing amount of scholarly attention, prompting vigorous and controversial debates.<sup>3</sup>

The key insights provided by the EETS extract cited above can therefore be summarised as follows. First, scholarly interest in the history of the language was, in 1868, in its infancy. Second, this new interest clearly indicates - and indeed arises from - the increasing prominence of a marked national and patriotic tone within late-nineteenth-century British scholarship. This leads us to another crucial insight provided by the EETS extract. In highlighting the new interest in the national past, it also proposes a particular vision of that past. In short, for the EETS, the English language and, in what would become a familiar extrapolation, the English nation itself, could both be traced back to 'Anglo-Saxon days'. As we noted above, in this respect the EETS is typical. Much of the work carried out into the history of the

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<sup>2</sup> Colonial metaphors abound in their writing, most obviously in the title of Booth's book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*.

<sup>3</sup> The English Historical Review was founded in 1884 to provide a forum for such debates. The Historical Association was founded in 1906.

language and the nation was to be infused by a marked Anglo-Saxonist tone. Anglo-Saxonism was by no means the only discourse of national identity to be proposed at the end of the nineteenth century. As we shall see below, many contemporary observers put forward a vision of the nation and its history which emphasised its British character. However, it is the discourse of Anglo-Saxonism which will be examined first, and at greater length. This is partly because Anglo-Saxonism was arguably the most prominent and influential vision of national identity and history during the period, but also because it drew far more heavily than discourses of Britishness on the evidence provided by the field which is our central concern: language.

### **An Anglo-Saxon language and people**

For much of the last third of the nineteenth century, English studies, as a discipline, was closely identified with Anglo-Saxonism. Writing in 1908, Fowler protests against the extent to which English studies had become dominated by the study of early and middle English:

It is far more vital to have some knowledge of the great world-stream of literature, of Homer and Virgil, as a preparation for the understanding of the best English classics than to be learned in early and middle English.

Fowler 1908: 2

Examples of the prevalence of Anglo-Saxonism within contemporary scholarship will be encountered below. The main point which we shall be striving to demonstrate is that Anglo-Saxonism was not merely a discourse of language. It was also a powerful discourse of national identity. It is language study, however, which provides our starting point. What is of particular interest for our purposes is the extent to which the English language became identified increasingly narrowly with Anglo-Saxon. In the course of this discussion we shall examine two ways in which the Anglo-Saxon nature of English was underlined. The more important of these is the construction of narratives of

linguistic continuity linking the language of Hengist and Horsa with the English of the late nineteenth century. In keeping with the historical focus of this chapter, this aspect of Anglo-Saxonism will be our chief concern and will be discussed in depth below. At this point, however, we can illustrate the prevalence of Anglo-Saxonism by highlighting another way in which Anglo-Saxonist scholars consolidated the view that the English language was essentially Anglo-Saxon: the dichotomy between native and alien.

The chief problem faced by late-nineteenth-century scholars aiming to underline the Anglo-Saxon provenance of English was that many of the features of the English language of their own day were manifestly not legacies of an Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>4</sup> It was a point which was underlined by some important figures within nineteenth-century language study whose views we have examined in previous chapters. Murray's work on the NED served to illustrate that English was, unequivocally, a world language. For observers such as Trench, the fact that English was a cosmopolitan language, incorporating influences from different times and places, was the very basis of its greatness. Any attempt to demonstrate that English could be closely identified with Anglo-Saxon would have to incorporate a strategy for dealing with these different influences. The bewildering diversity registered within English, especially the massive legacy of Norman French, could not simply be ignored.

One strategy which was widely used to underline the Anglo-Saxon provenance of English, and to minimise the significance of all other influences, was to portray the Anglo-Saxon element as native and to label everything else, explicitly or implicitly, as alien. This distinction between native and alien had been employed before, most famously by Johnson in his classification of the words in the English vocabulary. However, it was to be revived and taken to far greater lengths at the end of the nineteenth century. The most extreme example of the view that only Anglo-Saxon words are authentic English can be seen in the work of Meiklejohn. The title

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<sup>4</sup> Of course this had been recognised long before the nineteenth century. Defoe had described English as a "Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman" tongue (McCrum et al 1989:51)

of his chapter conveys the division between Anglo-Saxon and other elements of vocabulary in the clearest possible terms: 'The Two Languages in the English Language':

There are said to be about one hundred thousand words in the English language. But of these not quite one-third - not thirty thousand - are English words. The rest are mostly Latin.

Meiklejohn 1903: 121

Of course, one of the implications of this view of the language was that only those who had a working knowledge of etymology were in a position to judge what was English. In fact, a familiarity with Latin was also required: 'Unless a student has learned Latin it is often very difficult to distinguish an English-English from a Latin-English word' (Meiklejohn 1903:129). In short, definitions of English were determined by scholars rather than by speakers. In this sense, it is a profoundly elitist view of the language, a fact which is usually disguised by the populist rhetoric which, as we saw in chapter one, advocates of this Anglo-Saxonist vision of English frequently invoked in their diatribes against Latin.

Few scholars were as explicit as Meiklejohn in claiming that only the Anglo-Saxon portion of the language counted as English words. Other writers, though acknowledging that non-Anglo-Saxon words were part of the English language, nevertheless make a subtle distinction between native and foreign elements. Marsh insists on the original unity and self-sufficiency of the "native" language:

So complete is the Anglo-Saxon in itself, and so much of its original independence is still inherited by the modern English, that if we could but recover its primitive flexibility and plastic power, we might discard the adventitious aids and ornaments which we have borrowed from the heritage of Greece and Rome, supply the place of foreign by domestic compounds, and clothe again our thoughts and our feelings exclusively in a garb of living organic, native growth.

Marsh 1860: 87

Alford admits that what he calls 'Saxon' and 'Norman' are 'inseparable and welded together'. As with Marsh, however, what differentiates these two categories in Alford's view is that only one is native:

He is ever the most effective writer and speaker who knows how to build the great body of his discourse out of his native Saxon, availing himself indeed of those other terms without stint, as he needs them, but not letting them give the character and complexion to the whole.

Alford 1888:176

In an appendix to his Etymological Dictionary, Skeat (1882) also underlines that the Anglo-Saxon portion of English is native. Acknowledging that the English language consists of a wide range of influences, he nevertheless classifies Anglo-Saxon elements as 'Words of purely English origin'; by implication, Scandinavian, Celtic, Latin, Greek and hybrids are all labelled as alien. Even though none of these writers goes as far as Meiklejohn in denying that non-Anglo-Saxon words can legitimately be described as English, the effect of assuming the Anglo-Saxon element to be native in a way which other words are not is to send a subtle but extremely powerful message: all words may be English, but some are more English than others.<sup>5</sup>

Further examples of the way in which English was seen as Anglo-Saxon will be cited when we discuss the emphasis on continuity within historical narratives of the language. At this stage, however, there is a point of vital significance which needs to be underlined in the clearest possible terms. The point in question is that the emphasis on English as fundamentally Anglo-Saxon is not simply a discourse of language. Terms such as "native" and "alien" clearly hint at something else which was newly emphasised in much of the work which looked into the earliest periods of the language. Just as the English language was seen

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<sup>5</sup> In his preface to the NED, Murray employs the terms 'naturals', 'denizens', 'aliens', and 'casuals'. He differs from Anglo-Saxonist practice in classifying words which are plainly not of Anglo-Saxon origin ('parasol', 'rose') as 'naturals'. However, the native/alien dichotomy does reappear to some extent. Murray makes an interesting subdivision, labelling these examples of 'naturals' as 'naturalised' words, and distinguishing them from 'native' words such as 'father'. (NED 1888:xiv)



as Anglo-Saxon, so the English people were portrayed as Anglo-Saxons. In short, it was a small step from a discourse of language to a discourse of national identity. It was a step which many scholars made with ease. The most obvious evidence that Anglo-Saxonism was not merely concerned with language study is the fact that its influence is yet more visible in the new discipline of history. What is striking about the work produced by the main figures in late-nineteenth-century historiography in Britain is the fact that so much of it is dedicated to instilling the view that the English people were Anglo-Saxons. Historians such as Stubbs, Green and Freeman, despite their undoubted differences, shared a common belief that the English nation, as with the English language, could be traced back to its rise in Anglo-Saxon days. As we shall see below, to an extent which earlier historians would never have imagined, the English, as seen by many of their major historical and linguistic scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, were, unequivocally, an Anglo-Saxon people.

Thus we have given a broad outline of the prevalence of Anglo-Saxonism within late-nineteenth-century British ideas about language and identity. Further evidence to substantiate this point will be provided below. It is important, however, that we should first acknowledge the specificity of the late-nineteenth-century discourse of Anglo-Saxonism. This was not the first time within British cultural history that the Anglo-Saxons had been allotted a central role. During the Reformation, Protestant polemicists such as Foxe and Parker turned to Anglo-Saxon scripture in an attempt to find a precedent for an English church independent of Roman authority.<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, seventeenth-century Puritans such as Hare sought to establish a vision of the English nation based on veneration for what Francis Whyte, writing in 1652, called 'our sacred Saxon institutions' (cited in Jones 1953:226). Such views were widespread amongst the radical Protestant writers who enjoyed political ascendancy during the Commonwealth. For these writers, as for many scholars at the end of the nineteenth century (as we shall see below), 1066

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<sup>6</sup> The classic account of the rise of English and Anglo-Saxonism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is Jones's *Triumph of the English Language* (1953).

came to represent an aberration; in fact Hill (1989:162) argues that in many ways the 1640s can be seen as revenge for 1066.

During the eighteenth century, Anglo-Saxonism remained a powerful undercurrent within political and cultural debates. As Colley and Cunningham have pointed out, radical diatribes against the alleged corruption of the government and the monarchy frequently drew on the established Anglo-Saxon discourse of ancient rights and popular patriotism.<sup>7</sup> Sambrook shows that a far less radical form of that same discourse was used by eighteenth-century Whigs who saw the Anglo-Saxons as the foundation of their 'Gothick liberties' (1990:72). Franklin has underlined the way in which Alfred the Great was singled out by many eighteenth-century observers as the revered symbol of those liberties (1989:150).<sup>8</sup>

Turning to the nineteenth century, interest in the Anglo-Saxons was, if anything, increased. Moreover, far from being a completely new development from 1870 onwards, interest was sustained throughout the century. The French Revolution had stimulated a heightened degree of interest in national particularities. The emergence of Romanticism fuelled a fascination with origins, tradition and the primeval past. Against this backdrop, Sharon Turner produced his multi-volume History of the Anglo-Saxons, which Burrow describes as the 'first modern full-length history of Saxon England' (1981:116). Published between 1799 and 1805, it heralded the beginnings of a revival in Anglo-Saxon scholarship which was to gather increasing momentum throughout the nineteenth century. This revival prompted the short-lived Anglo-Saxon Review, Thorpe's 1845 translation of Lappenberg's History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings, and Kemble's 1849 book The Saxons in England.

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<sup>7</sup> Cunningham, H. 'The Language of Patriotism', Colley, L. 'Radical Patriotism in Eighteenth-Century England'; both in Samuel 1989 (vol. 1).

<sup>8</sup> Thomson's anthem "Rule Britannia" (1740) originally formed part of a masque called Alfred. It is worth noting, however, that in a climate of concern about Jacobitism Alfred is portrayed as a British rather than an English hero.

The fact that Thorpe and Kemble should feature in this surge of interest in the Anglo-Saxon past shows how it was to a large extent prompted by contemporary work in linguistic scholarship. As we saw in chapter one, it was Thorpe and Kemble who had been responsible for introducing into England the new philological methods they had learned in Germany, successfully defending them in the Anglo-Saxon controversy. In his preface to The Saxons in England, Kemble acknowledged that the advent of comparative philology had shed valuable new light on remote periods of Anglo-Saxon: 'to this last quarter of a century has it been given to attain a mastery never before attained over the language which our Anglo-Saxon ancestors spoke' (1849:vii). Although Kemble's interest in the history of the Anglo-Saxons had been fuelled by his background in language study, it is significant that apart from this remark in his preface, references to language in The Saxons in England are extremely rare. In this respect, as we shall see below, he differs markedly from later Anglo-Saxonist scholars.

From this overview of its previous historical incarnations, it can be seen that an interest in the Anglo-Saxon origins of the English nation and language can be identified within British cultural history long before the age of Freeman, Stubbs and Green. This is an important qualifying note which needs to be underlined before we turn our attention to the late nineteenth century. Yet there were respects in which the discourse of Anglo-Saxonism being widely deployed during that era, by historians and linguistic scholars alike, can be seen as representing a new departure. We shall focus on two features of late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism which, it will be argued, distinguish it from previous ideas about the Anglo-Saxon origins of the language and nation. In some ways they are differences of degree rather than kind. However, this in no way minimises their significance; far from being minor points, these features can also be seen as the two central planks of Anglo-Saxonism in the late nineteenth century. The first of these features is the emphasis on historical and linguistic continuity which was taken to much greater lengths than in previous versions of Anglo-Saxonism. The second feature was the way in which language and identity, English and Englishness, were seen as being not merely linked, but as

virtually tautologous. Each of these distinguishing characteristics of late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism will now be examined in turn.

### **Continuity of Englishness: the new Anglo-Saxonism**

At the start of this chapter it was suggested that a close correlation can be observed between the scale and pace of social change, and the emphasis within cultural values on continuity. Proof of this correlation can be seen especially clearly in the last third of the nineteenth century. Few eras see such wide-ranging social and political changes; at the same time, few display such a fixation with continuity. This fixation can be clearly seen within the contemporary discourse of Anglo-Saxonism. In fact, it is revealed in the debate over the very term "Anglo-Saxon". We have seen that the founding of the EETS was an important development in that it symbolised a new interest in the national past. Another vitally significant point about the EETS is the name it gives to its object of study: Early English. The fact that texts and manuscripts were classified as examples not of "Anglo-Saxon" or "Saxon" or both, but of the earliest stage of "English", is perhaps the first clear illustration of the growing trend towards establishing a unifying historical narrative of the language and thence of the nation. In a subtle but fundamental shift away from earlier assumptions, the very word "Anglo-Saxon" was looked upon by many as a misnomer which disguised the true continuity of the language. Wyld argues that "Anglo-Saxon" was a term coined by eighteenth-century writers keen to underline the remoteness of that barbarian era from enlightened contemporary England. He insists that it is 'better to follow ancient precedent...and call the language of the oldest periods Old English, not Anglo-Saxon' (1914:25). But it was a historian rather than a linguistic scholar who, according to his reviewer, deserved most of the credit for having 'utterly demolished that foolish word "Anglo-Saxon" which long hid from our eyes the true continuity of English life' (Allen 1880: 474). The historian in question was Freeman. In his historical writing Freeman scrupulously avoided using any term other than "English" or "Old English". In his view, the principle at stake went far beyond mere terminology. In an appendix to his History of the Norman Conquest of England, he

devotes several pages to the task of justifying his use of the term "English" when referring to periods as remote as the fourth century:

The name by which our forefathers really knew themselves and by which they were known to other nations was "English", and no other...The people are the English, their tongue is the English tongue, their King is the King of the English.

Freeman 1870 vol.1: 536

Freeman believed that the blame for what he saw as the mistaken use of "Anglo-Saxon" should be laid primarily at the feet of 'unscientific philologists' (1870 vol.1:539). In his view, "English" was the only correct term to apply to the language, as to the nation:

The English language has never either changed its name or lost its continuity. In the eyes of the scientific philologist, it is the same English language throughout all its modifications.

Freeman 1870 vol.1: 540

This emphasis on the continuity of the English language, though expressed most frequently by Freeman, can also be seen in much of the contemporary writing in linguistic scholarship. Sweet evidently shares Freeman's view that the English of the late nineteenth century was fundamentally the same language as the Anglo-Saxon invaders first brought to Britain. He defines his object of study thus:

The name "English language" in its widest sense comprehends the language of the English people from their first settlement in Britain to the present time.

Sweet 1892: 1

He then proceeds to identify the three main stages in the history of the language, not surprisingly, as Old, Middle, and Modern English.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Although Sweet's emphasis on the continuity of English was not consistent; take, for example, the following remark: "The English of the NED is not one language, but half-a-dozen" (Sweet 1900:138).

Similar assumptions are expressed in a more overtly nationalistic tone by Brooke in his book English Literature, first published as one of the "Literature Primers" series in 1876:

The earliest form of our English tongue is very different from modern English in form, pronunciation, and appearance; but still the language written in the year 700 is the same as that in which the prose of the Bible is written, just as much as the tree planted a hundred years ago is the same tree today.

Brooke 1905: 4

Narratives of linguistic continuity were projected back beyond that most fundamental of breaches, 1066. Writing in 1901, Greenough and Kittredge minimise the linguistic impact of the Norman Conquest:

What the Norman Conquest did was not to break up or confuse our language by coming into direct conflict with it, but simply to interrupt the literary tradition of the English tongue.

Greenough and Kittredge 1901: 84

In a similar vein, Wyld insists that 'there is no ground for assuming that the history of English sounds would have been other than we know it, had the Norman Conquest never taken place'(1914:81).

In his entry for "English language" in the Encyclopedia Britannica, Murray adopted a typically rigorous and balanced approach to the question of continuity, conceding that there were some grounds for referring to Anglo-Saxon and English as separate languages:

If the test of distinct languages be their degree of practical difference from each other, it cannot be denied that "Anglo-Saxon" is a distinct language from Modern English. But when we view the subject historically...we can nowhere draw distinct lines separating its successive stages, we recognise these stages as merely temporary phases of an individual whole

Encyclopedia Britannica 1926: 587

Thus even Murray, not as prone as Freeman and others to anachronistic and inexact terminology, provided guarded support for the view that the history of the language represented an 'individual whole'.

In extracts such as these we can see how language scholars of the late nineteenth century projected a narrative of English much further back into the past than their predecessors had done. And it is important to appreciate that it was a new development. Wyld had dismissed "Anglo-Saxon" as an eighteenth-century coinage, but it remained the most usual label to apply to the pre-1066 language of England for much of the nineteenth century. For example, in his appendix to his second volume entitled 'On the Language of the Anglo-Saxons', Turner avoids the term "Old English" altogether, preferring the label "Anglo-Saxon", or "Saxon". Freeman referred to 'the English tongue which Alfred wrote' (1870 vol.1:510). In contrast, Turner had described the work of Alfred as 'containing the Anglo-Saxon language in its genuine and uncorrupted state' (1836 vol.2:447). Kemble, though closer to Freeman's generation than to Turner's, was nevertheless far closer to the position of Turner in terms of the way in which he conceived of the Anglo-Saxons. As with Turner, Kemble (1849) does not use the term "Old English", referring instead to "Anglo-Saxon" as the most appropriate description of the language and people of that era.

In our discussion of narratives of continuity up to this point we have been referring chiefly to their prevalence within ideas about language. However, as suggested above, Anglo-Saxonism was by no means solely a discourse of language. Indeed, the fact that we find the most extreme examples of the emphasis on the continuity of English in the work of a historian rather than a linguistic scholar is significant. For the lengthening of narratives of language was matched by a lengthening of narratives of nation: Englishness, as well as English, was being projected back ever further into the distant past. Again, the contrast with previous ideas is striking. Turner had argued that it was inaccurate and anachronistic to speak of Egbert and even of Alfred as kings of England; the message was that England and Englishness were later creations (1836 vol.1:428-9). In a similar vein, Macaulay had seen the first

stirrings of national life in the revolt of the nobility and the signing of Magna Carta in the thirteenth century. Yet, as Burrow (1981) points out, with Freeman, Stubbs and Green, the events of the thirteenth century are seen not so much as founding moments, but as later episodes in the evolution of an English national identity which was already well-established. Like the English language, the English nation was seen as stretching back beyond 1066.<sup>10</sup> Lilly underlines that William the Conqueror 'set himself to rule as an English king, binding himself at his election and coronation by the accustomed oaths' (1897:860). Freeman criticised the 'fatal habit of beginning the study of English history with the Norman Conquest itself' (1870 vol.1:xii). Correcting this habit and instilling the idea that 1066 was merely a 'temporary overthrow of our national being' was Freeman's declared motive in producing his massive ten-volume history (1870 vol.1:1). In this respect the title of his work is misleading; much of it deals with events long before the Conquest itself, as would be expected from a writer keen to minimise the impact of 1066 and to emphasise the continuity of English national life.

Once the divide posed by 1066 had been bridged, historians began to extend the boundaries of national history ever further backwards into the past. Lilly (1897:859) takes the Anglo-Saxonist narrative of national identity to its logical conclusion, arguing that Queen Victoria is the 'direct representative' of Cerdic and Cymric who, according to the Saxon Chronicle, came to Britain to become kings of the West Saxons in the year 493. But Freeman went further still, using England and Englishness as labels which could legitimately be applied to the Anglo-Saxon tribes even before they invaded Britain. In his History of the Norman Conquest of England, he frequently refers in his customary solemn tone to 'the days when England was yet beyond the sea' (1870 vol.5: 586). This view that England was not so much a geographical as a spiritual entity, residing wherever Englishmen were to be found, also featured prominently in Freeman's Old English History for Children:

In the old days then, when the land was called only Britain,  
Englishmen had not yet begun to live in it. Our forefathers then

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<sup>10</sup> Such views underpin the primers and school textbooks of the era, eg Hearnshaw (1913) England in the Making - before 1066, Gardiner (1910), An Outline of English History - first period, BC 55 -1603.



lived in other lands, and had not yet come into the land where we now live; but there was an England even then, namely the land in which Englishmen then lived.

Freeman 1869: 1

The land in which, according to this view, Englishmen then lived was of course modern-day Germany.<sup>11</sup> The way in which Freeman's vision of English identity as Teutonic reflects a wider rise in German influence within British cultural life will be discussed below. The point to be reiterated here is that this idea of England existing even before the Anglo-Saxon invasions represents only the most extreme example of an emphasis on the continuity of the nation and its language which can be traced throughout the historical and linguistic scholarship of late-nineteenth-century Britain.

Before proceeding to look at the second distinctive feature of late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism, we can make brief reference to one aspect of the widespread emphasis on continuity between past and present which had important ramifications within the wider contemporary context. In the linguistic and historical work which emphasised continuity, English old and new was seen as a single, relatively unified language. This insistence on the synchronic unity of "the language" at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions can clearly be seen in Sweet's view that the various invading tribes 'spoke the same language with slight differences of dialect' (1892:4). Indeed, he claims that the Anglo-Saxons also wrote their language in the same way and that they 'brought with them to England their national Runic alphabet' (1888:101). Wyld's belief in the unity of English at its supposed origin forces him to account for linguistic difference by arguing that the early history of the language was one of divergence from a common source. He describes 'the rise of dialects, or varieties of speech, from what was once a uniform homogeneous language' (Wyld 1914:47). The view that English has always been one language, and particularly the idea that linguistic difference represents a shift away from a mythical golden age of original unity, took on an obvious potency at a

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<sup>11</sup> See Gardiner (1910), *An Outline of English History*. A map of parts of modern-day Denmark and northern Germany is entitled "The First Home of the English" (p.6)

time when, as we saw in chapter two, processes of linguistic homogenisation were transforming the language habits of millions. It allowed Wyld (1914:149) to portray his support for the diffusion of "Received Standard" pronunciation ('that form which has the widest currency and is heard with practically no variation among speakers of the better class all over the country') as a desire to return to the vanished era of original unity. The message was unequivocal: the linguistic unity of the nation was a truth which was founded in history.

Thus late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism is characterised by this widespread emphasis on the continuity of the language and the nation. In this respect, it differs from previous work which can be called Anglo-Saxonist, and from the dominant narratives of history and identity earlier in the nineteenth century. There were exceptions to this mania for narratives of seamless continuity; for example, swimming defiantly against the tide of scholarly opinion, Ellis (1868:1) persisted in using the term Anglo-Saxon, rather than Old English, when referring to texts from the twelfth century and before. In France, Hovelacque (1887:355) retained a distinction between Anglo-Saxon, Semi-Saxon and Old English, deeming the latter to have begun only in the year 1250.<sup>12</sup> But these figures were exceptions which proved the rule. The clearest message was that just as England had always been England, so English had always been English; encapsulating a seemingly obvious truth, this formula lay at the heart of much of the work carried out on the history of the language and the nation.

The close relationship between narratives of language and narratives of nation is a point which has recurred throughout our discussion of the theme of continuity. We have seen how writers such as Freeman and Brooke switch readily between language and identity in underlining the existence of continuity. And it is this link between language and nation which leads us to the second feature of late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism which can be seen as new and distinctive.

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<sup>12</sup> The anachronism of Anglo-Saxonist historians also came in for criticism. Cox took Freeman to task for describing Alfred as ruler of England; he argues that in Alfred's era "as before, there was no united English people or nation" (1870:328). Similarly, another writer argued that in 1066, "Harold's army fought for Harold, not for England" (Anon. 1905:202).

This is the growing influence of a cultural nationalist construction of identity in which the nation is seen as identical with the language, and Englishness becomes identified with English.

### **English and Englishness: cultural nationalism and the new Anglo-Saxonism**

Cultural nationalism is a construction of national identity which we have already encountered. In chapter one we saw that it was precisely this vision of nationality as based upon language which the Germans invoked in order to justify their occupation of Alsace-Lorraine. It is apt that we should have examined cultural nationalism in relation to Germany, as its prevalence within Anglo-Saxonism can in many ways be seen as one symptom of a marked shift towards what were seen as Germanic intellectual values and traditions in late-nineteenth-century Europe. In Britain, the startling rise of German power was watched with a mixture of fear and admiration, even before the watershed of 1870. And in this new and unfamiliar climate of national insecurity, the influence of German thought over many facets of British intellectual life reached unprecedented heights. From the 1860s onwards, swathes of British scholars were to become infected by a major outbreak of what one critic contemptuously labelled "Teutomania"(cited in Macdougall 1982:91).

The influence of German thought on British cultural life was by no means new. It can be seen quite clearly earlier in the nineteenth century: as well as the example of Kemble and Thorpe in language study, major literary figures of the mid-Victorian era such as Carlyle and Coleridge were deeply influenced by German Romanticism. What was new from the 1860s onwards, however, was that the influence of German thought was becoming not only deeper but wider, spreading beyond the confines of philology and literary study. Most significantly for our purposes, the influence of Romanticism in general, and of German cultural nationalism in particular, was becoming increasingly strong amongst a new generation of historians. Burrow argues that the second half of the nineteenth century sees the Whiggish and essentially Augustan historiographical tradition associated principally, though not

exclusively, with Macaulay, give way to a newer perspective on history which owed much to the German Romantic tradition:

For the fact that the intellectual and historiographical world of Stubbs and Freeman was very different from that of Turner or Miller or Hallam, despite the inevitable persistence of some perennial ideas of English history, the influence of ideas developed if not originated in Germany was unmistakably in part responsible.

Burrow 1981: 120

The growing fashion for all things Germanic, especially amongst historians, is most immediately obvious in the constant emphasis in the writings of Freeman, Stubbs, Green and others, on the Teutonic and Germanic ancestry of the English people.<sup>13</sup>

It is to Ancient Germany that we must look for the earliest traces of our forefathers...though we call ourselves Britons, the name has only a geographical significance. The blood that is in our veins come from German ancestors. Our language, diversified as it is, is at the bottom a German language.

Stubbs 1906: 9

Again, pro-Germanism was not a new theme: it can be detected in the Anglo-Saxonist vision of national identity put forward by Protestants such as Hare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But after being marginalised in favour of a classical, Latinate narrative during the Whig ascendancy which reached its climax with Macaulay, it was to resurface at the heart of a newly-strengthened Anglo-Saxonist discourse at the end of the nineteenth century. Mosse (1974:112) argues that this developing sense of Teutonic identity was translated into widespread support amongst the British intelligentsia for the German victory over France in 1870. Freeman, whose pro-Germanic feelings were matched in intensity only by his hatred of France, continued to voice support for the Germans in the bitter post-war dispute over Alsace-Lorraine. As Burrow (1981:165) notes, Freeman always referred to the province as "Elsass", allowing his pro-Germanic sympathies to take

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<sup>13</sup> One less avowedly pro-German variant of this theme was Jespersen's view that the English were part of the family of "northern folk". See his influential book, Growth and Structure of the English Language.

precedence in this instance over his much-vaunted belief in the democratically-expressed will of the population.

There was more to the influence of German thought over English historians than merely an increased emphasis on Teutonic solidarity. A second and, for our purposes, more significant way in which English scholarship was influenced by German thought concerned the very nature of national identity and the criteria by which it was to be defined. Not only were the English, to an unprecedented extent, represented by late-nineteenth-century historians as Germanic; but the way in which Englishness itself was to be defined was becoming increasingly bound up, again to an unprecedented degree, with cultural, as opposed to political, factors. In short, the influence of cultural nationalism was starting to be felt. We shall proceed to examine the new cultural nationalist vision of national identity, with its marked emphasis on language. First, in order to underline that it was a new development, we can briefly examine the very different discourse of Englishness which preceded it.

Borrowing the far more entrenched and polarised positions on language and nationality which were defended in the Alsace-Lorraine debate, we could argue, speaking in very broad terms, that the dominant discourse of English national identity for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century owed more to the liberal, voluntaristic and political conception of identity associated with the French than it owed to the linguistic, deterministic and fundamentally cultural definition associated with the Germans. For example, as Burrow (1981:117) points out, in describing the Anglo-Saxons, Turner refused to adopt the vocabulary of determinism and race, categories which were to be used quite freely in the very different circumstances from the 1870s onwards. However, the comparison with French positions in the Alsace-Lorraine debate should not be taken too far. Anglo-Saxon scholars from the first half of the nineteenth century, Turner in particular, were not so much endorsing the rhetoric of 1789 as reflecting the continued dominance of Whig definitions of the nation. In this Whig definition, Englishness was not first and foremost a matter of language and literature, though these could certainly be used as symbols of

national greatness. Englishness was bound up primarily with the constitution, which became esteemed as the single most important element of national identity. It was the constitution, rather than later Idealist notions of the national being or soul, which played the part of chief protagonist in contemporary accounts of the history of the nation, nowhere more obviously, or influentially, than in the historical narrative of Englishness built up by Macaulay.

Though Macaulay does make occasional reference to the way in which the English language symbolises the national character, it is clear from his work that Englishness is not identified primarily with the English language, as in the cultural nationalist definition. As Burrow (1981:287) argues, Macaulay is one of the last representatives of a Whig tradition which remains relatively untouched by the populist and nationalist tendencies of Romanticism, and which perpetuates eighteenth-century Augustan values in a nineteenth-century context. In this tradition, the English were defined first and foremost not by their language, but by their longstanding and much-cherished political values and institutions. This association of Englishness with fundamentally political criteria can be seen most clearly in the words of another of the giants of mid-Victorian Liberal England, John Bright: 'wherever an Englishman goes...he takes with him the foundation of representative institutions' (cited in Green & Taylor 1989:105).

The shift away from this political definition of Englishness and towards an identity based more on cultural factors cannot be traced back to a single cause.

Undoubtedly, it can partly be explained by the mood of uncertainty about national status which, as we have noted in previous chapters, marks out the last three decades of the century from the confident Liberalism of the mid-Victorian era. Defining Englishness primarily in terms of the constitution made sense only for as long as the political supremacy of the nation was unquestioned. When the political future began to look less certain, it seemed necessary, and more reassuring, to shift the basis of Englishness on to grounds which were deemed to be less exposed to the winds of historical change. Another factor to consider in explaining this shift is the extent to which it can be seen as a reaction against the individualistic ethos of Liberalism. As

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1994:8) have noted, mid-nineteenth-century Liberal ideology signally failed to provide for social ties. They also see a backlash against the legalistic, utilitarian aspects of Liberalism in the new importance attributed to symbolic and irrational elements within the dominant construction of national identity (1994:10). And, as Cannadine has argued, the foremost emotional and symbolic focus of this emerging discourse of national identity was the monarch, marketed now as never before as a 'symbol of permanence and national community' (1994:122).

Amongst English scholars, as with the emphasis on Teutonic identity, it is in the work of historians that this newly-prominent cultural nationalist vision of Englishness can be most readily discerned. Colls underlines the role played by two of the major historians from the era in bringing about this key shift in conceptions of national identity:

Stubbs and Green...shifted the grounds of Englishness from being something less about constitutional precedents to being something more about white skins, English tongues, and feelings about being free.

Colls 1986: 45

The reference to 'English tongues' is significant. For the clearest evidence of the extent to which new definitions of national identity derived from the cultural nationalist tradition is the vastly increased importance attributed by historians and linguistic scholars alike to language. As we have seen in preceding chapters, the equation of language and nationality lies at the very heart of cultural nationalism. It was an equation which, for the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, was absent not only from dominant definitions of the nation, but also from contemporary work in Anglo-Saxon studies. There is no sign in the work of Turner, Kemble, Thorpe and others that language is equated with identity and nationality to anything like the degree which was to become commonplace later in the century. For example, the amount of space devoted to language in Turner's work is, proportionately, far less than that in the work of Freeman or Stubbs. Moreover, when he does refer to language, he argues that it is only 'principally Saxon' and that, far from being a pure

speech, 'a large portion of it seems to have been made up from other ancient languages'(1836 vol.2:437-41). Kemble, although a linguistic scholar and author of historical works on the Anglo-Saxons, nevertheless tends to keep language and nation strictly separate. Given his linguistic background, references to language in his book Saxons in England are conspicuous by their absence. It is only really towards the last third of the nineteenth century that we can trace the emergence of a fully-fledged cultural nationalist vision of Englishness in which nationality was equated with language. It was this crucial equation which both prompted and underpinned the great surge in Anglo-Saxonist scholarship which we can trace in language study, history and beyond, during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Discourses of nation became linked to an unprecedented degree with discourses of language. Englishness, no longer primarily a matter of political and constitutional principles, had become synonymous with English.

This new cultural nationalist definition of Englishness can be traced across a range of academic disciplines, as one might expect of a discourse in which language is identified so closely with wider concerns. Indeed, it was a historian rather than a linguistic scholar who provided the most cogent summary of the new importance of language within the discourse of national identity: 'language is by itself the nearest approach to a perfect test of national extraction' (Stubbs, in Macdougall 1982:119). But the obvious example of the unprecedented significance allotted to language is the work of Freeman. Throughout his work, Freeman clearly sees language and identity as two sides of the same coin; wherever he mentions words such as "nation" or "people", references to "speech" or "tongue" are rarely far behind. His cultural nationalist assumptions, together with his general pro-Germanic views, are revealed most explicitly in the opening pages of his Old English History for Children:

There was a time, a very long time ago, when English and German were only one language, and when the forefathers of the English that are now and the forefathers of the Germans that are now were only one people or nation. We commonly say that men are of the same people or nation when they live in the same country and speak the same language.

Freeman 1869: 3



We can identify some further instances of the way in which the work of major late-nineteenth-century historians reveals the growing influence of cultural nationalism. For example, the cultural nationalist insistence that the nation is a natural phenomenon - a key principle which we examined with reference to the Alsace-Lorraine debate - underlies the approach of historians like Seeley, who refers to England as 'a living organism' (1895:142). Seeley also illustrates a second point of contact with the cultural nationalist tradition, namely, the widespread trend towards a more collective and national emphasis in the major historical works of the era. In another example of the rejection of the individual in favour of the collective which so clearly differentiates the late-Victorian period from the age of self-help, Seeley argues that 'history is not concerned with individuals except in their capacity as members of a state' (1895:7). In a similar vein, in stark contrast to the paternalistic, patrician perspective underlying Macaulay's history of England, Green epitomised the more populist tone in his History of the English People (1877). If these changes reflect an increasing degree of democratisation, they also clearly tie in with the populist characteristics of the cultural nationalist tradition, with its emphasis on the primacy of the autonomous and sovereign *volk*.

It is the increased importance attached to language which nevertheless remains the most important and the most striking symptom of the influence of cultural nationalism within dominant visions of Englishness. And it is the strength of this influence which is the second feature which distinguishes late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism from previous work on the history of the English language and nation. The fact that language was perceived to be closely identified to questions of nationality and identity explains why it was invoked so frequently by scholars from other disciplines, notably historians. Ultimately, it is only by recognising the extent to which nationality and language were increasingly being seen as virtually tautologous that we can explain why so much work was carried out on the history of English. As with the pioneering philological work carried out at the start of the nineteenth century by German comparativists such as Grimm and Bopp, it was

widely felt that in studying the language, nothing less than the history of the nation was at stake.

Before proceeding to examine the situation in France, it is important to recognise that although Anglo-Saxonism was arguably the single most important discourse of identity in late-nineteenth-century Britain, it was not unchallenged. One of its central tenets, as we have seen, was that national identity was closely identified, or even identical, with language. Another obvious characteristic was its clear Anglocentric bias; England and Englishness were assumed to be the primary, often the sole, category of identity. In the eyes of many observers, one or both of these traits made Anglo-Saxonism fundamentally unsuitable as a discourse of identity for a democratising, modernising and multinational British state. Examining the vision of Britishness put forward by many opponents of Anglo-Saxonism is our final task in this discussion of narratives of identity and history in late-nineteenth-century Britain.

### **Return of the Brut: narratives of Britishness**

In chapter two we saw that the late nineteenth century was an era in which processes of levelling and standardisation were helping to create an increasingly unified and integrated national space. That space was as much British as it was English. As the lamentations over the disappearance of dialect illustrate clearly, these powerful forces of what Briggs called 'nationalisation' were penetrating deep into the remotest parts of the national territory, overturning traditional boundaries. The ancient boundaries of Offa's Dyke and Hadrian's Wall were no exception.

An ever more integrated British state generated an increasingly powerful discourse of Britishness. Nowhere was this expressed more clearly than in attitudes to empire. Despite the efforts of some Celtic nationalists to portray imperialism as an exclusively English enterprise, there is no doubt that the Welsh and the Scots were amongst the most fervent supporters of British imperialism.<sup>14</sup> In the words of one

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<sup>14</sup> This uncomfortable truth is conveniently overlooked by those who hold that the Celtic countries were simple victims to English 'internal colonialism'. The phrase is Hechter's (1978).

Welsh writer who, like many of his compatriots, eagerly added this developing British imperial dimension to his sense of Welsh identity, 'we all have our part to play on the stage of this great empire'(Morgan 1888:216).<sup>15</sup> The part played by a small contingent of Welsh soldiers in defending Her Majesty's garrison at Rorke's Drift in 1879, acknowledged by the awarding of a still unsurpassed number of Victoria Crosses, immediately passed into British imperial mythology. In other words, despite the fantasies about global Anglo-Saxondom entertained by some, it was indeed Britannia who ruled the waves; and how could it be otherwise when so many of her ships were built on the Clyde, and so much of the coal which powered them was hewn from the depths of the Rhondda?<sup>16</sup>

Evidence of a growing sense of Britishness can also be found in contemporary debates about national history and ancestry. Many writers sought to counter the Anglocentric bias in the work of the major Anglo-Saxonist historians and to underline the importance of the presence and role of the Celtic countries within the history of Britain.<sup>17</sup> One of the key points at issue was the extent to which the invading Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century had interbred with the indigenous British populations. Not surprisingly, as far as the Anglo-Saxonists were concerned, such contact was virtually non-existent. Referring to the English, Freeman had claimed that 'we are not a British people, but an English people with a certain British infusion' (1890:49). However, there were many critics who offered a very different view, arguing that the population of England was first and foremost British, rather than English. In the words of Pike: 'the great bulk of Englishmen are the genuine descendants of the ancient Britons...they are not Anglo-Saxons or Germans or Teutons'(cited in Cox 1866:416). Allen is very clearly concerned to demolish the

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<sup>15</sup> Engels remarked that the Welsh "have become entirely reconciled with the British Empire"(Davies 1980:87). At a meeting in Aberdare in 1914, Keir Hardie, speaking against the war, was shouted down by a crowd singing Rule Britannia (Evans 1966:43).

<sup>16</sup> Of the 1million tons of British shipping built in the peak year of 1913, 75% came from the shipyards of the Clyde (Hobsbawm 1979:307).

<sup>17</sup> This had been acknowledged by Turner. In a manner unthinkable to later Anglo-Saxonists such as Freeman and Stubbs, he described "the Kelts" as "our first ancestors" (1836 vol.1:23). Arnold was one of the most powerful contemporary critics to underline the Celtic contribution. In *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1869) he argues that "there is a Celtic element in the English nature, as well as a Germanic element" (p.31), later avowing that "true Anglo-Saxons, simply and sincerely rooted in the German nature, we are not and cannot be" (p.147).

myth of English national purity, claiming that 'it would hardly be too much to say that there are no thoroughgoing Englishmen now left in Britain, save among the so-called Scotch of the Lothians' (1880:475). In an 1879 article entitled, significantly, 'English or British', Foster makes a similar point, rejecting the notion of Anglo-Saxon purity and underlining the mixed descent of the English:

There is probably not a single Englishman, whose family has been long in the country, who has not an admixture at least of British blood with Saxon; while most of us have all four elements in our blood, British, Saxon, Danish and Norman.

Foster 1879: 216

As we might expect, the typical Anglo-Saxonist response to these attacks was to point to language, arguing that it proved the preponderance and relative purity of the Anglo-Saxon element. Thus, with language turned into a major battleground in this debate, as in so many others, how did the supporters of a discourse of British identity counter the use of linguistic evidence to support the Anglo-Saxonists' case?

We can identify two principal strategies. The first was simply to refuse to acknowledge the validity of using language as evidence of ethnicity or identity. In other words, it was a defiant rejection of the cultural nationalist view that language can be conflated with nationality. The most virulent opponents of Anglo-Saxonism were usually quite prepared to accept the claims of Freeman and others that the English language came predominantly from Anglo-Saxon. Allen admits that 'it is no doubt true that the powerful Teutonic element has contributed the language, the laws, the institutions' (1882:197). Similarly, Foster, in arguing that the English people are 'vastly less Teutonic than their language', implicitly accepts the Anglo-Saxonists' claim that the English language is overwhelmingly made up of words descended from what was labelled "Old English" (1879:216). But it is one thing to accept that the English language is predominantly Anglo-Saxon; it is quite another to claim that this can be taken, or should be taken, as proof of identity or ethnic origin. Writers such as Allen, Foster and other enemies of Anglo-Saxonism were underlining a point which was being made, in a theoretical context, by the Neogrammarians, namely, that language operates according to its own laws and

rules, and therefore has to be seen to a large degree as independent of its speakers. In other words, language and identity, English and Englishness, could not simply be conflated in any sort of direct, symbiotic relationship. Using Anglo-Saxon words was not in itself proof of Anglo-Saxon ethnic origin: for language and identity belonged to very different orders of facts.

One of the first to develop this line of attack against the cultural nationalism of Freeman and his fellow Anglo-Saxonists was Pike. In his 1866 book The English and Their Origin, he maintains that language and race are not identifiable. However, one of the most eloquent opponents of the view that nationality could be equated with language was not referring to the English context at all. Mahaffy's tirade against cultural nationalism was addressed to its disciples in Ireland. It merits attention partly because it could be seen to apply just as readily to the English context, and partly because it served to warn an English audience of the separatist tendencies that would inevitably be fuelled within the kingdom and the empire if the cultural nationalist gospel were allowed to spread:

It seems to me a profound mistake that distinct nationality can only be sustained by distinct language. The greatest patriots Ireland has produced were English-speaking men, and not even bilingual...If Irish could be reintroduced and spoken in Dublin as Hungarian is in Pesth...it would not make Dublin one whit more Irish at heart than it is at present. It would, in fact, set up a false test of nationality instead of a true one.

Mahaffy 1899: 221

Thus it was this belief that language represented a 'false test of nationality' which represents one strategy used by opponents of Anglo-Saxonism. They dealt with the issue of language by refusing to make language an issue; to do so would have been to concede that language mattered.

Other supporters of Britishness adopted a different strategy in the effort to undermine Anglo-Saxonism. Rather than refusing as a matter of principle to accept the admissibility of linguistic evidence in debates over identity, they chose to use that same evidence to try and beat the Anglo-Saxonists at their own game. Thus we

see many writers highlighting the extent to which the English language derived from sources other than Anglo-Saxon. The reviewer of Nicholas's book, The Pedigree of the English People Investigated, describes the encounter between Celt and Saxon as a 'fusion' of races. Echoing the imperial role for English foreseen in the 1850s by Watts and, to a lesser extent, Trench, s/he argues that 'the language that has sprung from the two, promises to be the language of the world' (Anon.1869:320). In other words, the language of the empire may be called English, but that empire, and that language, were built by the British, not by the English alone.

The emphasis on the importance of Celtic or "British" influences within the English language even extended to those varieties of the language which were often seen as the very wellsprings of Anglo-Saxon purity, the rural dialects. In an article entitled 'The Poetry of Provincialisms', one writer stands on its head the familiar view that provincialisms represent an idealised linguistic purity vanished elsewhere; on the contrary, s/he argues that they are valuable because they represent 'our mixed descent'(Anon.1865:30). In a similar vein, Elworthy lends linguistic support to the view of Allen and others concerning the British, rather than Anglo-Saxon, ancestry of the population in the English west country. In his article on the dialect of west Somerset, Elworthy describes how the contemporary pronunciation of words within that dialect 'connects us with the times when our British forefathers were elbowed back by the prolific Saxon, and lorded over by the proud Norman'(1875-6:199). The same emphasis on the British provenance of many non-standard words can be seen in the provocative and unorthodox work of Charles Mackay. One of Mackay's favourite themes was the alleged Celtic etymology of contemporary slang: for example he tries to account for "bloody" by relating it to the Gaelic word "bloidhe" which, he argues, originally had the far more moderate meaning of "rather" (1888:696). Another of his main concerns is to undermine the notion that English can be identified almost exclusively with Anglo-Saxon. This attempt to play down the Anglo-Saxon contribution to English is made explicit, in Mackay's typically forthright style, in a fascinating article published posthumously in 1890:

This language was not derived from the Saxon, a dialect never spoken in England or anywhere but in a small corner of Germany,

where it was but a patois. The earliest English, instead of being called Anglo-Saxon, ought to have been called Anglo-Dutch, Anglo-Danish or Anglo-Norman, of which, with a considerable modicum or residuum of Keltic or Gaelic, it was almost wholly compounded.

Mackay 1890:138

As we see in this extract, opponents of Anglo-Saxonism underlined not only the contributions of the Celtic languages, but also the influences of the languages which were brought by invaders who came after the Anglo-Saxons, such as the Danish and the Normans. One member of the Yorkshire Dialect Society argues that the influence of Danish was so strong that it ought to be seen as more important even than Anglo-Saxon. As with Elworthy, the writer claims that this evidence shows through best in non-standard varieties of the language, in this case the 'northern folk-speech':

The proposition is undeniable, that the basis and oldest framework, not only of our northern folk-speech, but even of the English language as a whole, is decidedly Danish, not Saxon...In the fair fabric of our English idiom, the warp is Danish, the woof alone is Saxon.

Federer 1898: 9

It is an appropriate point at which to end our analysis of Britishness, for we see in the above extract perhaps the most extreme of the claims made by those who wanted to undermine the centrality of Anglo-Saxon influences within English. Few supporters of the discourse of Britishness were prepared to go as far as Federer and claim that a linguistic variety other than Anglo-Saxon should rightfully be seen as the 'framework' of the English language. Nevertheless, in denying the centrality of Anglo-Saxon, Federer's fanciful claim can be seen as one illustration of the fact that although Anglo-Saxonism may have been the dominant narrative of language and identity in late-nineteenth-century Britain, it was by no means the only one.

In summary, in the course of our discussion of the British context, we have examined two principal constructions of national identity, Anglo-Saxonism and a

discourse which emphasised Britishness. In one sense, both can be seen as products of the wide-ranging and fundamental social changes sweeping across Britain at this time. It is plausible to suggest that Anglo-Saxonism, no less than the growing nationalist sentiments in the Celtic countries, is itself a reaction against the perceived disappearance of national differences within a multinational British state; paradoxically, as in the case of local identity and dialect, the emphasis on particularity testifies to the influence of standardisation. In the discourse of Britishness, on the other hand, we see a vision of national identity and history which aims to recognise and keep pace with the changes and complexities within the society it purports to represent. In this respect, there are parallels between the discourse of Britishness and the Republican vision of nation in France which, as we saw in chapter two, can also be seen as reflecting and endorsing the process of standardisation and modernisation, rather than reacting against it.

Our concern, however, is with a closer parallel between Britain and France. For in France too, the prominence of questions about national status meant that narratives of national history and identity were high on the agenda. As in Britain, there are two such narratives which will command our attention, one of which is linked especially closely to the field which is our central concern: language study.

## **France**

### **Gauls and Romans**

In France as in Britain, the last third of the nineteenth century sees a major increase in the amount of scholarship devoted to the origins and history of the national language. Indeed, the fruits of this growth in interest were similar to those which had emerged in Britain. What Murray did for English, Littré had done for French, compiling a historical dictionary which charted the development of the language through the centuries. In 1881, Godefroy published his Dictionnaire de l'Ancienne



Langue Française which covered French and 'tous ses dialectes' from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. Besides this contemporary lexicographical work on the language past and present, the Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Langage François, compiled in the eighteenth century by Lacurne de St. Palaye, was published in 1875, with a preface which gave thanks for the fact that the dictionary had avoided the fate of the many other manuscripts destroyed by the Paris Commune. France also had a scholarly society to compare with the Early English Text Society. This was the Société des Anciens Textes Français (SATF), founded in 1875 by the philologist Gaston Paris. Like the EETS, the SATF played a key role in collating, editing and publishing a wide range of materials which threw light upon what was seen as the infancy of the national language.<sup>18</sup> But perhaps the single most important contemporary piece of work on the history of the French language is one which has no counterpart of comparable influence and authority in Britain. This was Brunot's magisterial multi-volume project, Histoire de la langue française, the first part of which was published in 1905. This seminal work, to which Brunot devoted much of his working life, arguably remains the most exhaustive, definitive and influential account of the historical development of the French language. The point to be underlined here, however, is that although it is unique in its scale and its enduring reputation, Brunot's work nevertheless represents only one expression of a general revival of interest at the end of the nineteenth century in the history of the French language.

If this new interest in the history of the language provides one similarity between France and Britain, another is that in both countries, it forms part of a more general revival in interest in the past. In literary terms this was reflected in the flood of historical chronicles tracing the evolution of French literature. The trend had been set in 1856 when Guessard launched a collection entitled Anciens Poètes de la France. In 1865, Paulin Paris, father of Gaston, published an updated version of the Histoire Littéraire de la France, production of which had first been undertaken by

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<sup>18</sup> As with the EETS, the SATF was infused with a marked patriotic tone. See its outline of its work, reproduced in Revue des Langues Romanes 1874 (vol. 6); 'il n'est pas d'oeuvre plus vraiment nationale que celle à laquelle nous voulons nous consacrer' (Société des Anciens Textes Français 1874:634).

Benedictine monks in 1733. In 1893 Brunetière edited a series of volumes entitled Etudes Critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française. This was followed three years later by Petit de Julleville's Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française des origines à 1900. These projects, together with the establishment of chairs in medieval literature at the Collège de France (1852) and the Sorbonne (1883), illustrate that interest in the past was by no means confined to language. Another illustration of this is the increasing awareness of the importance of the study of history.<sup>19</sup> We have already seen that the luminaries of the Third Republic consistently and consciously evoked continuity with the legacy of 1789. Unlike the First Republic, the Third had a precedent; consequently, under the Third Republic, the iconoclasts of 1789 had themselves become the icons. The study of this defining moment in the national past was institutionalised in 1885 with the establishment of a chair in the history of the French Revolution; as Gérard (1970:67) notes, its first incumbent, Aulard, became the 'historiographe quasi officiel du régime' during his forty-year tenure. But the vital point for our purposes is that interest in the past stretched beyond 1789. As in Britain, where historians such as Freeman and Green were projecting Macaulay's account of national history back as far as the fifth century, so many French writers on history and language were looking beyond the events of 1789 and seeking to locate the origins of national identity in a far more distant era. For if the English were seen as Anglo-Saxons, the founders of the French nation, increasingly, were deemed to be the Gauls.

We shall proceed to examine the discourse of Gaulish ancestry which was widespread under the Third Republic. However, without pre-empting too much of what follows, it is vital at the outset to highlight a fundamental difference between the narrative of Gaulish ancestry in France, and the discourse of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain. In stark contrast to Anglo-Saxonism, French mythologies of origin could not plausibly portray the founding language and the founding people as one and the same. Brachet encapsulates the problem: 'while the French nation is really Celtic in race, its language is not so' (1877:5). It was this asymmetry between a

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<sup>19</sup> As Thomson notes, "there is paradox in a tradition derived from a revolution which was itself a revolution against traditionalism" (1964:11).

Gaulish/Celtic narrative of nation and a Latinate narrative of language which was the single most striking general feature of the late-nineteenth-century scholarship pertaining to the question of national history. The overall message was that the French were a nation of Gauls, but that they spoke the language of Rome. We shall explore this asymmetry between narratives of language and identity below. We highlight it here because it is a point which must be borne in mind as we examine a narrative of identity which, in many other respects, closely resembles Anglo-Saxonism: the myth of Gaulish ancestry.

### **Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois**

As with Anglo-Saxonism in England, the myth of Gaulish origin which was widespread in late-nineteenth-century France has its own origins in the early modern period. Early examples are Lemaire de Belges's Illustrations de Gaule et Singularités de Troie, published in 1510, and Fauchet's book of 1579, Recueil des antiquitez gauloises et françoises. In his overview of work carried out in this field during the sixteenth century, Brunot (1905:1) also refers to Picard's thesis that even the Greek language stems originally from Gaulish. Another notable intervention was Pasquier's 1560 book Recherches de France, which, as Citron (1987:143) argues, was written as a polemic against the Italianate trend of a French aristocracy under the spell of the Medicis. What is significant about Pasquier's work is that he sets out a vision of French history in which the Franks were represented as ethnic Gauls who returned to their true ancestral home on Gallic soil. This vision of unity between Gauls and Franks differs dramatically from later uses of the discourse of Gaulish origin. In the very different circumstances of the late nineteenth century, when the greatest perceived threat to national identity and security came not from Italy but from Germany, writers underlining the centrality of the Gaulish element within French identity expended much time and effort in vilifying the Franks and in playing down their influence over France's history and language. This aspect of late-nineteenth-century Gallophilia will be discussed at greater length below. It is worth noting in passing, however, that hostility to the Franks was a characteristic of much of the French scholarship on the subject of national origins long before the spread of

particularly bitter anti-German sentiments from 1870 onwards.<sup>20</sup> As Weber argues, the opposition between Gauls and Franks was an interpretative framework which was used quite widely in 1789 to underline that the 'revolution was legitimate, being no more than the justified rebellion of the Gallic people against the remains of Frankish supremacy'(1991:9). In this perspective, revolution became seen as a conflict not so much between classes as between national or ethnic groups. As with the radical populism of many Anglo-Saxonists inveighing against the Norman Yoke, hostility towards the upper classes was motivated to a considerable extent by the fact that they were identified as foreign. The identification of the Franks with the aristocracy can be seen in Delaure's Histoire Critique de la Noblesse, written against a backdrop of revolution in 1790:

Ah malheureux peuple, vous étiez au pied des Barbares, dont les aïeux ont massacré vos ancêtres. Ils sont tous des étrangers, des sauvages échappés des forêts de la Germanie, des glaces de la Saxe.

cited in Citron 1987:146

Delaure concludes his peroration with the proud boast: 'Je suis de race gauloise' (Citron 1987:146). Reinforced during the events of the revolutionary era, it was a discourse of national identity which was to reach the peak of its influence during the nineteenth century.

The tone was set by Thierry, who published his immensely significant Histoire des Gaulois in 1828. Later historians such as Michelet and Martin followed Thierry's lead, and work on France's Gaulish heritage can be found throughout the nineteenth century. However, in France, as in Britain, it is in the last third of the century that interest in the question of national origins reaches its zenith. Presenting his paper on 'Celtic Philology' as part of the president's address to the Philological Society in 1874, Guiloiz suggests that the resurgence of interest in the Gauls in France was a relatively recent development:

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<sup>20</sup> For a useful historical overview of the different roles allotted to the Franks within French historiography, see Thom (1990).

Great attention has been paid these past fifteen years to Gaulish antiquities ... The late emperor has instituted a Gallo-Roman museum at St. Germain en Laye, near Paris, and a 'Commission de la Topographie des Gaules' to investigate the history, topography and archaeology of Ancient Gaul.

Guiloz 1874: 380

As Guiloz indicates, if the nineteenth century as a whole reveals a marked Gallophilia, from the 1860s onwards, and especially under the Third Republic, we can identify the spread of what can be best described as Gallomania. As with the Teutomania which captivated so many English scholars and historians at this time, the main objective was to legitimise the present by anchoring its origins in a primeval past, establishing a myth of national continuity with which to assuage worries about national status. The most obvious - and influential - examples of this attempt to cast the Gauls as the founders of modern France can be seen in the history textbooks used by millions of French schoolchildren throughout the new and rigidly-standardised state school network. Foremost amongst these were the various editions of Histoire de France by Ernest Lavisse, first published in 1882 and reprinted until as late as 1950. The emphasis on the identity of ancient Gaul with contemporary France can be seen in the opening words of the Cours Elementaire ('Autrefois notre pays s'appelait la *Gaule* et les habitants s'appelaient les *Gaulois*') and the Cours Moyen ('Il y a deux mille ans, la France s'appelait la *Gaule*').<sup>21</sup>

Lavisse's textbooks exerted an immeasurable influence over several generations of schoolchildren, profoundly shaping their awareness of their nation's history. The only other textbook to exert anything like this degree of influence was Bruno's famous story Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants. Yet here too readers were reminded of the significance of the nation's Gaulish ancestry. One of the most striking features of Bruno's book is the way in which her storyline and characters serve to reinforce the lessons taught in other subjects within the curriculum. In chapter two we cited extracts in which Bruno's characters reiterate the significance of language for national unity and underline the importance of reading aloud

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<sup>21</sup> Both in Citron (1987:30).

correctly. The subject-matter of history lessons was reinforced in a similar way. Indeed, in one of the scenes depicted in the book, language lessons and history lessons were reinforced simultaneously. Once more the nine-year old Julien is reading aloud, but this time he is reading the following extract from a history textbook:

La France s'appelait alors la Gaule, et les hommes à demi sauvages qui l'habitaient étaient les Gaulois. Nos ancêtres les Gaulois étaient grands et robustes, avec une peau blanche comme le lait, des yeux bleus et de longs cheveux blonds ou roux qu'ils laissaient flotter sur leurs épaules. Ils estimaient avant toutes chose le courage et la liberté.

Bruno 1878: 134

The similarities between this extract and the work of Lavissee are striking. They highlight the efforts made to ensure that a co-ordinated and consistent set of axioms were diffused throughout the school curriculum.

The extent to which this myth of Gaulish ancestry was successfully institutionalised can be seen in the abundance of less famous books on the subject. Jullian followed Lavissee's lead in underlining the identity of past and present in his book De la Gaule à la France: nos origines historiques. Bordier and Charton begin their 1881 textbook, Histoire de France, with a chapter entitled 'Gaule indépendante' prefaced with a sketch of a Gaulish warrior defending his household. On the opening page, the first few lines of text reinforce the message in the clearest possible terms:

Les Gaulois sont nos ancêtres. Leurs tombeaux sont les plus anciens que l'on découvre en creusant notre sol. Les invasions romaines et franques ont modifié notre antique nationalité, mais seulement à la surface. Le fond de la population attachée au travaux de la terre est toujours resté le même...c'est encore le sang gaulois qui coule aujourd'hui dans nos veines.

Bordier and Charton 1881: 1

One of the most important points about this vision of uncorrupted Gaulish ancestry is the way in which it necessarily plays down the influence of 'les invasions

romaines et franques'. Just as many English scholars made a distinction, especially with reference to language, between Anglo-Saxon elements and the rest, so many of their French counterparts made similar distinctions between the native and the foreign. As we shall see below, there was widespread support for the view that Frankish or Germanic influences were in some sense alien; a wide range of linguistic scholars echoed the words of Bordier and Charton and insisted that any such influences on the French language were merely superficial. However, the belief that only the Gaulish element within French identity was truly and authentically national implied that Roman and Latin influences should also be treated as alien. One historian who held this view was Jullian, as is clear from his description of those whom he sees as Latin incomers:

Leur arrivée ne modifia pas davantage l'humeur native des hommes. Tels étaient les Gaulois conquis par César, tels seront les Gallo-Romains conquis par Clovis: je parle du caractère transmis à la naissance, je ne parle pas des manières dont l'éducation l'enveloppe. Nos aïeux d'il y a deux mille ans avaient reçu leur part nécessaire de qualités et de défauts, et nous leur ressemblons.

Jullian 1922: 172

Although Jullian regards all influences on this original Gaulish identity as alien, he reserves particular criticism for Latin, as is clear in the plea with which he prefaces the extract above: 'Qu'on ne me parle plus du "génie latin", qu'on ne fasse pas de la France l'élève et l'héritière de ce génie'(Jullian 1922:172). In short, in this vision of French history, France was portrayed as a Gaulish nation uncorrupted not merely by Frankish but also by Latin.

To what extent were such views widespread in late-nineteenth-century France? This was a time when anti-Latinism was rife in England, especially amongst Anglo-Saxonist scholars keen to revive the anti-Roman sentiments of their sixteenth-century predecessors. In France too, as we noted in chapter one, the role and status of Latin within the education system was being vigorously debated. An explicit preference for the Gaulish over the Latin can also be seen in the two textbooks

which we cited above as playing a vital role in diffusing the narrative of Gaulish ancestry to generations of French schoolchildren: Lavissee and Bruno. Both writers make reference to the historical conflict between Gauls and Romans, and both present an idealised picture of the courage and valour of the Gaulish warriors. In his Histoire de France Lavissee instructs his readers to admire the tragic but heroic figure of Vercingetorix:

Ainsi Vercingétorix est mort pour avoir défendu son pays contre l'ennemi, mais il a combattu tant qu'il a pu. Dans les guerres on n'est jamais sûr d'être vainqueur; mais on peut sauver l'honneur en faisant son devoir de bon soldat. Tous les enfants doivent se souvenir de Vercingétorix et l'aimer.

cited in Girardet 1966: 81

In the work of some writers, the negative image of the Romans is not left as an implication. For example, in his preface to Dottin's 1918 book La Langue Gauloise, Jullian describes what he sees as the extermination of the Gaulish culture and language by the Romans in the most emotive terms: 'Je ne pardonne point à Rome et à César d'avoir été la cause de ce meurtre intellectuel venant après d'autres meurtres'(Dottin 1918:x) Similarly, in Bruno's book, an unsympathetic portrayal of Caesar is used explicitly as a contrast with the heroic virtues of Vercingetorix. Once again, the message is conveyed by means of Julien reading aloud from a textbook:

Enfants, réfléchissez en votre coeur, et demandez-vous lequel de ces deux hommes, dans cette lutte, fut le plus grand. Laquelle voudriez-vous avoir en vous, de l'âme héroïque du jeune Gaulois, ou de l'âme ambitieuse et insensible du conquérant romain?

Bruno 1878: 137

In keeping with a long Celtic literary tradition, Gaulish heroes such as Vercingetorix were idealised precisely because of their fortitude and valour in defeat. And in the wake of 1870, this can of course be seen as an attempt to salvage at least some national pride from the humiliation of Sedan. The French were invited to identify with the vanquished Gaulish heroes and to console themselves with the knowledge that just as the spirit of the Gauls lived on despite their defeat by the Romans, so



would the honour of France be restored and the humiliation of 1870 avenged. We shall look in more detail below at anti-German sentiments within narratives of language and nation. For the moment, our concern is with the contrast between Gauls and Romans, not with the contemporary analogy that could be drawn out of the conflict between conqueror and conquered. On the basis of what was to become a familiar opposition between the brave Gauls led by Vercingetorix, and the haughty Romans led by Caesar, it seems plausible to argue not only that a vision of Gaulish identity was widespread, but that that vision allowed little or no place for Latin influences. In other words, the extracts from Lavissee, Bruno and Jullian cited above lend credence to the view that the obverse of Gallomania was a hostility to all things Roman. Just as many English scholars saw their nation as definitively and exclusively Anglo-Saxon, so it might seem that many of their French counterparts saw their nation and its identity as largely, if not wholly, Gaulish.

However, the discourse of Gaulish origins, like Anglo-Saxonism, was not without its critics. Foremost amongst these was the historian whose intervention in the Alsace-Lorraine debate was cited in chapter two, Fustel de Coulanges. In his seminal multi-volume work, Histoire des Institutions Politiques d'Ancienne France, de Coulanges attempts to discredit the notion that the Franks were subjugators of a proto-democratic and independent Gaul. This removed one of the major pillars supporting the discourse of Gaulish ancestry; de Coulanges, however, was to carry out a full-scale demolition. In the volume of the Histoire entitled La Gaule Romaine (1891), de Coulanges's first heading is unequivocal: 'Qu'il n'existait pas d'unité nationale chez les Gaulois'. Under this heading he reinforces his view that projecting modern national identities back two millennia into the primeval past is, from the historian's point of view, an obvious and misleading anachronism:

La Gaule, avant la conquête romaine, ne formait pas un corps de nation. Les habitants n'avaient pas tous la même origine et n'étaient pas arrivés dans le pays en même temps. Les auteurs anciens assurent qu'ils ne parlaient pas tous la même langue. Ils n'avaient ni les mêmes institutions ni les mêmes lois.

Coulanges 1891: 5

De Coulanges's view of the Gauls was also taken up by the most prominent contemporary historian of the language, Brunot. The similarities can clearly be seen in Brunot's description of Gaul in the introduction to the first volume of his Histoire de la Langue Française: 'l'unité nationale n'existait pas, la patrie se bornait, aux yeux de la plupart, aux limites étroites d'une cité, en lutte perpétuelle avec ses voisines' (1905:25). As we shall see below, in the case of Brunot and de Coulanges, these views can be partly explained by their admiration for all things Roman. But at the root of their attempts to undermine the simplistic identification of Gaul with France was the view that this conflation of past and present represented an unacceptable anachronism.

Despite its critics, the myth of Gaulish ancestry remained a powerful discourse of national origins within nineteenth-century France, comparable in some ways with the discourse of Anglo-Saxonism which was becoming increasingly popular in England. Yet, as we suggested above, the myth of Gaulish origin displays one crucial difference from Anglo-Saxonism. In the English context it was plausible to argue that the founding people and the founding language were one and the same. It was an argument that the advocates of a Gaulish vision of nation in France were unable to put forward to support their views. Throughout the late nineteenth century, as we have seen in previous chapters, the French language was feted as a potent symbol of national pride and unity. The inescapable truth, however, was that it was manifestly not a legacy of a Gaulish past. It was a problem which the English did not have to face, convinced that their language and their forefathers were thoroughbred Anglo-Saxon stock. In other words, the discourse of Gaulish ancestry could never emulate the success of Anglo-Saxonism and present itself as the sole basis for a vision of French national identity. The French may indeed have seen themselves as Gauls: but they could not realistically see themselves as Gauls and nothing more. Their historical myths were telling them that they were Gauls, but their linguistic scholarship was telling them that they were Latins. Examining the way in which this scholarship underlined the Latin pedigree of the French language must be our next task.

## A Roman language

Amongst the large body of late-nineteenth-century writing on the history of the French language, references to the role played by the language of the Gauls are conspicuous by their almost total absence. The reason for this was that the overwhelming majority of serious linguistic scholars agreed that the influence of Gaulish words on French was so minute as to be insignificant. A few isolated figures did attempt to magnify this influence. In 1873 Granier de Cassagnac published his Histoire des origines de la langue française, in which he argued that French and all the other Romance languages were derived not from Latin but from Gaulish. Such a view was ridiculed by Paris. In his review article in the Revue Critique, he dismissed de Cassagnac's theory with a mixture of contempt and disbelief: 'Nous n'avons peut-être jamais vu un livre où tout soit aussi constamment mauvais' (Paris 1873:299). Another writer who underlined the linguistic contribution to French made by the Gauls was Callet, who launched a bitter attack against those whom he labelled the 'Latinomanes' or 'Romanomanes' 'dont M. Littré est le chef très érudit' (1911:733). But despite his attempts to illustrate that the Celtic element in the language of post-Roman Gaul was far greater than had been supposed, the best description of such a language that even Callet could plausibly muster was that it was a 'patois moitié celte et moitié latin' (1911:732). Even that ardent champion of the Gauls, Jullian, was reduced to speculating on the existence of some intangible Gaulish spirit embodied in the French vocabulary. He had attacked the view that France was inspired by the 'génie latin'; but he had no choice but to accept the Latin provenance of French:

Faut-il, à l'origine profonde du système de notre langage, rechercher d'anciennes et indéracinables traditions laissées par les Gaulois, qui ont habité cette terre? Quelle que soit la solution que nous apportera l'avenir de la science, un fait est acquis: c'est qu'avec de la matière latine que la France a façonné sa propre langue.

Jullian 1922: 249

The facts were inescapable. Noting that Gaulish influence was confined to the names of places and geographical features, Paris underlined the overwhelmingly Latin nature of French, pointing also to the consensus that he believed existed on this subject:

Nous parlons latin: personne aujourd'hui, parmi les gens de bon sens, ne songe à le contester et à rattacher au gaulois soit le français, soit tel de nos parlers provinciaux.

Paris 1888: 166

There could hardly be a more emphatic statement of the Latin nature of French than Paris's affirmation: 'nous parlons latin'. In other words, French was not merely an offshoot or derivative of Latin; it was Latin incarnate. Indeed, a few lines before the extract cited immediately above, Paris had elaborated upon the absolute identity of French and Latin:

Nous parlons latin, ai-je dit. Il ne faut plus en effet répéter, comme on le fait trop souvent, que les langues romanes "viennent" du latin, qu'elles sont les "filles" dont la langue latine est la "mère". Il n'y a pas des langues mères et des langues filles. Le langage va sans cesse en se modifiant, mais ses états successifs ne se séparent pas avec plus de netteté que ses variations locales.

Paris 1888: 165

We noted in chapter two that Paris viewed the French language as a vast "tapisserie" within which there were no significant internal divisions; in other words French represented a geographical continuum. What we see in the extract above is that this notion of a linguistic continuum applies also to the diachronic dimension. To say that French was a continuation of Latin in the sense that it was descended from it was, for Paris, inadequate. The notion of French and Latin as two parts of the same historical continuum underlines that they are not two related but separate phenomena, but that they are different elements of an underlying historical unity, in the same way as writers such as Sweet and Freeman insisted that the language of the Anglo-Saxons was an early form of English rather than a source from which English was to emerge. Writing in the first edition of the philological journal Romania, one

way in which Paris expresses this relationship is by referring to French and the other Romance tongues not as separate languages derived from Latin but as its 'dialectes populaires' (1872:19). Again, what is implied is that the apparent diversity of these "languages" is less significant than their fundamental unity.

Paris was not alone in insisting upon the absolute identity of French with Latin. A similar point was made by Brunot, who argues that 'le français n'est autre chose que le latin parlé dans Paris et la contrée qui l'avosine' (1905:15). Even writers such as Brachet, who, as we see in this extract, differed dramatically from Paris and many other theorists in continuing to use the naturalistic paradigm of Schleicher, nevertheless shared the widespread view that French and Latin represented not two languages, but one:

Thus penetrating by means of a strict analysis into the innermost organisation of language, one sees that living words change and grow, and that Latin and French for example, are in reality only two successive conditions of one language.

Brachet 1873: i

To argue that French and Latin were essentially the same language was a bold claim. An alternative and slightly less controversial view was that French was indeed related to Latin, but that it was also recognisably different from it, to the extent that it could be deemed a separate language. Although it is not consistent with the view he expresses in the extract above, Brachet also refers to French and Latin as separate but related languages, arguing that 'there is not a single broken link in the long chain which connects the French with the Latin language (1873:viii). Brunot, in an excerpt cited in chapter two, had described the 'transformation ininterrompue' between French and Latin. Yet for all his insistence on the close links between the two, Brunot recognised that they were not the same language. His interventions in the debate over the language of instruction in schools clearly show that his insistence on the continuity between French and Latin was accompanied by the firm belief that French should nevertheless be seen as an independent language.

Another influential writer on language who underlines the continuity of French and Latin whilst acknowledging that they were separate languages was Littré. As we saw above, the pro-Gaulish writer Callet contemptuously labelled Littré 'chef érudit des Romanomanes'. However, such a label would have been applied far more appropriately to Paris. As far as Littré is concerned, Latin is, unequivocally, a dead language, although its qualities are considered to live on in its descendants, chiefly French. Littré argues that the transition between the two generations occurred around the twelfth century. Writing in 1863, his description of this transition reflects the powerful influence of the Schleicherian naturalistic paradigm within linguistic scholarship at that time:

D'abord c'est la phase de formation latente et de végétation; le latin, comme un grand arbre dont le tronc est frappé de mort, se dépouille peu à peu de ses feuilles et de ses rameaux; mais l'inclemence mortelle n'en atteint pas les racines plongées dans le sol; de ces racines il sort des rejetons vigoureux, qui, vienne le temps, seront des arbres. Ce temps arrive: et le français, pour ne parler que de lui, est en pleine sève et vigueur au douzième siècle.

Littré 1863 vol.1: xlviii

The key point which emerges from this analysis of the two principal means of describing the relationship between French and Latin is that the differences are far outweighed by the similarities. Essentially, they were different ways of conceptualising the same central theme; whether French and Latin were seen as one and the same language or as related but separate languages, what was emphasised about them, almost without exception, was their fundamental identity. Paris claimed that no-one seriously doubted that French people spoke Latin itself. This may be something of an exaggeration, but what is beyond doubt is that in late-nineteenth-century France, few would have dissented from the view that French was overwhelmingly descended from Latin. It was a message which ever more historians of the language could communicate to ever larger sections of the population through the textbooks and historical grammars used in the new school curricula. The schoolchildren of the Third Republic may have learned that they should strive to emulate the heroism of their ancestor Vercingetorix; but the whole

weight of linguistic scholarship underlined that they should also be proud to speak the language of Caesar.

This asymmetry between narratives of history and language clearly creates the potential for contradiction and conflict. However, there are two important points which should be borne in mind. First, it should be remembered that a discrepancy between language and identity could readily be accommodated within the dominant post-revolutionary discourse of nation. The very principle so stoutly defended with reference to 1789 in the Alsace-Lorraine debate was that language could not and should not be equated with identity. The enduring power of this voluntarist, political definition of the nation helps explain why the asymmetry between linguistic and historical narratives did not generate as many problems as may be expected.

The second point is of more interest for our purposes. This is the fact that, in practice, narratives of language and identity did not remain completely separate. If our analysis of the myth of Gaulish origin was by definition bound up with questions of identity, our discussion of the Latin legacy has so far been focused exclusively upon linguistic matters. We have examined the various ways in which the French language was seen to be related to its Latin forebear, without examining any potential overlaps with notions of identity. Such overlaps, however, are clearly visible. Many writers argued not only that the French spoke a Roman language, but also that they were essentially a Roman people. There seems to be little more than a slight difference in emphasis between Paris's claim '*nous parlons latin*' and Brunetière's assertion, '*nous sommes latins, foncièrement, éminemment Latins*' (1885:870). But that seemingly innocuous shift reveals a point of much wider significance. It illustrates the way in which, as with Anglo-Saxonism in England, a discourse of language fed into a powerful discourse of identity. Examining the belief that the French were Latin in their identity as well as in their language is the object of the following section.

### A Roman people

In his view that the French were Latin in their language and in their identity, Brunetière was by no means an isolated exception. We noted above that influential figures such as Brunot and de Coulanges were unequivocally opposed to what they regarded as the anachronistic identification of nineteenth-century France with first-century Gaul. What concerns us here is the obverse of this hostility to the myth of Gaulish origins, namely, a profound admiration for the achievements of the Gauls' Roman conquerors. This extended beyond eulogies to the glories of Latin. Latin was only one part of what was seen as the highest possible form of civilisation, in comparison with which the cultures of the subject peoples were regarded as crude and primitive. Brunot argues that it was the obvious superiority of Roman civilisation which ultimately was to prompt so many of the peoples conquered by Rome to embrace Roman ways:

Aux autres [tribus] Rome offrait aussi de quoi les séduire; c'était non seulement ce que les nations modernes offrent aux habitants de leur colonies, la paix et l'initiation à une civilisation supérieure, mais l'admission à toutes les charges ouvertes aux métropolitains.

Brunot 1905: 27

In this extract we see a clear analogy between the Roman conquest of Gaul and the late-nineteenth-century scramble for colonial possessions. This view that France was continuing the *mission civilisatrice* of her Roman forebears played an important part in the legitimising discourse of imperial aggrandisement. Thomson (1964:167) identifies a 'strong Roman tradition which has haunted all her colonial enterprise', citing the extension of French citizenship as an example of this continuity. The significance of this extract for our present purposes, however, is to illustrate the esteem in which Rome was held. For writers such as Brunot and de Coulanges, the foundation and the keystone in the edifice of French national identity was not the fragmented, tribal culture of the Gauls, but the illustrious and enduring civilisation of imperial Rome.



The notion of the shared *mission civilisatrice* is one example of the way in which France was seen as torchbearer of the Roman legacy.<sup>22</sup> Another example of this close identification of past with present, and of Rome with France, can be seen in the insistence that Roman authorities did not compel their subjects to learn the imperial language, Latin. This point is clearly emphasised by de Coulanges: 'Jamais Rome ne se donna la peine de faire la guerre aux langues des vaincus' (1891:132). Brunot conveys the same point in more detail, arguing that whilst the linguistic unification of the empire was to be welcomed, it was a matter of principle that there should be no element of compulsion:

Ce qu'on sait bien, c'est que l'administration impériale ... comprit quel avantage la diffusion du latin devait avoir pour l'unification de l'empire; au reste, dès les derniers siècles de la République, Rome chercha à le répandre et, comme le dit Valère Maxime, à en augmenter le prestige dans le monde entier. Mais jamais elle ne prétendit le substituer aux autres langues par la contrainte.

Brunot 1905: 30

Although Brunot is referring to the Roman Republic, his comments on the benefits of linguistic unification and on the importance of voluntarism can also be seen to apply to the Third Republic in France. After all, as we have seen in previous chapters, this insistence on consent rather than coercion in matters relating to language and identity was one of the central principles defended under the Third Republic, especially in the dispute over Alsace-Lorraine. In other words, France was continuing in the tradition of Rome not only in extending the benefits of civilisation to the world, but also in underlining that the language of that civilisation was one which by definition had to be freely chosen. Thus, by underlining that the links between Rome and France extended beyond the linguistic legacy of Latin, writers such as Brunot, de Coulanges and others were effectively voicing their support for Brunetière's contention: 'nous sommes latins'.

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<sup>22</sup> Of course this vision of national identity as originating in the values and institutions of imperial Rome is just as open to the charge of anachronism as the view that it originates with the Gauls.

Further evidence of the extent of this Latinate vision of French identity can be seen in abundance in the work of the linguistic theorists whose comments on Latin were discussed above. We have already noted that Brunot's sympathetic views towards Latin fitted in with his wider conception of French identity as deriving largely from the Roman legacy. Other writers also made this small but significant shift from eulogising the Latin language to constructing a Latinate discourse of identity. Indeed, such was the interest in this Latin dimension that a group of French linguists under the leadership of Paris and Meyer established a journal in 1872 dedicated to the study of what they called "Roman" languages. The journal was entitled Romania, and it styled itself as a publication 'consacré à l'étude des langues et littératures romanes'(vol.1:title page). In his introductory article in the first edition, Paris clearly indicates the extent to which this new forum for contemporary linguistic debates took its inspiration, not to mention its name, from the world of ancient Rome:

En résumé, le mot Romania, fait pour embrasser sous un nom commun l'ensemble des possessions des Romains, a servi particulièrement à désigner l'empire d'Occident, quand il fut détachée de celui de Constantinople...Depuis la destruction successive de toutes les restes de la domination romaine, il a exprimé l'ensemble des pays qui étaient habités par les Romani, ainsi que le groupe des hommes parlant encore la langue de Rome, et par suite la civilisation romaine elle-même.

Paris 1872: 16

What is obvious from this extract is that Paris goes far beyond the field of language study and broaches much wider questions relating to history and identity. The extent to which Romania conflated discourses of language and identity can be seen even more clearly later in the same article, when Paris calls for a revival of the ancient notion of Romania as a viable basis for contemporary identity. He argues that its demise began during the Middle Ages when it started to fragment into what he describes as "individual" national identities, a process which he wishes to reverse before it is too late:

Cette individualité a même été assez marquée pour que le sentiment de la communauté ait pu presque s'effacer: il doit

trouver une réviviscence durable dans l'étude des langues et des littératures romanes, à laquelle nous consacrons ce recueil.

Paris 1872: 22

In his attempts to revive a pan-Latin identity grounded in the traditions of Rome, Paris did not confine himself to the pages of Romania. His contention, 'nous parlons latin', cited above, was taken from an article in a second linguistic journal founded in this period. This second journal also reflects the pro-Roman tendencies seen in Romania, though broadening its focus to encompass the Gauls: it was the Revue des Patois Gallo-Romans, the first edition of which appeared in 1887 with a dedication to Paris himself. As with his articles in Romania, Paris makes clear in his 1888 article in the Revue that his views on the Latin provenance of French are matched by a fervent belief in the need for a revived pan-Latin identity. In addition to France he argues that this should embrace Spain, Italy and the contemporary state of Romania, along with Romance-speaking areas of Switzerland and the Tyrol:

La langue que nous parlons, que parlent les autres peuples que je viens de nommer, est le roman, la langue des Romani, c'est-à-dire le latin; c'est pour cela qu'on appelle ces peuples les peuples romans, leurs langues les langues romanes, et qu'il existe ou qu'il devrait exister entre eux un sentiment de solidarité et d'union remontant au temps où tous portaient avec orgueil ce nom qu'aujourd'hui ils ont oublié, sauf dans les Alpes et dans les Balkans.

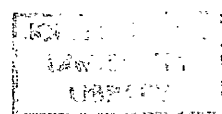
Paris 1888: 165

Insofar as they illustrate how readily Paris elided questions of language with discourses of identity, these extracts provide further evidence of the way in which linguistic debates tie in with much wider ideological matters. But the interest of these extracts from Paris goes further; they provide vital insights into the particular vision of identity which underpinned Romania. Much of the linguistic scholarship we have examined so far in this discussion relates in some way to discourses of identity. But the identity in question has been, almost without exception, a specifically national identity. In contrast, the vision of identity set out by Paris and, as we shall see, by other pro-Latin writers, went beyond the national dimension.

'Romania' was by definition a supranational category. In Paris's view, it stretched from the Iberian peninsula to the Balkans, encompassing a whole range of peoples. And what united these disparate peoples was seen to be far more significant than what divided them. If it was national identities which divided them, what was the basis for what was seen as their more fundamental unity?

An obvious answer is the discourse of race. 'Romania' could quite plausibly be seen as a racial category, especially given the prevalence of such categories in late-nineteenth-century Europe. The extent to which the ideas and vocabulary of race saturated French society between 1880 and 1914 is clearly shown by Antoine and Martin (1985) in their survey of political discourse in the period. It comes as no surprise to find that, during the Dreyfus affair, the anti-Dreyfusards invoked an opposition between "franc" or "gaulois" on the one hand (terms which, ironically, had long been opposed to each other, as we noted above), and "fils de Juda" or "fils de Sem" on the other. However, as they point out, even such an ardent pro-Dreyfusard as Clemenceau opposed "Juif" to "Celte"(1985:79). In a similar vein, Brachet believed it was 'established as a law that the elements of language answer to the elements of races', and that 'the Frenchman does not belong to the same race as a Jew ... such resemblances as may exist between their languages are accidental' (1877:27 footnote). Against this backdrop, it was hardly surprising that notions of a pan-Latin identity and persistent references to 'les peuples romans' should take on definite racial connotations. The discourse of race was one of the few ways in which late-nineteenth-century Europe could conceive of an identity which existed beyond the national level.

But if it seems plausible to see 'Romania' as related to racial categories, it is vital to underline that its proponents were steadfastly opposed to the view that the much-vaunted Roman identity was based on racial grounds. This opposition is made clear by one of the most fervent admirers of the Roman world in general and of Latin in particular:



Nous ne sommes pas des Latins de race, il n'y a pas de races latines, pas plus qu'il n'y a pas des races aryennes, mais il y a une civilisation latine. Nous en jouissons:conservons-la.

de Gourmont 1910: 304

Meillet makes a similar point in an article written in 1916:

La diversité des types ethniques est grande dans les pays de langue néo-latine, d'un pays à l'autre, d'une partie d'un pays à l'autre partie, souvent d'un canton à l'autre. Il n'y a donc, entre les individus parlant les langues romanes, aucune communauté de "race".

Meillet 1921: 312

Paris also insists that the vocabulary of race and determinism has no place in his vision of 'Romania':

La Romania, ou l'union des nations romanes, n'a pas pour base une communauté de race. Quand on parle des races latines, on emploie une expression qui manque absolument de justesse: il n'y a pas de races latines. La langue et la civilisation romaines ont été adoptées, plus ou moins volontairement, par les races les plus diverses, Ligures, Ibères, Celtes, Illyriens, etc.

Paris 1872: 20

In these extracts we see the extent to which the legacy of the Roman world was identified with "civilisation". In the words of Paris in particular we see the emphasis on voluntarism and consent that we noted in the pro-Roman views of Brunot and de Coulanges. Indeed, so central were these themes to much of the work on Latin and the Roman legacy carried out at this time that it is plausible to describe them as defining features. In other words, it was not a common racial origin which was seen to unite the 'peuples romans'; on the contrary, what united them was a shared opposition to the very discourse of race and determinism.

These themes have a familiar ring to them, and they take us back to chapter one in particular. The way in which all these pro-Roman writers endorse notions of "civilisation" and voluntarism and simultaneously reject the deterministic

vocabulary of race clearly recalls the vitriolic debates over language, ethnicity and identity which crystallised around the issue of Alsace-Lorraine. Indeed, the resonances become louder still in the sentence which follows the extract from Paris's article cited immediately above:

C'est donc sur le sacrifice de la nationalité propre et originelle que repose l'unité des peuples romans; elle a pour base un principe tout différent de celui qui constitue l'unité germanique ou slave.

Paris 1872: 20

In this extract and others, as in the debates over Alsace-Lorraine, French positions on the question of nationality and identity are explicitly contrasted with what are seen as "Germanic" principles. We have already noted that the discourse of Gaulish ancestry frequently drew on established oppositions between a free, democratic Gaulish people and a tyrannical Frankish aristocracy. As the above extract suggests, a marked anti-Germanism can also be found in much of the work celebrating France's Roman legacy. Indeed, it is arguably one of the key themes underpinning journals such as *Romania*. Given its prominence during this era, and the fact that it represents a common theme amongst pro-Gaulish and pro-Roman writers, the anti-Germanism manifested in narratives of language and identity is a subject that clearly merits closer attention.

### **Union Sacrée: Romans and Gauls against the Germans**

In our discussion in chapter one of the effects of defeat in 1870, we have already encountered evidence of the depth of anti-German feeling within French scholarship. It was argued that the opposition to the naturalistic paradigm in language study, and the general reassertion of voluntarism against determinism in matters of language and nation, both spring from a widespread sense of hostility towards Germany in the wake of the war and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Additional and far more explicit evidence of the prevalence of anti-German sentiments can be found in contemporary French work on the national past. We shall proceed to demonstrate this point with reference to work on the history of the

French language. However, as we have seen above, even the linguistic scholars working in this field frequently strayed beyond the subject of language and broached much wider issues. Consequently, our first task is to illustrate how anti-Germanism was by no means confined to narratives of language.

Elaborating on an extract cited above, Paris explains the different principles which underlie the identity of the 'peuples romans' and that of the Germans and Slavs, to whom he is initially referring:

Chez ces peuples, la nationalité est exclusivement le produit du sang; la Romania au contraire est un produit tout historique. Son rôle paraît donc être, en faces des sociétés qui ne sont que des tribus agrandies, de représenter la fusion des races par la civilisation.

Paris 1872: 21

This dichotomy between a universalist, voluntarist "Roman" principle and a particularist, determinist "Germanic" vision of identity clearly mirrors the opposing positions taken up by French and German adversaries in the Alsace-Lorraine debate. By emphasising the significance of this distinction between principles of identity, and by explicitly associating the discourse of determinism with Germany, pro-Roman writers such as Paris were underlining that the rivalry between France and Germany, although heightened by contemporary events, was a phenomenon which stretched back two thousand years or more. Once more it was a question of constructing a legitimising historical narrative. It was important to stress that what was being defended in the Alsace-Lorraine debate was the legacy of 1789. But as the whole phenomenon of Gallomania shows clearly, it was widely felt in late-nineteenth-century France that a narrative beginning only in 1789 did not go back far enough. A far greater aura of sanctity could be attached to a set of principles which could be shown to have endured for two millennia, rather than a mere century. And the more sacred and fundamental the principles, the greater the legitimacy conferred on the struggle to defend them.

Even without considering the backdrop of post-war anti-German resentment against which journals such as Romania were first produced, a hostility to all things Germanic can clearly be seen in much of the work which eulogised the glories of the Roman world. One familiar ploy was to underline the barbarousness associated with the Germanic peoples, and to contrast this with the enlightened civilisation of the Roman empire:

Ce n'est que par l'influence latine que la France s'est différenciée  
des peuples barbares du nord et de l'est de l'Europe.

de Gourmont 1910: 302

Paris is far more explicit. Indeed, to make the contemporary resonances stronger still, he equates barbarism not with the rather vague and inclusive historical label "Germanic", but with the far more precise and contemporary adjective used specifically to refer to the new German state, "allemand":

Romania, c'est ici l'ensemble des Romani, la société romaine, le  
monde romain en opposition au monde allemand ou barbare.

Paris 1872: 15

This subtle elision of historical and contemporary references can be seen elsewhere in Paris's article:

Les conquérants (Allemands) avaient une haute opinion d'eux-  
mêmes et se regardaient comme très supérieur aux peuples chez  
lesquels ils venaient s'établir.

Paris 1872: 5

The conquest to which Paris is alluding here is the destruction of the Roman empire by the barbarians. But once more, by labelling those fifth-century conquerors as 'Allemands', the analogy with a far more recent invasion is made clear.

These examples of Paris's anti-Germanism were taken from Romania, which, together with the Revue des Patois Gallo-Romans, was primarily a linguistic journal.



But for Paris at least, it is the wider issues which seem to dominate; in his articles, language study seems to shift from the foreground to the background. As a result, it is in the work of other writers that we see this widespread anti-Germanism revealed in attitudes to the French language. For example, writing in 1877, Brachet uses what would have been extremely emotive rhetoric as he describes the influence of Frankish words on the French language as a 'German invasion' (1877:6). The hostility to Germanic influences can also be seen in the way in which they were clearly labelled as peripheral. As we have seen, drawing a distinction in this way between native and supposedly alien words was a feature of Anglo-Saxonist scholarship in England. Indeed, as we noted above, a handful of writers on the history of the French language attempted to use the same ploy to support the view that only Gaulish words were authentically French and that Latin was in some way peripheral. In a similar way, those who saw Latin as authentic and who wished to marginalise Germanic influences, attempted to minimise the extent to which those influences had permeated what they saw as the Latin core of the French language. For example, Brachet insists that 'this invasion touched the vocabulary only; there are no traces of German influence on French syntax' (1877:11). In fact, attempts to reduce the importance of German influences can be seen even before the events of 1870 polarised the situation further. Brachet's insistence on the superficial nature of German influences clearly follows on from Littré's comments in his pioneering Histoire de la langue française, published in 1863:

En fait de langue l'élément germanique est purement néologique; et si je puis ici transporter les termes de la physiologie, il est de juxtaposition, non de intussusception; il apporte un certain nombre de mots, il n'apporte pas des actions organiques qui dérangent la majestueuse régularité de la formation romane.

Littré 1863 vol.1: xxvi

Littré was one of the most fervent torchbearers of the Latin legacy amongst historians of the language. Indeed, as we noted above, one writer who was keen to underline the importance of the Gauls had contemptuously labelled him a 'Romanomane'. Given the extent to which supporters of a more pro-Gaulish vision of French identity found themselves at odds with the pro-Latin faction, it is

somewhat surprising to find Bordier and Charton closely echoing Littré's view of the extent of Germanic influences. Having underlined the predominantly Gaulish character of the French nation, they argue that this supposed homogeneity arises because the influence of the Frankish languages ("Tudesque") did not penetrate far beneath the surface:

Le tudesque a vécu à côté du roman et du français, sans guère pénétrer dans le tissu de notre langue, et plus celle-ci a marché... plus aussi elle a repoussée, par une antipathie naturelle, les constructions, les mots et les sons germaniques.

Bordier & Charton 1881: 124

In other words, Bordier and Charton might have disagreed vehemently with Littré as to whether France was Gaulish or Latin. But all sides were agreed on the fact that France owed little or nothing to Frankish or Germanic influences. Earlier anti-German stereotypes used by pro-Gaulish writers revolved around the populist notion that the Franks/Germans should be despised because they represented the aristocracy.<sup>23</sup> However, in an example of the growing convergence between pro-Gaulish and pro-Roman writers in the face of a Germanic other, late-nineteenth-century writers who drew on the discourse of Gaulish ancestry generally saw the Germans not so much as aristocrats subduing a free Gaul, but as barbarians threatening the whole of western civilisation. Bordier and Charton's comments reveal obvious similarities with the rhetoric of Paris:

Si l'on suit la marche de la civilisation dans notre Occident, on verra qu'après avoir succombé sous les coups des peuples du Nord, elle ne s'est relevée, peu à peu, qu'au fur et à mesure que nous nous sommes purgés de ce que nous avons de germanique...Loin d'avoir contribué à restaurer la société, les Germains n'ont fait que la corrompre davantage et qu'en rendre la restauration plus difficile.

Bordier & Charton 1881: 129

A similar hostility to Germanic influences can be detected in the work of another pro-Gaulish writer, Jullian. It was he who had pleaded, 'qu'on ne me parle plus du

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<sup>23</sup> See p.239 above

“génie latin”, avowing that ‘je ne peux plus admirer l’Empire romain, et me réjouir de ce que la Gaule lui ait appartenu’ (1922:188). Yet even this arch-critic of pro-Roman writers such as Paris, Brunot and de Coulanges could unite with them in an anti-Germanic chorus:

Des Francs et de la Germanie il n’est rien venu qui ait relevé la dignité des hommes et qui ait égayé leur vie. Si toutefois, dans les temps dont nous parlons, la dignité humaine a survécu et grandi à travers toutes de misères...ce n’est point parce que la Gaule s’était livrée à des rois barbares, c’est parce qu’elle était devenue chrétienne.

Jullian 1922: 203

What is illustrated by these examples of anti-German rhetoric from pro-Roman and pro-Gaulish writers is the extent to which hostility to all things Germanic was widespread amongst major cultural figures in late-nineteenth-century France. In the face of what were perceived on all sides as alien Germanic influences, such differences as existed between supporters of the Gauls and Romans were buried in what can be seen as a cultural rehearsal of the political *union sacrée* of 1914.

Given the extent of the anti-German consensus, it is not surprising that it is reflected in the school textbooks of the period. As Citron notes, history books made no reference whatsoever to the fact that the very name of France comes from the Franks. In Lavisse’s *Histoire de France*, “Gaul” changes into “France” at the baptism of Clovis, described not as a Frankish king, but as a ‘roi Carolingien’:

Les évêques et les Gaulois furent très contents du baptême de Clovis. Ils l’aidèrent à devenir roi de toute la Gaule. Dans la suite la Gaule changea de nom. Elle s’appela la France.

cited in Citron 1987: 31

The fact that even the most obvious legacy of Germanic influences could be played down in this way indicates the extent to which narratives of language and history were purged of all things Germanic. As Cerquiglini shows, the same applied to the narratives of literary continuity constructed by Paris, ‘repoussant, pour des raisons

politiques, toute influence germanique sur l'épopée primitive romane'(1989:82).<sup>24</sup>

This is not to say that there were not other foils against which national identity was defined; in the imperial context, French identity was defined against a whole host of other cultural groups. But the work carried out at the end of the nineteenth century on the history of the language and the nation shows unequivocally that the dominant other, historically, racially, and implacably, was the "German". It was a polarity which was felt to be both deeply rooted in the past and supremely relevant to the present. And in comparison to this most fundamental of all rivalries, differences between Gauls and Romans appeared trivial.

The deep-seated anti-Germanism revealed in so much of the work on the history of France and of French provides an appropriate conclusion for our discussion of historical narratives. For the way in which scholars from different fields and from varying perspectives were more or less united in marginalising Germanic influences is perhaps the clearest possible illustration of Orwell's contention that the shape of the past is moulded by the concerns of the present. It is a point which applies, with equal force, to all the narratives of language and nation, both in Britain and in France, which we have examined in the course of this chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Adrian Armstrong for this reference.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of this thesis we have explored four different, though often overlapping, fields of debate involving language. The broad theme of chapter one was attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm within British and French language study. Many of the issues raised in chapter one were then revisited in chapter two, in which we focused specifically on the remarkable expansion in dialect study during this period. Chapter three examined the ways in which language was invoked in contemporary debates about the future of Britain and France as global and imperial powers. Finally, in chapter four, we returned to the national context to analyse the relationship between work on the history of English and French, and contemporary narratives of national identity and history.

We have covered a broad canvas, moving back and forth not only between Britain and France, but also between areas such as cultural history, social and political history, linguistics, and historiography. Despite this breadth of coverage, however, this project has by no means explored all the ways in which discourses of language relate to wider concerns in the period and countries under discussion. The way in which the issue of spelling reform was bound up with contemporary - and pressing - debates about educational provision is one topic which we have had to exclude. Another is the extent to which ideas about language related to what was one of the main fields of debate throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in Victorian Britain: religion. In other words, there are areas which remain to be explored.

Nevertheless, significant ground has been covered in the course of our four chapters; enough to allow us to sketch out an overall picture on the basis of our comparison of Britain and France. That picture, in essence, shows broad similarities between the two countries concealing important differences. The fact that each chapter has dealt with a particular aspect of the relationship

between language and nation in relation to both Britain and France is itself a clear indication that there is much common ground. In both countries, as we have seen, we can identify an enormous expansion in work on the history of the language and on dialect, together with a widespread tendency to draw on linguistic evidence in debates about national status in the world. Even in chapter one, we can identify a similarity in that in both countries, developments in linguistic scholarship were defined, admittedly in very different ways, in relation to the naturalistic paradigm.

More important than these similarities, however, are the significant differences between Britain and France which have emerged in each of the chapters. These differences are not always immediately apparent; yet they become visible the moment we narrow our focus from the overall frame and examine the British and French contexts in any detail. Indeed, the existence of important differences was clearly indicated at the outset, when we examined the very different dominant responses to the naturalistic paradigm in each country. Contrasting perceptions of nature and, more significantly, of nation, also help explain why the dominant trends within the dialect study carried out in each country during the period were so different. In this sense, chapter two serves to magnify the themes - and the differences - indicated in chapter one.

Again, in chapter three, a detailed examination of an area of common ground between France and Britain revealed significant and deep-rooted differences. We saw that, in both of these global and imperial powers, fears about the fate of the language in the world were widespread. The point, however, is that those fears were very different. British concerns centred around the prospect of losing control over a language that was spreading too quickly; for the French, in contrast, the problem was that the language was not spreading quickly enough. Moving to chapter four, differences between Britain and France, though less polarised, remain visible. The dichotomy between Gauls and Romans in the French context, though significant, was by no means absolute; as we have seen, contemporary political circumstances meant that both these discourses of

identity could be reconciled in the face of a common Germanic enemy. In Britain, there was no such implacable common foe which could forge a united front amongst Anglo-Saxonists and supporters of the discourse of Britishness.

The overriding point to be reiterated, however, is one which applies in equal measure to both countries; as such, it can be counted as a similarity rather than a difference. This central point, which has been demonstrated repeatedly in each chapter, is the extent to which, during this turbulent and immensely complex period, ideas about language were inextricably bound up with developments in the wider cultural, social and political context. It is perhaps in chapter three that we have seen the most obvious illustration of this point, with a wide range of British and French observers drawing, in different ways, on language in order to express their ideas and concerns about empire and the global status of the nation. However, similar links, though less visible, can be discerned in all the areas we have examined in the chapters above. In the case of attitudes to the naturalistic paradigm and to dialect, as with the scholarship devoted to tracing the history of English and French, ideas about language cannot be examined as though they existed in a vacuum; it is this which is perhaps the most fundamental point which has been demonstrated in the course of this discussion.

To emphasise this point is not to set out to undermine the legitimacy and importance of language study. On the contrary, it is to insist on its central role, and to highlight the way in which it shapes and is shaped by wider forces in intellectual, cultural and social history. It is precisely this interaction which we have attempted to trace in our discussion of the period from 1870 to 1914. The irony of course is that this was the era during which the field of knowledge we know as linguistics first acquired the status of an independent subject. The same applies to other subjects such as English and History. In that sense, it was an age more concerned with establishing than with crossing boundaries. The problem, however, is not with boundaries in themselves; they are clearly necessary and useful tools. The problem arises if these boundaries are accorded more status than they deserve, or, worse still, if they are treated as natural rather

than arbitrary features. If this happens, far from aiding intellectual enquiry they can often end up constraining it.

The overriding point is that the study of language should not be marginalised or treated as just another self-contained specialism. It should never be forgotten that, as Williams has put it, 'a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world'(1977:21). But the central role of language within human society and history was well understood long before the era of Williams. As one observer expressed it in 1916; 'In the lives of individuals and of societies, language is a factor of greater importance than any other. For the study of language to remain solely the business of a handful of specialists would be a quite unacceptable state of affairs.' These comments are all the more pertinent as they were made by the figure often credited with having established modern linguistics as an independent subject: Saussure (1983:7). In other words, Saussure himself, together with Bréal, Meillet and other seminal figures who laid the foundations of modern linguistics, clearly recognised that boundaries delimiting language study were for practical convenience only. In short, they recognised that ideas about language involved more than just language. It is a point which applies, with equal force, to all the discourses of language which we have examined in the course of this thesis.

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