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SEVERED LANGUAGE CONTACTS: TWO EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

Abstract: The phenomenon of language contact is generally viewed as establishing or maintaining relationship by speakers of different languages. As far as the English language is concerned, especially its contemporary status, it is its global reach and influence that is discussed, as well as the influence it exerts on other languages. The present text deals with a reverse phenomenon, that is the cessation of contact, which results in a change of the linguistic situation. This is exemplified with the 16th-century English Reformation, to be more precise: the establishment of the Anglican Church, and the independence of the United States in the 18th century. With these two events, the author attempts to present how the breaking of contact influenced the further development of the linguistic situation in the external history of the English language.

Key words: the English language, linguistic situation, external history of English, English Reformation, independence of the United States

1. Introduction

The birth of the English language dates back to the fifth century. Historians attribute this event to the invasion of Anglo-Saxon tribes, whose traditional date is 449 (Millward and Hayes 2012: 81). Up to the present moment, English has been spread so widely that it has received the status of a global language (Crystal 2003). This means that its geographical extent is no longer limited to one country or a certain number of countries; rather it is used all over the world. In other words, throughout the centuries, a once local language is now used supraterritorially.

Having gained the status of a global language, English must have had contact with other languages. This phenomenon is known as language contact, and it is described below. Furthermore, English has exerted a certain impact on a variety

of languages. Some contemporary consequences of these influences may be found, for example, in Görlach (2001). This paper, however, does not deal with the present situation of English, its status or its planet-wide expansion, which have been recent topics (Crystal 2003, Kapica-Curzytek 2015). Instead, the paper will give an account of two historical events which shaped the linguistic situations related to the English language at their times.

What is more, the paper will not focus on how language contact enriches or threatens a language. Rather, it will discuss an opposite situation; that is it will trace the impact which the cessations of contacts had on the linguistic situations of English, following two historical events.

The present paper is structured in the following manner. It opens with the present Introduction. Next, Section 2 explains how language may be studied from the historical perspective. Then, Section 3 defines the phenomenon of language contact. It also discusses how such a situation may emerge. This is followed by a presentation of the stages of a linguistic contact. Section 4 analyzes two events within the external history of the English language, which may be considered milestones for the then linguistic situations. These events are: the English Reformation of the 16th century and the American War of Independence of the 18th century. The paper ends in a Conclusions section, which presents the author's reasoning about the influences of the discussed events on the linguistic situations in the noted places at those times.

2. Diachronic approaches to language studies

This paper takes a diachronic approach to the study of language. Historical language-related studies can take one of two forms. As Millward and Hayes (2012: 14) observe: “In discussing the history of a language, it is useful to distinguish *outer history* (or *external history*) from *inner history* (or *internal history*).”¹ The *outer (external) history of a language* relates to the functioning of a particular language in a cultural context. This approach focuses on historical, social, economic or cultural events which have influenced the life of the speakers of a particular language. Thus, historians of a language study the relationship between the life of a speech community and the linguistic situation at a certain time in the past. The *inner (internal) history of a language* concerns the description of the language material itself. Thus, it focuses on analyses of the subsystems of a studied language. Here, historians of a language focus on the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of a particular language at a given time in the past. The present text adheres to the former type, as it deals with historical events which happened to the speakers of English in the 16th-century England and 18th-century America.

¹ Original highlights replaced with italics for the editorial requirements of this journal.

3. Language contact

This section discusses the phenomenon of *language contact*, which may be perceived as: “the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time” (Thomason 2001: 1). This comprehension may be further extended to any “contact situations in which at least some people use more than one language” (Thomason 2001: 1). It may thus be deduced that language contact is actually people's contact, with a restriction that those people speak divergent languages.

Languages, or in fact their speakers, may come into contact in a number of ways, although it is sometimes impossible to say how it happens due to the lack of knowledge (Thomason 2001: 15-20). For one thing, speakers of different languages may move to an uninhabited area, where no language holds the position of the local one. This may seem unlikely in the present world; however, this is what might have happened in the past, when some lands were still unoccupied. A far more likely, and more common (according to Thomason 2001: 18), way in which languages may enact contacts is when a group of people moves into a territory already inhabited by another one, and each of the groups speaks a different language. This is what happened, for instance, when the English explorers came to settle down in the New Land, which had been previously occupied by Native Americans. As a result, a number of local words, such as names of animals, plants, food or everyday objects entered the English language (for examples see section 5.2.). Another way of how languages may come into contact is immigration of small groups or of individuals. In such circumstances, the newcomers enter the local community; that is individuals join a larger local group. The immigrants do not conquer the inhabitants, nor do they take over their territory but rather they become new members of the community, instead. This may be exemplified with the early-20th-century European immigrants of various national backgrounds moving to America. Next, speakers of different languages are often those who have been brought to a place as labor force. This can be illustrated with the African slaves who were taken over to America in order to work on plantations. Furthermore, Thomason (2001: 20) points to a possibility “to meet in No Man's Land”. This means that speakers of different languages come to one place for certain reasons, and so they bring their languages with them. Such are, for instance, meetings for religious practices in particular places of worship, for example in the Vatican or Mecca. Also, language contact may emerge as a result of mutual interactions of long-time neighbors. This does not refer to their initial contact, which coincides with the moment they became neighbors, but to the one that may grow at any time during the process of living side by side. In addition, language contact may emerge due to individuals contracting cross-national marriages. This is what happened among American soldiers and Vietnamese women, or what takes place among international exchange students. Moreover, individual actions, like international

adoptions or bringing back repatriates, lead to language contact. Eventually, language contact comes into being due to education or as a result of “learned contacts” (Thomason 2001: 20-21). Examples include: Latin, which used to be the language of scholars, or the position which English has been in recently for internationally-spread knowledge and scholarly activity.

Once initiated, language contact usually continues and evolves in a particular area for a certain period of time. Its development can be divided into three stages. The first one is called the *initiation*. It takes place when speakers of different languages meet and they converse using these different codes. The second stage is called the *duration*. It is the time when the contact between (or among) speakers of different languages in the same place progresses over a period of time. The length of the time span cannot be defined, as it is impossible to anticipate it. The third stage is the *cessation* of contact. It occurs when the interrelation between the speakers or groups of them breaks up for a reason. The first two stages are necessary for language contact to emerge; the third one is optional and may even never take place.

4. Two examples of the cessation of contacts in the English-speaking world

This section discusses two events from the external history of the English language, both of which feature the breaking of contact. They include: the English Reformation of the 16th century and the American Revolutionary War of the 18th century.

4.1. The English Reformation

The Reformation in England was a gradual process that consisted of a series of actions taken in order to separate Britain from the Roman Catholic Church. It took place in the 16th century (Dickens 1989, Smoluk 2009b). The English Reformation was implemented by Henry VIII Tudor, who demanded a dissolution of his marriage with Catherine of Aragon from Pope Clement VII. The Pope's refusal triggered the monarch's wrath. Consequently, the king decided to cease any relations with the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, a separate, national Church was established by Henry VIII in England. Furthermore, in 1534, the Act of Supremacy pronounced Henry VIII the "supreme head in earth of the Church of England" and disregarded any "usage, custom, foreign laws, foreign authority [or] prescription". Thus, the king was appointed the head of the new Church, the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. Appointed the head of the Church of England, Henry VIII officially broke the connection between England and Rome, which had been

maintained on religious and political grounds. This also resulted in the cessation of language contact between speakers of English and speakers of Latin.

4.2. The American War of Independence

The American War of Independence, also known as the (American) Revolutionary War, was fought between Great Britain and the original thirteen Colonies in America from 1775 to 1783 (Boyer et al 2011, Higginbotham 1983, Ward 1999). The war broke out as a consequence of the British politics towards the new colonies established in America. The colonists rebelled against the limitations concerning their self-governing, development and expansion which Britain had imposed on them, as well as against the imposition of newer and newer taxes. In consequence, the American settlers demanded the withdrawal of the taxes, as well as the cessation of any political ties and connections with Great Britain.

In the wake of the colonists' demands, on July 4, 1776, *The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America* was signed. This document, announced during the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, established a new, independent country. It also used the label “United States of America” for the first time in history. In addition, this event initiated the first English-speaking nation outside Great Britain. As a result, the language contact between European and American speakers of English ceased.

5. The consequences for the English language

This part goes on to discuss the aftermath of the breaking of contacts described in section 4 above. Of course, the results pertain to the linguistic situations at the particular times in England and America.

5.1. The linguistic situation of English after the English Reformation

As pointed out in Section 4.1, during the English Reformation, England broke contact with Rome (Dickens 1989, Smoluk 2009a and 2009b, Millward and Hayes 2012). This cessation influenced the linguistic situation in the 16th-century England. At that time, the language of the Roman Catholic Church was Latin, even though the Church-related activities were carried out in England. Thus, we can perceive Latin as a language of a minority, that is a group of clergy, yet an influential and important minority. Such a standing of Latin changed after Henry VIII established the Anglican Church. Due to the fact that the new Church was a national Church from the outset, Anglicanism changed the

language of the Church in England into English. It was a language of the majority, but without any value for the official religious practices during the dominance of Latin for religious practices.

The position of English changed enormously. According to one of the Protestant beliefs, the Bible should be made available to everyone (Millward and Hayes 2012: 211). This resulted in the urgent need for an English-language version of the Bible and numerous translations of this Holy Book.

Notwithstanding the above, there had been attempts to produce English translations of the Bible prior to the Reformation time. The earliest ones were found already in the Old English period (DeRose 2008-2009). Those were mostly interlinear translations (i.e. glosses) with English words written above the Latin text. Altogether, 30 attempts of translating biblical texts into English before the Reformation have been reported: 15 during the Old English period and 15 during the Middle English period (after DeRose 2008-2009). None of them, however, received the royalty's support. The situation with the English version of the Bible changed into a more favorable one after Henry VIII founded the Anglican Church. It was so because of the national character of the new Church as well as the monarch's support.

The first English-language biblical translation to be authorized by the king was the Great Bible of 1539 (Dickens 1989, Smoluk 2009a). Myles Coverdale produced the English text of the Bible already in 1535. In 1536, Thomas Cromwell, Vicar General, issued a decree, according to which all the parishes in England were obliged to possess two copies of the Bible. It is important to emphasize that one of them had to be in English. Additionally, the books were to be made publicly available. This entailed the fact that the English-text Bible was made accessible to the English people, even to non-clergy laypeople, for whom English was predominantly the only comprehensible language (Dickens 1989, Smoluk 2009a). In 1538, Cromwell officially commissioned Coverdale to prepare a new English text of the Bible in cooperation with the Grafton and Whitchurch team. In the wake of this, the Great Bible appeared on the market in April 1539 in London (Dickens 1989).

The appearance of the Bible in English changed the linguistic situation in the 16th-century England. The laypeople who did not know Latin but were literate could read the Bible for the first time. This was welcomed with enthusiasm among the English society. In addition to this, biblical and other religious texts, for instance prayers, were read out loud in churches. People could, therefore, understand them and worship the God in the language they knew and could understand. In addition to the above, "The Reformation also tended to break the centuries-old monopoly of the Church on education" (Millward and Hayes 2012: 221). Most schools were run by the Church, hence they were also staffed with clergy. Thus, it was natural that the language of education was Latin. With the English Reformation, this was revolutionized. Since the language of the new

Anglican Church was English, it replaced Latin at schools. Moreover, the responsibility for education was moved from the Church to the state. New schools were established by laypeople, and their teachers were laypeople whose language was English, not Latin. Even if some of the educators were clergy members, those were members of the Protestant (Anglican) Church, so they taught in English (Millward and Hayes 2012: 221).

In the wake of the above-described situation, Latin, associated with the unwelcome Roman Catholic Church, became unpopular among the English. At the same time, the position of English was strengthened. Moreover, the fact that English appeared in writing in the most important book at the time contributed to its standardization and freezing of spelling (Millward and Hayes 2012).

5.2. The linguistic situation of English in America after its separation from Britain

The English language came to America with the British settlers at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries (Baugh and Cable 2002, Mathews [1963] 2011, Millward and Hayes 2012). The fact that this group separated themselves from Britain physically entailed the development of a new variety of their language, which is contemporarily known as *American English*. At the beginning, it was the 17th-century English brought over the Atlantic from Britain, with all its phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic and graphic features (Baugh and Cable 2002, Mathews [1963] 2011). Its evolution, however, proceeded independently of the English in Europe.

The most striking first discrepancy between the “early-American” English and its European counterpart could be observed at the lexical level. This is so because new vocabulary entered the English in America. It was related to the new circumstances in which the formerly-British and then-American settlers lived. Those new, characteristic expressions included (after Baugh and Cable 2002: 342): Indian plant names (e.g. *chinquapin*, *hickory*, *pecan*, *persimmon*, *squash*), Indian animal names (*coon*, *moose*, *possum*, *racconn*, *skunk*, *woodchuck*), Indian food names (*hominy*, *tapioca*, *succotash*), descriptive animal names (e.g. *mud hen*, *garter snake*, *bullfrog*, *potato bug*, *groundhog*) or everyday-life objects (e.g. *tomahawk*, *hammoccus*, *moccasins*, *wigwam*, *tomahawk*, *canoe*, *toboggan*). All of these words are characteristic of Native Americans' life and culture.

Such was the beginning of what we call now *American English* (Baugh and Cable 2002, Mathews [1963] 2011, Millward and Hayes 2012). It was an important event in the history of this language because it was the emergence of the first geographical, non-European variety of English. Moreover, it was used by a newly-arising nation, so it may be called a national variety of English.

In the wake of the American Revolution, the original thirteen colonies in America officially separated themselves from Great Britain. In fact, it was the first political separation within the community of English speakers. In consequence, the language also became a marker of the geographical, as well as political to a certain extent, distinction between America and Britain.

The initial influences on this language-based division may be traced to the works of Noah Webster, who proposed a number of changes in the English language, which should make the language “Americanized” (see Baugh and Cable 2012: 346-354, Millward and Hayes 2012: 236). Using new words, or attempting to revolutionize spelling in order to make it closer to pronunciation (e.g. *honor* instead of *honour*, *center* instead of *centre* or *traveler* instead of *traveller*), Americans intended to manifest their separation from Britain by means of the use of the language, which was still English, yet with altered forms.² Webster's works could also be classified as educational. To begin with, he published a three-volume work entitled *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. It is composed of three other works: *The American Spelling Book* of 1783 - a book normative in approach, which teaches children how to spell and pronounce words correctly; *Plain and Comprehensive Grammar* of 1784 - another normative book which advises on the rules of grammar; and a reader of 1785. In addition to this, Webster authored *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* of 1806 and *An American Dictionary of the English Language* – his most widely known dictionary published as a two-volume work in 1828.

All the works published by Webster may be perceived as linked together by the idea of America’s separation from Britain. He intended to educate Americans so that they use the language in an American way, different from the one used in Europe. Moreover, Webster’s endeavors may be considered as using the language for political purposes. This is so because the language became a distinguishing mark of a new nation formed outside Europe, and it was used as a marker of this parting.

In addition to the above, attempts at introducing new nomenclature for naming the language could be observed in the history of the United States. For example, Mencken (1919) uses the label *American language* in the title and content of his volume describing the English used in America. Furthermore, in 1923, the state of Illinois issued a decree which stated that: “The official language of the State of Illinois shall be known hereafter as the "American" language and not as the "English" language”. One may interpret this statement as a strong feeling of

² The earliest attempts to record the differences in lexis between British and American English are attributed to John Pickering's *Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America* (Millward and Hayes 2012: 301).

national identity, which is inseparably related to a different language. This law was amended in 1969, when English was made the official language of the state (Tatalovich 2017). Taking these examples into consideration, the newly-emerging variety of English became a characteristic of a newly-arising American identity and an American in-group membership marker.

6. Conclusions

Languages, as abstract entities, do not come into contact themselves. It is the people who speak them that do. After the initiation, a language contact progresses, and it may last for years or, uninterruptedly, forever. There is not a rule as for when a contact may potentially cease; nor is its end necessary to take place at all. However, when such a contact is broken, the linguistic situation may and will change.

As the two examples from the external history of English referred to above have shown, when a language contact ceases, the fact does not necessarily entail negative consequences. In the 16th-century England, the breaking of the contact with the Latin-language Roman Catholic Church brought about the consolidation and reinforcement of the position of English as the national language. When it comes to the American Revolutionary War, in the aftermath, the American colonies broke their political ties with Britain. Thus, Americans closed their linguistic contact with the British. Founding a new country, Americans also sought to emphasize their new national identity, and they used the language for this purpose.

The two historical events discussed above are characterized by a common theme regarding the external history of the English language. Both of them feature the termination of language contact, and in each of these cases, the end of the contact added positive values to the status the language locally held. Thus, concluding what has been said above, when language contact is broken, it cannot be excluded that positive results for a language will emerge.

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