Linguistic Stereotypes and National Topoi from Antiquity to Two Early 18th-century English Lexicographic Texts

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Abstract

The article focusses on the process of recontextualization of ancient topoi in the English lexicographic representation of "languages"/ "nations" in the early eighteenth century. Laying emphasis on the way in which the dictionaries of the first half of the eighteenth century contribute to the shaping of the correlation between "language" and "nation", a correlation which is central to the ideology of standardization, the article examines how linguistic and ethnic stereotypes that can be traced back to Antiquity find their way into representations of English present in Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1728) and in the second edition of Nathan Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1736).

Keywords: Commonplace, 18th-century Dictionaries, Ethnic Stereotype, Language Ideology, National Identity

Introduction

Previous accounts have emphasized that "ethnic stereotypes, ancient and modern, though revealing almost nothing about the groups they are intended to define, say a great deal about the community which produces them" (Hall 1989, ix). Taking into account analyses that see the eighteenth century as the time when standard language ideology rose to prominence (Milroy and Milroy 1999; Watts 2011) the present paper examines the way in which two of the most influential texts in the English lexicography of the eighteenth century, Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopædia* (1728) and Nathan Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1736), recontextualize ethnic stereotypes that have their roots in representations which emerged during Antiquity. On the one hand, the aim is to examine in detail the complex process of recontextualization through which (late) ancient ethnic topoi become part of modern representations of the English language "devised to glorify England as a nation" (Rodríguez-Álvarez 2022, 178). At the same time, the paper means to underline the role of the lexicographic texts of the first half of the eighteenth century in the shaping of a correlation central to the discourse of standardization, that between the English national identity and the English language (see Rodríguez-Álvarez 2009; Vişan 2018; Rodríguez-Álvarez 2022).

As means of taxinomization and as attempts to capture the totality of knowledge (see Yeo 2001 and 2003), eighteenth-century lexicographic texts

such as Chambers's *Cyclopædia* and Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* make a significant contribution to the transformation of what Benedict Anderson has famously called "imagined communities". Moreover, both these lexicographic texts function as significant points of reference in (eighteenth-century) lexicography, as Chambers's *Cyclopædia* serves as a source of inspiration not only for Bailey's early eighteenth-century universal dictionary but also for several well-known lexicographic texts, which include the *Encylopédie française*. Reprinted in multiple editions over the years, Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* was not only "the most comprehensive English dictionary of its day" (Osselton 2009, 151) but also, in its various versions, one of the most popular dictionaries of the eighteenth-century (Reddick 2009, 156). The *Dictionarium Britannicum* also served as a working base for Johnson's 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Starnes and Noyes 1991, 117), most probably in its 1736 edition, which, unlike the first edition (1730), includes prefatory material that provides a historical account of the English language (118; Vișan 2018, 285-87).

Focusing on the historical accounts of the English language from the early to the late modern age, Alicia Rodríguez-Álvarez has pertinently underlined that such accounts emerge as fairly homogeneous, based on common value judgements and similar bodies of ideas (2022, 198). As will be shown in subsequent sections, this common ground significantly relies on a commonplace whose roots are to be found in Antiquity, and which finds its way into English lexicography through a series of previous European texts.

1. Ethnic Stereotypes in Two Early 18th-century Texts

While national consciousness has usually been envisaged as a nineteenth-century phenomenon (Burke 2013, 22), there are many continuities concerning "nation" across the divide between the early and the late modern age (23). Relying on ethnic stereotypes, the excerpts below, which appear in representations of the English language in two significant texts of eighteenth-century English lexicography, emphasize the existence of such continuities:

Chambers 1728 (LANGUAGE)	Bailey 1736 (The Preface)
There is found a constant Resemblance between the Genius or Natural Complexion of each People and the Language they speak. Thus the *Greeks*, a polite but voluptuous People, had a *Language* perfectly suitable, full of Delicacy and Sweetness. The *Romans*, who seemed only born to command, had a *Language* noble, nervous, and august; and their Descendants, the *Italians*, are sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, which is as visible in their *Language* as their Manners. The *Language* of the *Spaniards* is full of that Gravity and Haughtiness of Air which make the distinguishing Character of the People. The *French*, who have a World of Vivacity, have a *Language* that runs extremely brisk and lively. And the *English*, who are naturally blunt, thoughtful and of few Words, have a *Language* exceedingly short, concise, and sententious. (429)	Some have remark'd that there is a constant Resemblance between the Genius of each People and the Language which they speak, and thence The *French* who are a People of great Vivacity have a Language that runs extreme Lively and Brisk, and the *Italians* who succeeded the *Romans* have quite lost the Augustness and Nervousness of the *Latin* and sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, as well in their Language as their Manners. The *Spaniards*, whose distinguishing Character is a haughty Air, have a Language resembling their Qualities, yet not without Delicacy and Sweetness. The *Romans* who seem'd to be a People design'd for Command, us'd a Language that was noble, august and nervous. The *Greeks* who were a polite but voluptuous People, us'd a Language exactly adapted thereto. The *English* who are naturally Blunt, thoughtful and of few Words, use a Language that is very short, concise and sententious.

Tab. 1 – Language and genius in two English dictionaries

Highlighting a correlation between the genius of "each people" and "the language they speak", the entry for LANGUAGE in Ephraim Chambers' 1728 *Cyclopædia* includes a comparison between English and the languages of European nations. English, perceived as "short, concise and sententious", is the last of the items listed in a comparison which starts chronologically with the languages of the Greco-Roman world (the "polite but voluptuous" Greek and the "noble, nervous and august" Latin). The list goes on to include Romance languages such as Italian

(represented as having degenerated into a "soft" and "effeminate" language), Spanish (seen as "grave" and "haughty"), and French, characterized as "brisk and lively". The representation of "national" stereotypes and their correlation with languages includes elements of both derision and praise, emphasized by the contrast between negative epithets such as "soft", "effeminate" or "haughty", and attributes such as "polite", "noble", "august", "thoughtful" or "concise".

Recontextualizing remarks which, in Chambers's lexicographic text, were part of an encyclopaedic entry, Nathan Bailey includes the same representation of European languages in his Preface to the second edition of his *Dictionarium Britannicum* (Vișan 2018, 290-92). Significantly, no longer included in an encyclopaedic entry meant to provide a comprehensive representation of the keyword "language", the linguistic bluntness of the English becomes part of the paratext of a universal dictionary more narrowly focused on "English". Also fulfilling a paratextual function, the Latin title of Bailey's lexicographic text (*Dictionarium Britannicum: Or A more Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary Than any Extant*) not only brings the English language into focus, but also reinforces the connection between eighteenth-century English culture and *Britannia*, a name which emerges as part of an imagined Roman Empire. In Bailey's early eighteenth-century Preface, which also selects passages from Chambers's encyclopaedic entry for ENGLISH, the recontextualized excerpt becomes part of "an encomium" to this language (297).

Bailey's choice of changing the order of presentation of the European languages in his lexicographic paratext cannot be random. It is plausible to assume that this choice has not been dictated only by an attempt to conceal the author's plagiarism of Chambers, but also by a *translatio imperii*. In the Preface to Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum*, English no longer follows French, but is immediately placed after Greek and Latin in the list of languages and nations. Bailey's decision to use a different order than Chambers can be interpreted as prompted by the desire to emphasize a more direct connection between the English language and a prestigious classical heritage (see Considine 2008; Rodríguez-Álvarez 2022). Here, English is no longer the last language in a list of (more) prestigious European vernaculars. Instead, it becomes the central image in a dictionary preface which emphasizes its superiority over other European vernaculars.

As my previous discussion of the excerpts above has revealed, Chambers's representation is by no means original. The ultimate source for Chambers's entry for LANGUAGE is in fact the French Jesuit Dominique Bouhours's seventeenth-century *Les entretiens d'Ariste et d'Evgène* (1671), which includes "La langue Françoise", a famous apology of French (Vișan 2018, 294-95):

Bouhours 1671 (La langue Françoise)	**Chambers 1728 (LANGUAGE)**
Car le langage suit d'ordinaire la disposition des esprits; & chaque nation a toujours parlé selon son genie. Les Grecs, qui étoient gens polis et voluptueux, avoient vn langage delicat, & plein de douceur. Les Romains, qui n'aspiroient qu'à la gloire, & qui sembloient n'estre nez que pour gouverner, avoient un langage noble, & auguste; ce qui a fait dire à vn Père de l'Eglise que la langue latine est vne langue fiere et imperieuse, qui commande, plutôst qu'elle ne persuade. Le langage des Espagnols se sent fort de leur gravité, & de cet air superbe qui est commun à toute la nation. Les Allemans ont vne langue rude & grossière; les Italiens en ont vne molle & effeminée, selon le temperament & les mœurs de leur païs. Il faut donc que les François, qui sont naturellement brusques, & qui ont beaucoup de vivacité & de feu, ayent vn langage court & animé, qui n'ait rien de languissant. Aussi nos Ancestres qui étoient plus prompts que les Romains, accourcirent presque tous les mots qu'ils prirent de la langue Latine; & pour les monosyllabes, qui ne peuvent estre abregez, ou ils n'y changerent rien du tout, ou ils les changerent en d'autres monosyllabes […] (62-63)	There is found a constant Resemblance between the Genius or Natural Complexion of each People and the Language they speak. Thus the *Greeks*, a polite but voluptuous People, had a *Language* perfectly suitable, full of Delicacy and Sweetness. The *Romans*, who seemed only born to command, had a *Language* noble, nervous, and august; and their Descendants, the *Italians*, are sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, which is as visible in their *Language* as their Manners. The *Language* of the *Spaniards* is full of that Gravity and Haughtiness of Air which make the distinguishing Character of the People. The *French*, who have a World of Vivacity, have a *Language* that runs extremely brisk and lively. And the *English*, who are naturally blunt, thoughtful and of few Words, have a *Language* exceedingly short, concise, and sententious. (429)

Tab. 2 – Bouhours and Chambers on language and genius

As can be seen, the stereotypical representation of the English is one of a people that is "naturally blunt". A look at a French-English/English-French lexicographic text that was popular throughout the eighteenth century, such as Abel Boyer's *The Royal Dictionary*, in its 1729 edition, reveals that one of the translation

equivalents of the French *brusque* is indeed "blunt". While Bouhours's text stereotypically portrays the French as "naturellement brusques", Chambers transfers this attribute in order to create his representation of the English language. Relying on translation and recontextualization, the English author thus adds the formerly invisible English in the competitive comparison of nations/languages, by truncating the representation of French. However, he does not operate a complete erasure of French, which is preserved in this comparison, and portrayed as "brisk and lively".

Based on recontextualized material, Chambers's Preface emphasizes a contrast between the stereotypically blunt Englishman and the stereotypically vivacious Frenchman. Commonplaces and proverbial material are certainly instrumental in the lexicographic representations of the early eighteenth century. Significantly, "brisk" (another translation equivalent of *blunt*) is also one of the English equivalents of "lively" in Boyer's bilingual dictionary. In its entry for "lively", Boyer's dictionary, which is a text well-known for its treatment of proverbial material and which explicitly mentions Bouhours as one of its sources, gives as French equivalents the adjective *vif*, as well as the collocation *qui a beaucoup de feu*, which recalls Bouhours's iconic image of French ("les François, qui [...] ont beaucoup de vivacité & de feu, ayent un langage court & animé").

2. *Previous Lexicographic Sources*

Part of a discourse of national glorification, Bouhours's seventeenth-century text, which portrays the French language and culture as a worthy heir to the Roman Empire, in opposition to two other dominant cultures of the age, Italy and Spain, emerges as the ultimate source for the excerpt in Chambers's lexicographic entry. However, it is essential to underline here that it is in fact the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, the popular name of *Le dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, first published in 1704, which is Chambers's most probable direct source, yet not with its entry for LANGUE but with one of its subentries for LANGAGE.

A comparison between the entry for LANGAGE in the Trévoux lexicographic text and the entry for LANGUAGE in Chambers's text reveals that it is a lexicographic truncation of Bouhours's text that is employed in the 1728 *Cyclopædia*:

Trévoux 1721 (LANGAGE)	Chambers 1728 (LANGUAGE)
Le *langage* suit d'ordinaire la disposition des esprits, & chaque Nation a toujours parlé selon son génie. Les Grècs, qui étoient gens polis et voluptueux, avoient un *langage* délicat, & plein de douceur. Les Romains qui sembloient n'être nez que pour commander, avoient un *langage* noble et auguste. Le *langage* des Espagnols se sent de leur gravité, & de cet air superbe qui est commun à toute la nation. Celui des Italiens est mol & efféminé, selon le tempérament, & les mœurs de leur païs. Les François, qui sont naturellement brusques, & qui ont beaucoup de vivacité et de feu, ont un *langage* court et animé, & qui n'a rien de languissant. PASQ. BOUH.	There is found a constant Resemblance between the Genius or Natural Complexion of each People and the Language they speak. Thus the *Greeks*, a polite but voluptuous People, had a *Language* perfectly suitable, full of Delicacy and Sweetness. The *Romans*, who seemed only born to command, had a *Language* noble, nervous, and august; and their Descendants, the *Italians*, are sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, which is as visible in their *Language* as their Manners. The *Language* of the *Spaniards* is full of that Gravity and Haughtiness of Air which make the distinguishing Character of the People. The *French*, who have a World of Vivacity, have a *Language* that runs extremely brisk and lively. And the *English*, who are naturally blunt, thoughtful and of few Words, have a *Language* exceedingly short, concise, and sententious. (429)

Tab. 3 – The Trévoux dictionary as a source for Chamber's entry

Chambers's reliance on the Trévoux dictionary regarding a significant number of entries has been already underlined by Bocast (2019, 2020a, 2020b), who argues that the mention of the "Jesuits of Trévoux" in the Preface to the 1728 *Cyclopædia* makes this dictionary (probably in its second edition, 1721) the most plausible source for Chambers (Bocast 2020b, 9-10). Moreover, the fact that the Trévoux dictionary is, in its turn, heavily indebted to the second edition of Furetière's earlier *Dictionnaire universel* has already been noted by previous scholars, among whom Bocast (2020b).[1]

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[1] Bocast notes that it is not until the Preface to the second edition of the *Cyclopædia* that Chambers shows himself aware of the reliance of the Trévoux dictionary on Basnage de Beauval's edition of Furetière (2020b, 9-10).

A look at the entry for LANGAGE in Henri Basnage de Beauval's second edition (1701) of Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690) reveals that the Trévoux dictionary has indeed used Basnage de Beauval's edition of Furetière as its source:

Furetière 1701 (LANGAGE)	**Trévoux 1721 (LANGAGE)**
LANGAGE [...] Le *langage* suit d'ordinaire la disposition des esprits, & chaque Nation a toujours parlé selon son génie. Les Grecs, qui étoient gens polis et voluptueux, avoient un *langage* delicat, & plein de douceur. Les Romains qui sembloient n'être nez que pour commander, avoient un *langage* noble et auguste. Le *langage* des Espagnols se sent de leur gravité, & de cet air superbe qui est commun à toute la Nation. Celui des Italiens est mol & efféminé, selff on le temperament, & les mœurs de leur païs. Les François, qui sont naturellement brusques, & qui ont beaucoup de vivacité et de feu, ont un *langage* court et animé, & qui n'a rien de languissant. PASQ. BOU.	LANGAGE [...] Le *langage* suit d'ordinaire la disposition des esprits, & chaque Nation a toujours parlé selon son génie. Les Grècs, qui étoient gens polis et voluptueux, avoient un langage délicat, & plein de douceur. Les Romains qui sembloient n'être nez que pour commander, avoient un *langage* noble et auguste. Le *langage* des Espagnols se sent de leur gravité, & de cet air superbe qui est commun à toute la nation. Celui des Italiens est mol & efféminé, selon le tempérament, & les mœurs de leur païs. Il faut donc que les François, qui sont naturellement brusques, & qui ont beaucoup de vivacité et de feu, ont un *langage* court et animé, & qui n'a rien de languissant. PASQ. BOUH.

Tab. 4 – Furetière's dictionary as a source for the Trévoux dictionary

A complex process of recontextualization underlies the lexicographic texts of the (early) modern age. As can be seen, the abridgment of Bouhours's text made in the Basnage de Beauval edition is preserved in the excerpt from the Trévoux subentry for LANGAGE exemplified above. In fact, the two subentries for LANGAGE are, with the exception of a couple of minor graphemic changes, entirely identical in both French dictionaries, which, as the references indicate, make use not only of Bouhours's text but also of Étienne Pasquier's apology of the qualities of French. Chambers's English translation of excerpts from Bouhours's "La langue Françoise" is undoubtedly mediated by these French lexicographic texts. An early eighteenth-century lexicographic representation of English thus emerges as based on the repeated recontextualization of remarks originally meant for French. Moreover, the ethnic representations employed are by no means an original creation of Bouhours himself but in fact European commonplaces of the time.

Bouhours's seventeenth-century text, which bears echoes of Boileau, as well as of Longinus and Quintilian, and which denounces excessive rhetorical ornamentation, relies upon already circulating ethnic topoi in order to express a correlation between "language" and "nation":

'La langue française' also turned the commonplaces of the time concerning the supposed characters of nations into objects of scholarly attention, articulating, for the first time in an extensive way, the rising interest of European scholars in the relationship between language and nation. Furthermore, the dialogue constitutes a significant example in the history of the debate because it documents the first combined use of the two terms *génie de la langue* and *génie de la nation*. (Gambarota 2011, 62)

3. Ancient Topoi, Language, and the Shaping of "National Character"

It has been argued that "an increasingly sharp national consciousness may be seen in the early modern period" (Burke 2013, 31). Peter Burke, who sees stereotypes, and stereotypes of "nations", as central to the history of *l'imaginaire social* (2022), has already evoked a well-known excerpt from Dominique Bouhours's *Les entretiens d'Ariste et d'Evgène* regarding a stereotypical representation of languages/nations: "*Les Chinois, et presque tous les peuples de l'Asie, chantent; les Allemands râlent; les Espagnols déclament; les Italiens soupirent; les Anglais sifflent. Il n'y a proprement que les Français qui parlent*" (Bouhours, quoted in Burke 2004, 67).[2] Significantly, this commonplace appears in "La langue Françoise",[3] the ultimate source for Chambers's representation of LANGUAGE

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[2] The fact that only the French are capable of speech is an echo of the ancient polarization Hellene/Barbarian (see discussions in Watts 2011; Vişan 2013).
[3] Several scholars have already argued that such comparisons can be traced back to medieval musical treatises. According to previous

in the *Cyclopædia*. Moreover, Peter Burke pertinently underlines that such representations also appear in early modern apologies of vernaculars such as Henri Estienne's *La précellence du langage françois*. In Estienne's text, the topos is present in its Latin form: "*Balant Itali, gemunt Hispani, ululant Germani, cantant Galli*" (Estienne quoted in Burke 2004, 67).

Emphasizing a correlation which, according to previous authors, will become a frequent one by the beginning of the eighteenth century, that between the genius of language and the genius of nation, Bouhours's apology of French includes not only the comparison of the various "character traits" perceived as giving a unified identity to "languages" and "nations" but also the commonplace correlation between "nation", music, and ways of speaking. Bouhours's text is by no means the first which makes use of this particular combination of topoi. Agrippa von Nettesheim's sixteenth-century work denouncing the vanity of arts and sciences (*De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi Dei declamatio,* 1531) is yet another text where these two commonplace images appear side by side. In the chapter "De Morali Philosophia", which means to show that, when it comes to the actions of human beings, astrological and environmental factors take precedence over moral philosophy, the German scholar employs similar imagery to that in Bouhours's apology of French:

[…] inquit Iulius Firmicus in astrologicis suis ad Lollianum scribens. Quædam gentes ita a cælo formatae sunt, vt propria sint morum vnitate perspicuæ. Scythæ immanis veritatis crudelitate grassantur. Itali fuerunt regali semper nobilitate præfulgidi, Galli stolidi, acuti Siculi, luxuriosi semper Asiatici, & voluptatibus occupati, Hispani elata jactantiæ animositate præpositi […] Iamque scimus etiam, quia in cantu balant Itali, gemunt Hispani, ululant Germani, modulantur Galli. Sunt in oratione graves, sed versuti Itali: culti, sed jactabundi Hispani, prompti sed superbi Galli, duri, sed simplices Germani.[4] (1575, 130-31)

A French translation of Agrippa's popular text dates from 1582, and illustrates the way in which early modern texts culturally reappropriate ethnic labels which can be traced back to Antiquity:

Iulius Firmicus, en ses discours astrologiques qu'il escrit a Lollianus, dit, que aucunes nations sont tellement façonnees par les cieux, que lon les peut remarquer d'entre les autres à certaines moeurs & façons propres & particulieres. Les Scythes ou Tartares brigandent auec cruelle & farouche inhumanité. Les Italiens on esté de tous temps apparents entre les autres par vne royale noblesse: les Gaulois sont simples & sots: les Siciliens rusés: les Espagnols aduantageux & hardis en vanterie: les peoples d'Asie fondus en voluptés & toutes superfluitiés […] Et est chaque nation diuisee en moeurs & facons par la nature & d'enhaut, en sorte que lon peut aisement cognoistre de quelle region ou païs est l'homme. […] Nous sçauons aussi pareillement qu'en chantant les Italiens beslent, les Espagnols gemissent, les Allemans hurlent, les François chantent vraymẽt. Au parler & au discourir les Italiens sont graues, mais rusés: les Espagnols ornés, mai vanteurs: les François prompts & hautains: les Allemans durs, mais ronds & simples.[5] (1582, 209-10)

Since translation and (language) ideology are essentially interlinked, it is significant to focus on the French translation from Latin of one of the names of the proto-nations identified in von Nettesheim's text, namely *Galli*. As can be seen, the sixteenth-century French translation already substitutes *Galli* with both "les Gaulois", when the negative attribute "stolidi" ("stupid") is predicated of them, and "les François", when positive representations emerge. In *François*, the label "Frank/frank" becomes the basis for French identity, in a complex movement of *translatio*, which connects Gallic identity to Roman and Carolingian imperial roots. Significantly, the Gallic and Germanic identities evoked in Agrippa's text rely upon labels made prominent by Julius Caesar's famous ethnocentric narrative, *De bello Gallico*, in which *Galli* or *Germani* were "othered" as groups in relation with the expanding Roman Empire.

Ethnic stereotypes were certainly already present in medieval texts, and they have their roots not only in earlier classical texts but also in the biblical, patristical literature (see Grévin 2014). Agrippa von Nettesheim's early modern text thus employs familiar topoi, which can be, in their turn, traced back to recognizable previous sources (see also Florack 2001, 61). In fact, the German scholar makes direct reference in his book to the Late Antiquity astrologer, Iulius Firmicus Maternus' fourth-century astrological text, the *Mathesis*. Firmicus Maternus

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discussions, animal metaphors underlie this commonplace (see for example Stoessel 2014).

[4] Trans.: says Iulius Firmicus in his astrological words which he wrote to Lollianus. All those nations that are fashioned by the heavens are thus characterized by certain habits and common ways. The Scythians raid with unspeakable cruelty, the Italians were always conspicuously loyal, and full of nobility, the Gauls stupid, the Sicilians sharp, the Asians always luxurious and occupied with pleasures, the Spaniards prone to animosity and boasting -[…] And now we also know that the Italians bleat in song, that the Spanish moan, that the Germans howl, that the Gauls modulate. In their speech the Italians are grave, yet well-versed: the Spanish cultured but boastful, the Gauls prompt but proud, the Germans harsh yet simple.

[5] The 1582 translation was made by the French historian Louis Turquet de Mayerne (c. 1550-1618).

does not include the correlation between "language", music, and "nation", but he relies upon what must have been a commonplace representation of his time:

De moribus uero illud addunt: «Si Saturnus facit cautos, graues, tardos, auaros ac tacitos, Iuppiter maturos, bonos, benignos ac modestos, Mars crudeles, perfidos ac feroces, Sol religiosos, nobiles ac superbos, Venus luxuriosos, uenustos et honesto gratiae splendore fulgentes, Mercurius astutos, callidos et concitati animi mobilitatibus turbulentos, Luna acutos, splendidos, elegantes et populares, splendoris gratia praeualentes, cur quaedam gentes ita sunt formatae ut propria sint morum quodammodo unitate perspicuae? Scythae soli immanis feritatis crudelitate grassantur, Itali fiunt regali semper nobilitate praefulgidi, Galli stolidi, leues Graeci, Afri subdoli, auari Syri, acuti Siculi, luxuriosi semper Asiani uoluptatibus occupati, et Hispani elata iactantiae animositate praeposteri [...]» (1913, 1.2.2.6-1.2.3.6).[6]

Also present in Isidore of Seville's famous *Etymologiae*, ethnic stereotypes such as those included in this Late Antiquity text have been reappropriated in various forms by medieval and early modern authors.[7] Yet such stereotypical images were already in use during the Classical Antiquity. "Greek levitas", an image of Greek frivolity, brings to mind Ciceronian works and a rhetorical *locus communis*, based on the opposition of the dangerous Greek rhetoric to the Roman *gravitas*. Part of the Roman narrative which opposed the simplicity and directness of the Attic style to Asianic luxuriance and theatricality, this representation also brings echoes of the correlation between climate and disposition, and climate and rhetorical style in the ancient world.

The juxtaposition of Greek *levitas* to Roman *gravitas* springs from a representation in the Ciceronian age of Greek rhetoric as drawing away from the simple Attic model, towards the overflowing Asianic style (Connors 1997, 84). This correlation of climate and rhetorical style (*tenue*, the thin climate of Athens versus *crassum*, the heavy climate of Thebes) is in itself influenced by the well-known Hippocratic treatise *On Airs, Waters, and Places* in which the luxuriant landscape of Asia is associated with a soft, sluggish, feeble body (84-85). Scholars have emphasized the significance of the climate theory for commonplace ethnic representations which connect ancient topoi to the medieval and early modern age in Western Europe (see for example Weeda 2012; Grévin 2014 and 2022). Recontextualized, such topoi, which bring forth negative keywords such as "soft", "effeminate" or "languishing", rely upon complex imagery which draws not only from Hippocrates' work but also from influential ancient historical representations, such as Herodotus's *Histories*, where Persian civilization is represented as corrupt and effeminate in contrast to the more restrained Greek culture.

Grévin (2014 and 2022) pertinently argues that, in the transition from the medieval to the early modern age, ethnic stereotypes come to reside at the intersection of folklore, literary allusions, classical and biblical culture, on the one hand, and the emergent "scientific", classificatory thinking, on the other. It is thus not surprising that these commonplaces find their way into seventeenth- and, subsequently, into eighteenth-century lexicographic texts. Scholars such as Richard Yeo have relevantly emphasized the connection between Renaissance commonplace books and encyclopaedic texts (2001 and 2003). In the dictionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such commonplaces begin to function more prominently in their classificatory dimension than in their aphoristic one, and they become significant elements of metalinguistic discourse, and, hence, essential aids in the definition of what emerges as a "language" versus other "languages".

4. The Prompt, Monosyllabic English

Keeping in mind the early models that shape the boundaries of the ancient world, it is relevant to focus yet again on the translation and recontextualization of Bouhours's remarks in early eighteenth-century English dictionaries, and on the re-imagination (to use Anderson's watershed term) of English linguistic identity in the lexicographic texts of the first half of the eighteenth century in Britain.

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[6] Translated by Jean Rhys Bram 1975, 14: "As for character, they add, 'If Saturn makes men careful, serious, dull, miserly, and silent; Jupiter, mature, kindly, generous, temperate; Mars, cruel, treacherous, and fierce; the Sun, upright, high-minded, and proud; Venus, pleasure-loving, charming, handsome; Mercury, shrewd, clever, excitable, changeable; the Moon, intelligent, distinguished, well-mannered, capable of dazzling people with brilliance, why do certain human groups appear to produce largely one type?' The Scythians are known for monstrous, savage cruelty; the Italians for their king-like superiority; the Gauls are slow-witted, the Greeks frivolous, the Africans tricky, the Syrians greedy, the Sicilians clever, the Asians lustful and pleasure-loving; the Spaniards are absurd with their exaggerated boastfulness".

[7] As various other scholars have already noted, ethnic stereotypes are present in Isidore de Seville's well-known *Etymologiae*: "*Secundum diversitatem enim caeli et facies hominum et colores et corporum quantitates et animorum diversitates existunt. Inde Romanos graves, Graecos leves, Afros versipelles, Gallos natura feroces atque acriores ingenio pervidemus, quod natura climatum facit*" (Isidore 1911, 9.2.105.358).

As is underlined by the use of the term *François*, different from *Gaulois*, in the French translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim's text, French linguistic identity concentrates on the positive connotation of labels such as *prompti*. "Prompt" is listed as the equivalent of *brusque* in Basnage de Beauval's edition of Furetière, in an entry which includes the phrase "le génie français brusque et impétueux" (1701). In Bouhours's seventeenth-century text, equivalent labels such as *brusque*, *vivace*, *court* or *animé* contribute to create the representation of a language which does not have anything "languishing" (*languissant*), and hence one which is not to be associated with the luxurious Asianic model. This image echoes even earlier representations than those in the rhetorical models embraced by Cicero, Longinus or Quintilian. Certainly, it has its roots not only in Hippocrates' influential *On Air, Waters, and Places* but also in the early portrayal of Greek identity by Herodotus.

As Paola Gambarota has underlined, Bouhours, who takes his cues from earlier authors, represents French not only as an heir to the noble, august, imperious/imperial Rome – unlike its rival, Italian, imagined as a degenerate version of Latin – but also as a vital Gallic language, an image which appears in earlier apologies of the vernacular, such as those of Estienne (2011, 52). Discussions of Bouhours's text by several previous authors have already shown that "La langue Françoise" makes significant use of Étienne Pasquier's *Les recherches de la France*, whose first volume appeared in 1560 (see Gambarota 2011, 53-54). Both Basnage de Beauval and the Jesuits of Trévoux reference Pasquier in their entry concerning LANGAGE, before introducing Bouhours's competitive comparison of languages, and they include yet another image of Italian as soft and effeminate, and hence as an unworthy heir to the Roman Empire: "Les Italiens, degenerans de l'ancienne force du Romain, formerent peu-à-peu de ce *langage* mâle Romain, un vulgaire tout effeminé & molasse" (Furetière 1701; Trévoux 1721). This polarization between Italian effeminacy and French promptitude echoes the contrast Herodotus makes between the portrayal of the effeminate Persian, corrupted by the luxuries of civilization, and that of the more "manly" Greek society.

Significantly, Chambers' English translation of the lexicographic version of the French text relies upon "blunt", which is a different translation equivalent of the keyword *brusque*, in order to add the English in the comparative representation of the different European nations. The attribute *court*, which was associated with the animate, vivacious French in Bouhours's description, is now transferred to English, which emerges as "short". English is thus spoken by a people "of few words", a phrase which brings to mind not only Caesar's Roman *veni, vidi, vici*, but also the Germanic simplicity evoked by Firmicus Maternus, an image which goes back to Caesar's representation of Germanic populations as straightforward and fierce in *De bello Gallico*. It also bears echoes of Tacitus's well-known admiration of the simple Germanic society, in contrast to the corrupt imperial Rome.

While Chambers's early eighteenth-century encyclopaedia portrays the English language as characterized by bluntness, brevity, and conciseness, Addison's article 135 for the *Spectator* (1711), refers to "the Genius of the English [language]" as linked to "taciturnity" (1776, 230-33) and which relies on a motto from Horace (also employed by Alexander Pope): "Est brevitate opus, ut currat sententia".[8] Addison's metalinguistic comment in *The Spectator*, in which, significantly, Germans, and not the English, are characterized as "blunt" (1776, 233), lays emphasis on both the monosyllabic character of English and on its particular kind of musicality:

As first of all by its abounding in monosyllables, which gives us an opportunity of delivering our thoughts in few sounds […] The sounds of our English words are commonly like those of string music, short and transient, which rise and perish upon a single touch; those of other languages are like the notes of wind instruments, sweet and swelling, and lengthened out into variety of modulation. (230)

As Michele Cohen has already argued regarding this essay, "at the time Addison was writing, not only were the French the best model of conversation, but the French language was the language of politeness par excellence" (1999, 55). Addison's remarks upon English echo Bouhours's mention of French monosyllables, which neither Henri Basnage de Beauval nor Chambers include in their lexicographic entries, but which become part of a complex representation of both French and English as effective, clear means of communication and as "not languishing", in opposition to luxurious and effeminate models. Certainly, ancient representations had already linked the "manly", all-conquering Roman and Germanic identities to brevity and clarity.

Chambers's representation of English, which relies upon the erasure of French as a "blunt", "monosyllabic" language, and focuses only on its vivacity, also marks the beginnings of a polarization which becomes prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century (55-56), that of the talkative French versus the taciturn English as national characters. Certainly, in the first half of the eighteenth century, French is a model employed in the

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[8] Trans.: Terseness is needed so that the thought may run free.

metalinguistic comments regarding English, and Chambers's representation of English, later taken over by Bailey's paratext is, as can be seen, modelled on the image of the superiority of French over other languages and nations, and upon a recontextualization of the image of a European vernacular as a worthy heir to the Roman Empire. However, in a different excerpt in his entry for LANGUAGE, Chambers further transforms and expands a translation from Bouhours's French text (taken via previous lexicographic texts), in order to suggest the superiority of English over French linguistic identity (see also Vişan 2018, 295):

Bouhours 1671 (La langue Françoise)	Chambers 1728 (LANGUAGE)
La langue Italienne est vne coquette toujours parée et toûjours fardée, qui ne cherche qu'à plaire, et qui ne se plaît qu'à la bagatelle. La langue Françoise est vne prude; mais vne prude agreable, qui, toute sage et toute modeste qu'elle est, n'a rien de rude ni de farouche. C'est vne fille qui a beaucoup de traits de sa mère, je veux dire de la langue Latine. (70)	The *Italian*, a Coquette, full of fine Airs; always appearing dres'd, and taking all Occasions of shewing her Findery; to be admired being all she aims at. The *French*, an easy Prude, that has her share of Modesty and Discretion, but on occasion can lay them both aside. The *English* is of a more Masculine Temperament. 'Tis not only a different Family from others, but appears of a different Sex too: Its Virtues are those of a Man: indeed 'tis the Product of a colder Climate and a rougher People, […] but its Faculties are more extensive, its Conduct more ingenious, and its Views more noble. (429)

Tab. 5 – The superiority of the English language

Chambers's gendered representation of English as a language "of a more Masculine Temperament" and as "the Product of a colder Climate and a rougher People" is an obvious echo of geographical determinism, and of Hippocrates' *On Airs, Waters, Places*, as well as of images, also inspired by earlier Greek models, of Germanic simplicity and virility, present in the work of authors such as Caesar or Tacitus. As previous researchers have emphasized, Germanism, which can be traced back to Gesner's *Mithridates* (1555) becomes a significant part of the glorification of English, and is promoted by seventeenth-century antiquarians (such as Camden and Verstegan) who stress the excellence of English over other European languages (Rodríguez-Álvarez 2022, 186). In the early eighteenth century, Chambers's lexicographic entry portrays English as "short, concise and sententious", which is not only a reappropriation of attributes already used by Bouhours in his apology of French clarity, but also an echo of the laudatory epithets such as "martial" or "moral" associated with Germanic populations in the work of antiquarian scholars (186-88).

The Preface to Nathan Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1736) recontextualizes excerpts from Chambers's lexicographic entries in a paratext which is meant to reinforce English's Germanic heritage (see Vişan 2018, 298). Apart from material taken from Chambers's entries, Bailey's paratext includes a number of new excerpts from previous authors (including Camden) who further glorify English and decisively proclaim its superiority over other European vernaculars (288-90). No longer part of a lexicographic entry but included in a lexicographic preface which portrays it as a more than worthy rival to French, in Bailey's text, English becomes "the protagonist of its own history" (Rodríguez-Álvarez 2009, 190), and, in this way, it emerges as the worthy topic of a dictionary whose focus starts shifting away from "encyclopaedic" towards "linguistic" matters (see also Vişan 2009 and 2013).

Contributing to the representation of "the English language" in opposition to other languages, lexicographic texts such as those of Chambers and Bailey can be envisaged as marking the beginnings of a polarization which, as Michelle Cohen has already argued, will become crystallized in the second half of the eighteenth century (1999, 55-56). This polarization will come to oppose the manly English to the effeminate French, in a movement quite similar to the one in which the seventeenth-century Bouhours opposes the brisk, animate French to the soft and effeminate Italian, and which certainly bears echoes of the early polarization of the virtuous (republican) Roman versus the degenerate, effeminate Greek or the morally corrupt (imperial) Roman, and to even earlier Greek/Persian polarizations.

Conclusion

While English linguistic identity emerges as "blunt" in early eighteenth-century English dictionaries, it is nevertheless based on a florilegium of recontextualized quotes, whose copiousness is somewhat trimmed down

by its becoming part of a lexicographic endeavour. Focussing on the reappropriation of ancient commonplaces, while underlining a connection between lexicographic texts and the commonplace tradition (see Yeo 2001 and 2003), the present paper has explored not only the complex negotiation between English dictionaries and their European sources but also the complex interplay between ancient topoi and representations of national/linguistic identity in the eighteenth century.

Present both in an encyclopaedic text and in the preface of a universal dictionary more narrowly focused on "English" than on "arts and sciences", the commonplace which correlates "language" and "nation" becomes a significant element in the conceptualization of what emerges as a unified English linguistic identity in the eighteenth century, distinct from and, eventually, perceived as decidedly superior to "other" linguistic identities whose boundaries are conceptualized in a similar manner. While the proto-nations in Firmicus Maternus's ancient text and the *nationes* of Agrippa von Nettesheim's early modern text are certainly not identical with the "nation" which underlies the early nineteenth-century nation-state, there is an obvious continuity which characterizes these representations. Eighteenth-century English lexicographic texts, which recontextualize earlier European representations, highlight this continuity, and the way in which reappropriated ancient commonplaces contribute to the shaping of the emergent nation-state and of the related ideology of the standard language.

As Richard Watts has shown, it is the linguistic homogeneity myth which "drives the ideology of the *Kultursprache* and the related ideology of the standard language" (2011, 129), a myth in its turn "made up of a complex web of myths that are interwoven and continually open to further extension" (*ibidem*). According to Watts, "the concept of a language is derived from an awareness that different communities of human beings use different variations of the capacity for human language" (*ibidem*). The competitive comparison of languages which is present in early eighteenth-century lexicographic texts is meant to consolidate not only a "hypostasisation of individual languages" (119) but also a representation of a homogeneous linguistic identity of English, in sharp contrast with other linguistic identities. Watts, who envisages language myths as the basis of language ideology, sees all language myths as "derived from the common, possibly universal conceptual anthropomorphic metaphor used to understand that nature of human language […] A LANGUAGE IS A HUMAN BEING" (129).

The exploration of the topoi which make possible the fusion of "language", "nation" and "genius" has shown that ancient representations and polarizations are a decisive part underlying the generalizations at the basis of eighteenth-century images of English. Such images contribute to the representation of a standard of English, which becomes prominent in the prescriptive texts of the latter part of the century. Quoting Philip White's "Globalization and the mythology of the nation-state" (2006), Richard Watts underlines that the building of the nation-state is nothing more than a myth (2011, 115). In its discussion of the ethnic stereotypes which contribute to the lexicographic representation of the English language in the early eighteenth century, the present paper lays emphasis on the way in which the myth of the nation-state emerges as gradually interconnected with that of a homogeneous language.

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