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The Quest for a Global Language from Ogden's Project of Basic English

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Introduction

Foreign languages students often come across comments of people saying that some languages are worthier of being studied than others because they are the "languages of the future". Others comment that in the future a "universal language" will be developed that will cause the end of the translation industry.

Such drastic comments sparked the idea of this work that aims at being an analysis of the subject of universal languages in the past and at the current moment, giving special regard to Charles K. Ogden's Basic English.

In the first part of this work, the history of universal languages will be analysed. The opinions of the first philosophers that aimed at creating common means of communication will be reported, followed by an overview of the language projects developed in the last centuries.

In the second part, the expansion of the English language will be described, alongside the predictions that many linguists and men of power made regarding its future.

The third part lays its focus on Charles K. Odgen's project of defeating the so-called "word magic" through a language that would facilitate the correlation between symbol and reference: a project that he would later define as Basic English, an acronym for *British, American, Scientific, International and Commercial.* Then, the spread and success of this language as a possible solution to the problem of Babel will be analysed, alongside its linguistic and political implications.

1. The search of a universal language

The quest for a common and universal language started in the late 17th century, as Latin had started its descent. The language that had once dominated the fields of science and culture began to be too out-dated to continue playing this role. Philosophers started then reflecting on the idea of natural languages and began therefore to question the epistemological value of words as a means of thought and condition.

René Descartes himself, in a letter sent to Marin Mersenn on 20th November 1629, writes that a simplified grammatical system that could be learned in just a matter of a few hours and with an easy pronunciation would be a great discovery. "This language would aid judgment by presenting all things to the individual so clearly that error would be virtually impossible."[as quoted in (Janton P, 1993)]

Much debate revolved around the necessity of a universal language, but many philosophers thought it to be a very useful means of communication as well as a great classifying and clarifying device. Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz wrote two years before he died that he dreamed of a language so logical that all errors would be just error of calculation, but of course, he admits, "It would be very difficult to create or invent this language or character, but extremely easy to learn it without a dictionary." (ibid.)

Starting from the Descartes' postulate of creating a language starting from a true philosophy, a number of philosophers started creating new languages. They used both alphabetical and numeral systems, but they tended to overlook the languages' concept of beauty.

After the Renaissance, the dream of creating a universal language continued for the following three hundred and fifty years, producing more than seven hundred attempts, making it an average of two per year (Al-Dabbagh, 2005). They all had the same objectives, namely, to reach the maximal ease of learning and to be efficient, but they differed a lot from one another. Most projects, however, could be divided into two macro-categories: pasigraphies and pasilalies.

1.1 Pasigraphies

The term *Pasigraphy* represents a purely visual writing system that was thought to be the basis for the creation of a universal language.

One example of pasigraphy is the language invented by John Wilkins, presented in 1668 in his book *A Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. He distinguished forty classes of ideas and divided them into subclasses and species, each of which had its separate sign, but of course, its usage was thought to be merely written.

Along Wilkins, many other linguists and philosophers started inventing such pasigraphies, like Gybrgy Kalmar (1772) in Hungary, Christoph Berger (1779) and J. Z. Nather (1805) in Germany, and J. P. De Ria (1788) in Switzerland. (Janton P, 1993)

Even though such projects did not encounter much success, pasigraphies continued being invented, like the language created by Dr. Lipschitz Binem, called Logography and presented to *The New York Times* as late as 30th October 1960. As quoted in (Sharpe, 1961) the sentence "I love you" in this so-called language would be 1547-1818-4003, making it a language usable solely in written contexts.

1.2 Pasilaly

Pasilalies consist of audio-visual conventions employing letters and symbols that can be combined into pronounceable words. They differ from pasigraphies because they are languages that can be spoken and read.

Pasilalies can also be divided into two sub-groups, *a priori* and *a posteriori* languages.

1.2.1 A Priori Language

Although their vocabulary seems to be an arbitrary invention, it is undeniable that the creators of such languages wanted to reflect Indo-European morphology and used their categories of nouns, adjectives, verbs, conjugation, declension, et cetera. One example cited in (Janton P, 1993) is the one of Comenius (1592 – 1670) who conjugated the root *ban-* 'be' using suffixes for the indication of the person and prefixes for indicating the tense:

Present	bana	bane	bani	baná	bané	baní
Past	pabana	pabane	pabani	pabaná	pabané	pabaní
Future	fabana	fabane	fabani	fabaná	fabané	fabaní

Since the first creators of *a priori* languages were philosophers and mathematicians, they used abstract methods that did not consider language as a system in itself, but rather as a concretization of those structures that already pre-existed in the human mind. Therefore, even though they were developed long before *a posteriori* languages, they did not achieve the same success.

1.2.2 A Posteriori Languages

These kinds of languages try to imitate already existing natural languages, elaborating or simplifying them in various degrees.

Some of the earliest attempts to create *a posteriori* languages were Lucien de Rudelle's Cosmoglossa (1858) and Jean Pirro's Universalglot (1868). As quoted in (Janton P, 1993), here an example of the latter:

"Men senior, I sede evos un gramatik e un verb-bibel de un nuov glot nomed Universalglot. In futur I scriptrai evos semper in dit glot. I pregate evos responden ad me in dit self glot".

The translation of which would be:

"Sir, I am sending you a grammar and dictionary of a new language called Universalglot. In the future, I will always write to you in this language. I request you to reply in this same language".

The words used in the text can be reconnected to Latin, Greek, German, English and French roots and it is possible to say that the first group of *a posteriori* languages tried to imitate already existing languages in order to create a new and simpler way of communicating.

Among these kinds of languages, light must be shed on Volapük and Esperanto, the latter being probably the most widely known. Officially presented to the world in 1887, Esperanto is now talked by more than two million users, including 1,000 L1 users.[1]

Another type of *a posteriori* language is represented by the simplifications of already existing languages, either living or dead.

In these two tendencies of creating a language from scratch and simplifying already existing languages, it is possible to see two different approaches to the problem of Babel. On one side, philosophers aimed at creating a new medium of communication that did not belong to any political power.

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[1] https://www-ethnologue-com.ezproxy.unibo.it/language/epo

Talking about how he came to the development of a universal language, Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof himself, the creator of Esperanto, wrote:

> "In this town [Bialystok, where he was born] […] the diversity of languages is the only, or at least the main cause, that separates the human family and divides it in conflicting groups.

Being a Jew in a town of the Russian Empire, he spoke Russian at home and heard Polish on the streets. He learned German, French, Latin and Greek at school and was taught Hebrew by his father. This mixture of language led him to write:

> "My Jewishness has been the main reason why, from earliest childhood, I have given my all for a single great idea, a single dream- the dream of the unity of humankind" [as quoted in (Janton P, 1993)]

On the other side of the spectrum, however, many linguists wanted to facilitate the extension of the power of their countries through a widespread simplification of the language.

Since the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were marked by expansionist ambitions and the growth of nationalistic thought, many projects of simplification of English, French, Spanish and German began to develop.

The title of Adalbert Baumann's book presenting his simplified version of German, Wede, is particularly significant in this sense: *Wede, A Language for the Understanding of the Axis Powers and Their Friends. Munich, in the War Year 1915.* (ibid.)

2. The expansion of English

While philosophers and linguists continued developing new languages, history had already started the spread of a language in the greater part of the globe: English.

In 1780, John Adams had already foreseen that "English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French is in the present age" (Adams, 1780). He also added that a chief reason for this was the increasing population in America and the great influence of England in the World.

In the next centuries, the spread of English took place, and Isaac Pitman, the editor of *The Phonetic Journal*, estimated that the number of speakers of English would have reached more than 1,000 million by the year 2000. He based his figures on the number of English speakers in the 1870s and if one considers the second and foreign language usage of English at the end of the century, the figures don't present significant differences. (Crystal, 2012)

With the expansion of the British Empire, English reached two-thirds of the globe, but it was not just the geographical distribution that helped its affirmation as eminent language. Through the colonies, English established itself as a symbol of political unity within the colony and with the home country. After reaching Independence, many ex-colonies kept English as official language because it was a 'neutral' medium of communication that did not privilege any of the local languages.

The spread of English was also strengthened by the scientific development, which was conducted for the greatest part in English-speaking countries. Since most of the innovations in the 19th century took place in England and the United States, the new terms were developed in English and this meant that foreigners who wanted to have access to this knowledge had to learn English as well. Between 1750 and 1900 about half of the scientific documents were written in English, consequently playing a very important role in the spread of the language abroad (ibid.)

Moreover, with the development of the international banking system, Britain and the United States started dominating the global market, resulting in what would later be called "economic imperialism".

The sum of these events led to the 'unspoken' decision to choose English as the language of communication, finding itself to be "at the right place at the right time" (ibid.).

3. The hypothesis of Basic English

At the beginning of the 20th century, when it became evident that English was becoming a dominant language, linguists Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards started drawing on their studies on semantics to develop a simplified version of English that could facilitate the spread and learning of the language.

C. K. Ogden (1889-1957) seems to have been thinking about a possible universal language during the First World War, since he thought that "harmony between nations would be impossible without a common language to facilitate effortless communication". He also observed the spread of English and saw in it a possible source of inspiration for the creation of a universal language (Garay, 1988).

As testified in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Ogden first had the idea of what would later be called "Basic English" as he and Richards were writing the fifth chapter of their book "*The Meaning of Meaning*", published in 1923.

In this book they tried to analyse the linguistic problem of word meaning and whilst analysing the process of definition as a means to get the profound meaning of a word, the idea of Basic English sparkled.

They observed that during the process of definition, some words are continuingly used, and they started, therefore, developing the idea of a language that used a limited number of words and resort to definition in order to express more complex ideas.

This led the two linguists to reduce the English vocabulary through a scientific and 'panoptic conjugation' system in order to achieve a minimum of 850 words. This reduced vocabulary, thought Ogden and Richards, could be used in every aspect of daily life and for international communication in various sectors. For this reason, it was given the acronym of "Basic", *British, American, Scientific, International and Commercial*. (Gordon, 2017)

English' simple morphology had already facilitated the work of the linguists in the simplification of the language and the existence of the so-called phrasal verbs represented a great help in achieving an 'analytical language'. The fact that more complex verbs, universally considered the most important part of speech, could be dissected into simpler ones with an indication of motion represented the possibility of a drastic reduction of the vocabulary and that was thought to help the process of learning the language. Since the focus of the teachers would have been laid on improving grammar instead of the increase of the vocabulary, Basic English was also seen as a suitable fighter of 'pidgin' English.

3.1 Addressing the problem of 'word magic'

The biggest problem addressed by Ogden and Richards in their book *The Meaning of Meaning* was 'word magic'. With this term, they identified "a superstitious awe of the power of words which clouds our understanding and interferes with proper communication" (McElvenny, 2015).

In order to explain how the difficulties in communication arise, an explanation of the concept of reference is provided in the book. The following triangle represents the symbolic function of words, the problem that Oden and Richards dealt with the most.

THOUGHT OR REFERENCE

CORRECT
Symbolises
(a causal relation)

ADEQUATE
Refers to
(other causal relations)

SYMBOL   REFERENT

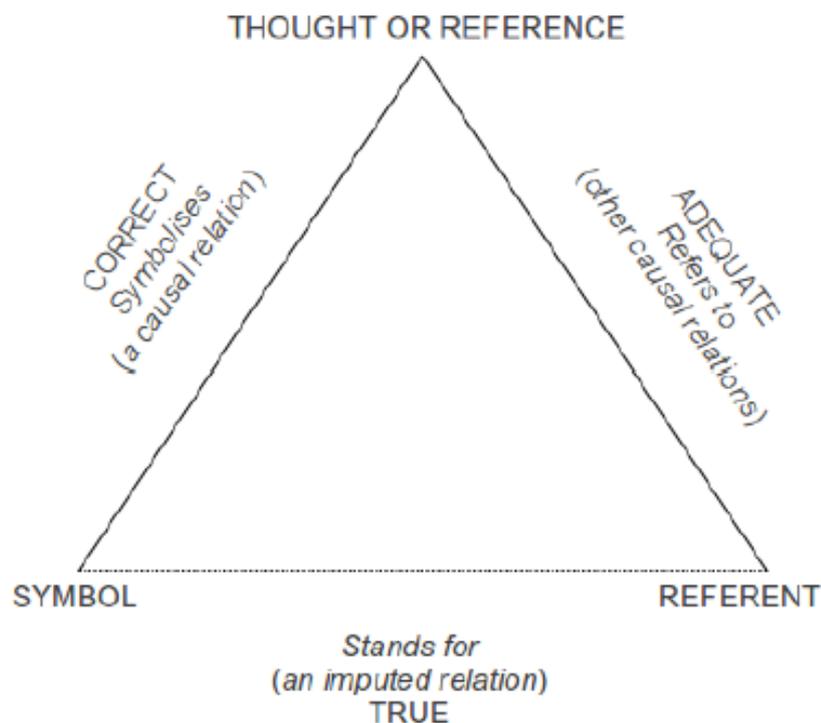Stands for
(an imputed relation)
TRUE

Figure 1. The Triangle of Reference (Ogden and Richards 1989[1923]:11)

According to this image reported in (McElvenny, 2015), the reference happens when a 'symbol' (that could be either a word or any other type of sign) evokes an idea ('thought or reference') in the mind of the recipient of the message. This person is then lead to a 'referent' that could be an entity or an object.

The problem of 'word magic' arises when the relation between the symbol and referent is assumed to be a direct relationship, whereas every reference passes through the middle stage of 'thought and reference'. To solve this problem, Ogden and Richards thought about expanding the symbol, so that it reflected its 'thought or reference' most clearly. (ibid.)

This is the moment when definition starts playing a vital role in the development of the analysis of *The meaning of meaning*. By defining, the speaker starts from a secure point known both by them and the recipient of the message and starts reaching the reference. In the book, 'secure point' is a term which identifies ideally items encountered in everyday life, "things, that is, which we can point to or experience" (ibid.).

By looking at the problem of 'word magic' and at the analysis of the process of definition, it becomes clear how Basic English is a concrete application of these theories.

3.2 Panoptic conjugation

The words selected by Ogden as the core vocabulary of Basic were chosen on the principle of what he called 'panoptic conjugation'.

He used this term because he saw a correspondence between the process of definition and the conjugations of verbs since both of them were elaborations of words related to the same root. In order to apply this method, he placed "the word under consideration at the centre of a circle, whose radii can then represent the directions in which the conjugates may be sought. For example, in the case of 'House', cottage, bungalow, hotel, sanatorium, palace, hut, hovel, home, city room, chimney, etc" [as quoted in (McElvenny, 2015)].

He explained this procedure through a diagram, where the root word is surrounded by its conjugates which are connected along one of the twenty radial definition routes or are derived through the processes of metaphor, opposition, and derivation. (ibid.)

PANOPTIC CONJUGATION
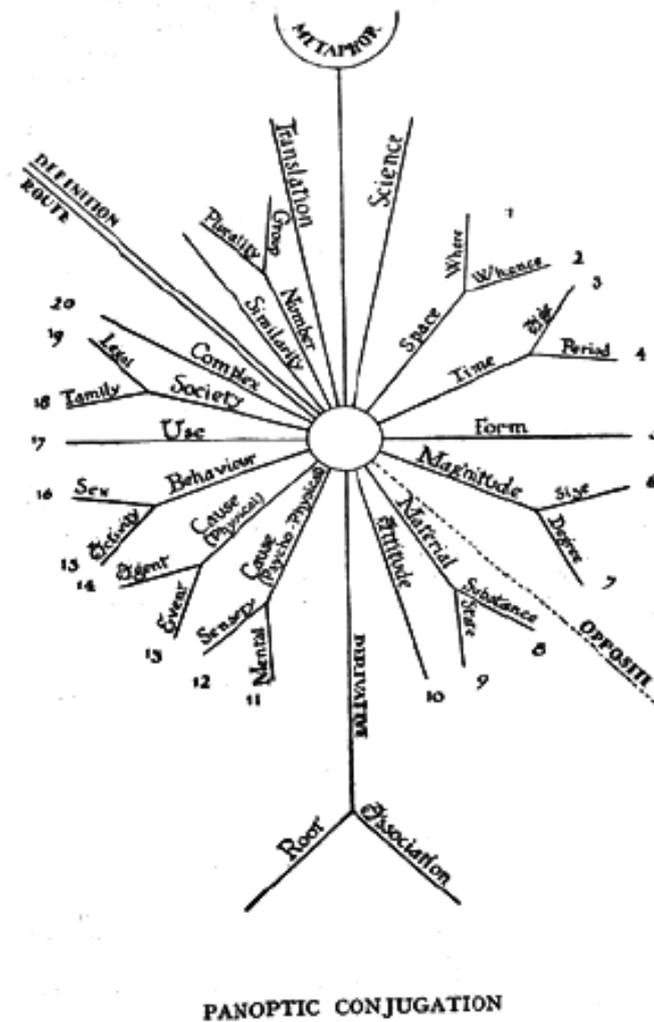
What resulted to be a peripheral conjugate was eliminated in the process of forming Basic English and had to be replaced by paraphrases. When these paraphrases, however, include more than nine words or are seen as 'awkward', they are to be replaced by the original word.

Through this process, Ogden managed to shrink the English vocabulary to 850 words that included 600 nouns (called 'things' by Ogden), sixteen verbs ('operators'), 150 adjectives ('qualities') and a number of prepositions ('directives'), adverbs, pronouns and conjunctions (Basic English, 1932).

The change of the definitions of the parts of speech is important in Ogden's work since he thought that the first knowledge needed in order to learn Basic was 'the functions of different part of speech' (McElvenny, 2015).

Nouns, or, as he called them, 'things', are at the heart of the Basic vocabulary since they name the objects present in the world and, because of that, they give an enormous advantage in teaching a language since nouns can be explained through a pictorial method. Through the same process, he defines 'qualities', especially 'emotive adjectives', where it "may not be possible to convey all the

subtleties of mood and attitude, but the behaviour by which alone they are recognized is usually less elusive" (ibid.)

Verbs are particularly intriguing when it comes to rendering them Basic, since they often include all of an 'operation', an 'object' and a 'direction', as in a word like 'disembark', which means 'get [operation] off [direction] a ship [object]'. By dissecting the verbs of the English language and getting to the core modifiers, Ogden limited the list to twelve representing actions and four others (do, have, be and seem). Their simple structure and reduced number allowed Ogden to create a scheme where 'model sentences' were presented, reaching the acme of conciseness through the 'Basic World Wheel' that follows. Each of the discs includes all words of one part of speech and by rotating them, grammatically correct sentences can be formed. (ibid.)

¹ Price 2/6 (70 cents) from The Orthological Institute,
10, King's Parade, Cambridge, England.

Figure 3. Ogden's Panopticon (Ogden 1932a:183)

3.3 Teaching Basic English

Because of its clarity and reduced vocabulary, Basic English was thought to be the best way to approach the English language by non-native speakers. Richards, in a speech reported on the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,* stated that "there is no good reason for using Basic in the place of a wider English, when talking to anyone with a complete knowledge of English", but what they aimed at was creating a limited version of English that could help in teaching the language (Richards, 1939). In order to do so, he recounted his experience as Visiting Professor to the National Tsing Hwa University in China.

He was concerned when he discovered that his students there aimed at understanding very well-known writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, whilst not having a complete understanding of the English tenses and the use of conditional. They focussed much of their attention to the expansion of their vocabulary, not studying either the pronunciation or the grammatical structures these words required.

In the discussion reported in the same article, Mr. Adolph Myers reports his experience with English in India which is paradigmatic for what Richards affirmed in his speech. Myers recounts that he once asked a young man in Bangalore, South India, if he was on the right road towards his destination and the boy answered: "No, this is not the way, you have to retreat!". One other time, he had just given a lecture on Basic and a young teacher came to him saying "I hope you will help me improve my English. Of course, I know what is wrong. As you said in your lecture, I have no basement!" (Richards, 1939). These examples show that a vast vocabulary is not always linked with language competence but rather represents an obstacle in communication.

These kinds of problems are the ones that Basic English aimed at eliminating, in order to spread a simpler, but fully correct version of the language. Grammar rules do not differ from those of Standard English, except for the abolition of the auxiliary *shall* and of the subjunctive. Comparatives and superlatives are created through the particles *more* and *most* when the original adjective is longer than a syllable and further nouns can be formed by adding the suffixes -er, -ed, -ing. (Graham, 1966)

Ogden did not bring any grammatical reform of Standard English in Basic because he wanted to present to the world a simplified version of the language that could be easily learned, without altering the original one, so that students would not need to un-learn anything when going towards Standard English. One of his aims was to invite students to reflect on the patterns of the language in order to allow them to master them in a short period of time.

3.3.1 Teaching 'modifiers'

As Richards reports, the two greatest sources of error in learning a new language are interferences with the native language patterns and interferences between the new language patterns that are being learned.

At the early stages of teaching a language, lucid sentence patterns need to be delivered to the learner, *lucid* meaning a sentence where the single words deliver only one message each. One sentence that respects this criterion is "I will give this to you". Each of the elements in this sentence conveys only one specific meaning and the sentence itself reflects the act that is being made, making the structure, therefore, lucid. Other sentences can present the same structure, like "I will say this to you" or "I will send this to you".

The English language allows of course variations of this structure, "I will give you this", for example, but sentences like this do not present the same lucidity as those explained before. If such a sentence is taught too soon, the risk of the learner applying the same pattern to verbs which do not accept it is visibly higher. The learner could, for example, say "I will say you this" or "I will take you this".

The modifiers selected for Basic English, however, were specifically selected to present peculiarly lucid sentence patterns, allowing the teacher to lay the focus on the clear understanding of their meaning and strengthen it before going forward. Another characteristic of these verbs is also the fact that their usage in these lucid patterns never sounds unacceptable in Standard English: as Richards stressed, everything that could be considered bad English is also considered Bad Basic.

The reduction to the verbs to sixteen brings several other advantages. They enable the teacher to exert full control on the language patterns since the words used are very few, for example. The fact that these verbs are constantly being used during classes in order to explain and define every action makes it also easier for the students to exercise their pronunciation fully.

3.3.2 Teaching prepositions

The syntactic lucidity explained by Richards in regard to modifiers is a principle that can also be followed when teaching prepositions.

With the exception of *for* and *of,* all prepositions have their original meaning in the position in space or direction of motion. Before explaining metaphorical uses of prepositions such as "on no account" or "on view", teachers need to consolidate their original space-related meaning in the mind of the students. When teaching the preposition *on*, the first message that needs to be conveyed is its nuclear sense of *touching*, *being in spatial contiguity,* for example, and once it is fully understood by students, they can proceed and learn every other metaphorical use of the preposition.

4. The reception and application of Basic English

As reported in the *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, whilst the idea of Basic English sparkled with the creation of *The meaning of meaning,* which was published in 1923, it was in 1928 that the first word list of Basic was drawn up and in 1930 that the book *Basic English* was released to the public.

It was the first post-war period and English was already used in a great part of the world as second language, since it was spoken as mother tongue in vast influential areas and that helped Basic being welcomed relative successfully. By 1939, 100 books were already written in Basic, including a dictionary of 20,000 words.

The spread of Basic was favoured by several foundations, like the first privately financed *The Orthological Institute*, founded by Ogden in 1927, and also by some American Foundations like the *Rockefeller Foundation.* The latter in particular sponsored research programmes for Japan and China.

In 1939, however, the Second World War started, causing a shortage in paper and a halt to programmes overseas.

War did not, however, stop the interest in Basic by prominent figures. On 6th September 1943, Sir Winston Churchill received an honorary degree at Harvard and on this occasion, he gave a speech on the importance of the common tongue between the United States and the United Kingdom as a factor of unity between the nations. He went even further saying that the common language could be a promotor of an eventual common citizenship and added:

> "I do not see why we should not try to spread our common language even
> more widely throughout the globe and, without seeking selfish advantage over
> any, possess ourselves of this invaluable amenity and birthright."[2]

He then added that he had asked the British Cabinet to create a committee of Ministers which could analyse Basic English and study how it could be exported in the world, since "It would certainly be a grand convenience for us all to be able to move freely about the world […] and be able to find everywhere a medium, albeit primitive, of intercourse and understanding" (ibid).

After reaching the acme of its notoriety, the news regarding Basic was swept away by the news on the invasion of Italy, resulting in it stop being a matter of international interest.

As Joseph Albert Lauwerys reports in his speech published on the *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, the Cabinet committee built by the British Prime

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[2] https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1941-1945-war-leader/the-price-of-greatness-is-responsibility/

Minister was neither quick nor efficient. In October 1943, he wrote to the Secretary of State for India "I was shocked to find on my return to this country that the Cabinet Committee appointed on July 12th had never once met" (Lauwerys, 1966).

From this moment on, a series of administrative incompetence and procrastination represented a halt to Ogden's idea of expanding Basic. In 1945, more than 100,000 volumes by the value of £ 18,000 were destroyed by dampness in Cursitor Street, as the Inter-Departmental Committee spent a long time debating on the necessary accommodation for them.

In July 1945, Churchill's coalition government lost the election contrary to all expectations and the new Labour ministry did not engage in carrying on Churchill's projects of expanding Basic. This came as good news to the contestants of Basic working by the B.B.C. because it relieved them from the burden of promoting the language. As quoted in (Epson, 2015), on 5th October 1945, the BBC controller of the Overseas Service J.B. Clark wrote to other colleagues around the world "It seems to us likely that the recent change of Government here may result in the whole question being put on a high shelf or in a dark corner".

Ogden was asked by the English Government to set up *The Basic English Foundation*, partly financed by the Ministry of Education. The sum allotted for it was of about £ 100,000 over six years, a sum that may appear large, but was actually not. Furthermore, with the news of official funds allotted to this foundation, it was generally assumed that *The Orthological Institute* founded by Ogden would also receive official support and that caused private benefactors to cease their financial support, as the Payne Fund did in 1946.

The Basic English Foundation started working together with *The Orthological Institute*, but in this post-war time, when every resource was dedicated to rebuilding the new world, the financing for these institutions ceased in 1953. They both tried to continue their work, but they eventually stopped with the death of Ogden in 1957.

After his creator died, Basic saw a great loss of interest, but there was not just one person or association to blame for that. As Lauwerys said "too many cooks spoiled the broth", even though there is no need to suppose the existence of active malevolence in anyone.

What carries the blame for the unsuccess of Basic after the war is, according to him, the absence of the solid official support needed to put into praxis the policy decisions Churchill proposed in his Harvard speech. (Lauwerys, 1966)

4.1 Criticism against Basic English

Basic English has been criticized in the course of history for two main reasons. Some critics affirmed that it was not the easiest way to reach Standard English and some others saw in it a weapon for the new kind of imperialism, namely cultural imperialism.

4.1.1 The usefulness of Basic English

In his article "*How Basic is Basic English?*" Rudolf Flesch analyses the problem of finding an international language. He claims that an international language is as desirable as peace is, no human would say the opposite, but then he asks himself if this international language should actually be English. Many people saw it as imperialistic, but the status quo showed that in 1944 millions of people were already trying to learn English as second language and that gave it "a long head start as the coming international language". (Flesch, 1944) Whether Basic represents the shortest route to English, Flesch claims that it falls in the teachers' competence, since every teacher prefers different methods.

As far as Basic itself as an international language, he says that it would be inconceivable to ask someone who has a perfect competence of English to stay in the 850 words limit and that if Basic were to be adopted, it should represent a mere instrument to get to English. The most important question that should be asked, according to Flesch, is whether Basic is a successful simplification of English or not.

While analysing actual simplifications of English such as Pidgin English and the language used in children stories, Flesch claims that the key to reaching simplicity is a matter of sentence structure and concrete expressions. He says that it can be achieved by following "these five rules of thumb:

1) Use sentences rather than clauses
2) Use word order rather than word forms
3) Use verbs rather than nouns
4) Use nouns rather than adjectives
5) Use words about people rather than things" (Flesch, 1944)

Basic does not follow these rules, but the drastic reduction of verbs makes the sentences much more complex, according to Flesch. The reduction of vocabulary to the famous 850 words is also seen as an obstacle rather than a simplification, since a simple sentence such as "We ate an old-fashioned holiday dinner with turkey and pumpkin pie" would become "We took as food a chief meal of a day of rest from work, not in the taste of the present day, with a great bird and a great round yellow fruit with hard skin and a great number of seeds, covered with paste and cooked in the oven" (ibid.)

Flesch concludes then his article by saying that Basic English is neither Basic nor English, but it is still a better alternative to the bureaucratic lexicon that dominates in modern times. He recognises its value as the first significant simplification of English, "for simplified English is bound to come […] Basic English, like other outdated pioneer adventures, will by then be buried and forgotten". (ibid.)

Another critic to the immediateness of Basic can be found in an article entitled "Basic English" published on the magazine *Nature* on 16th July 1932.

In this article it is criticised that Basic not only puts non-native speakers in a disadvantaged position, but it does not come easy even to L1 English speakers since they would have to bear in mind which words belong to the vocabulary and which do not. The biggest problem that is addressed in the article, however, is the fact that even though Basic has no literary claims, it is still seen as the possible language for science, showing that "its author has poor opinion of the literary value of scientific writing" (Basic English, 1932). Science is also continually evolving and therefore it needs an auxiliary language that can expand its vocabulary, quality which Basic in its original form does not have.

4.1.2 The imperialistic motor of Basic English

K.E. Garay explains in his *article ""Empires of the Mind"? C.K. Ogden, Winston Churchill and Basic English"* that, even though Churchill often stressed the usefulness of Basic English, it is conceivable that he was also moved by an imperialistic ardour. By the link of a common language, he aimed at keeping vital the British ideals and traditions that had already been exported in the greatest part of the world in the nineteenth century.

On 10th November 1942, Churchill announced at the Mansion House that he had not become "the King's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire" and on 11th July 1943, he wrote to Sir Edward Bridges "I am very much interested in the question of Basic English. The widespread use of this would be a gain to us far more fruitful than the annexation of great provinces"[as quoted in (Garay, 1988)].

Churchill's great ally in the United States, President Roosevelt, was also interested in Basic English, as testified in one of his letters sent to the Prime minister and also in his words a sign of imperialistic ambitions is traceable: "My conviction is that Basic English will then prove to be a great boon to mankind in the future and a powerful support to the influence of the Anglo Saxon people in world affairs" (ibid.).

In concluding his article, Garay addresses once again the fact that Churchill must have seen a wider potential of Basic English that went beyond the simple convenience of having a common medium of communication. He must have seen in it a way to preserve the remnants of the British Empire, as it is testified by an exchange of words reported by Garay. He was once interrupted in one speech about Basic by a member of the House who asked, "what about winning the war?", to whom he answered, "This is in connection of winning the peace". (ibid.)

K.E. Garay, however, is not the only one who addressed the imperialistic ambition behind the potential spread of Basic English. Many supporters of international auxiliary languages expressed their negative opinion on Basic.

One university professor who advocated for a more neutral international language was the linguist Albert Léon Guérard. In his article *"International languages and national cultures"* he advocates for the preservation of national languages since foreign languages represent a challenge and a chance of discovery, "the vast common

denominator of world-wide human experience" (Guérard, 1941), but he also preaches for the existence of an international language that could smooth international communication. He sees in it the sign that humanity could be ready for mutual consideration, the first condition for the stabilisation of peace.

This language, however, should not be a 'major' one, since that would result in both a deterioration of the original language and the death of the smaller ones. In his opinion, it should be found in a neutral language, like those invented by Zamenhof and Giuseppe Peano, Esperanto, and Latino sine Flexione. Their Latin roots would certainly facilitate speakers of European languages, but, on the other hand, absolute neutrality would be impossible to achieve unless a complete artificial language was to be invented.

In regard to Basic, Guérard defines it "not neutral in spirit", since it represents only the start of the process of learning a national language, a process that would inevitably bring English in losing its national pride and put other languages in an inferior position. He also goes on saying that the spread of English would be nothing less than an instrument to achieve supremacy, since "language imperialism is not identical but parallel to political imperialism" (ibid.).

Conclusions

There have been several attempts to artificially create simple languages that could gain the status of universal language, but even though there was no active project that aimed at establishing English as the language of communication around the globe and even though many have seen in its expansion a new form of imperialism, English has *de facto* become the Global Language.

Due to difficulties in collecting data, it is impossible to say how many people are able to speak English around the globe, but it is estimated that among L1 and L2 speakers, the figures are around 1.5 Billion. [3] It is the official language of countless organisations and it has started being taught from a very young age. English-speaking kindergartens and schools are starting to be founded everywhere in the world and, in order to facilitate studying mobility, a great part of the university courses all around the globe are taught in English.

One clear example among many others of the *de facto* globality of English, regardless of the power of the English-speaking countries, could be found by its use made by the Friday for Future movement. The environmentalist movement that aims at raising awareness about the global challenge of climate change uses English in order to reach the broadest number of people. Even though its starter, Greta Thunberg, has Swedish as mother-tongue, she prefers using English and this decision is not to be drawn upon an especially vital role played by English-speaking countries in the promotion of the movement.

The University of Hamburg published an article on its website underlying the vital role of English in the mediatic communication of the movement, saying "as Fridays for Future is a movement with a unifying objective across borders, it also requires a communication tool which underlines its internationality."[4]

Through this example, it is clear how English has become the chief language in international communication and that is not linked to the influence of the English-speaking countries anymore.

As Barbara Seidlhofer writes in her 2005 article on the ELT journal, only 25% of the users of English in the world is a native speaker, meaning that most of the interactions using English as a Lingua Franca take place among "non-natives". (Seidlhofer, 2005)

English as a Lingua Franca has recently become a matter of studies and several corpora on the subject are now being developed, like the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) and the English as Lingua Franca in Academic settings (ELFA). Through instruments like these, it is possible to document and scientifically study every-day conversations among non-native speakers.

These corpora show that when English is used as a Lingua Franca, many pronunciation difficulties are avoided, such as 'th' sounds /θ/ and /ð/ and the 'dark l' allophone [ɫ], and speakers often do not use the third person

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[3] https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/12/04/where-are-the-worlds-best-english-speakers
[4] https://englishexplorations.check.uni-hamburg.de/fridays-for-future/

singular present tense '-s' marking of the verbs. This great number of modifications of the English language, however, do not seem to hinder communication. (ibid.)

Trying to find patterns in English as a Lingua Franca is complicated, though, since it is "not a variety of English but a variable way of using English" (Kecskes, 2019). It is the result of a temporary community that comes together and creates its own variety of lingua franca "depending on each other's proficiency level, use of code-mixing, degree of pidginization, etc" (ibid.). It is also hard to find recurrent grammatical irregularities since they are strongly influenced by the language patterns of the different L1 of the speakers and since the communities speaking English as a lingua franca dissolve in a short matter of time.

What can be said about this particular use of English, however, is that it presents mistakes almost inherently due to the influence of the native languages of the speakers and that such mistakes are a breeding ground for incomprehension.

It becomes now clear how the project of Charles K. Odgen, if thoroughly applied, would have spared this variable use of English in intercultural contexts, and given it a rigorous grammatical structure free from mistakes. Being aware of the risk of L2 speakers modifying the language and speaking an incoherent and incorrect version of English, Odgen wanted to create a simple language system that could be taught and learnt in a fully correct manner and that would enable everyone to speak a fully grammatically regulated common tongue. With its limited vocabulary, Basic also provides a means to defeat "word magic", the biggest source of incomprehension not only among non-native speakers, but also among people who share the same mother tongue.

It is now impossible to try and say what would have happened if every learner of English would have first learnt Basic, but since the first experiments with this language did experience success, it is probably safe to say that such grammatical irregularities in English as a Lingua Franca would not occur.

As Richards explained in his speech in 1939, it is of no use to aim at reaching the English level of authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce without a clear and solid base of the language (Richards, 1939), but since no steady teaching project like Basic has been thoroughly applied, the so-called Global English is now rich in grammatical irregularities.

Already in 1966, Lauwerys spoke about English saying that it may have become the Global Language, but it has not become any easier to learn and that a systematic way of teaching a basic but fully correct version of English was the goal they should have aimed to reach. (Lauwerys, 1966)

In 2020, as a flawed version of English dominates every-day communication all around the world, these words are still of topical relevance and the matter of Basic English is a point worthy of debate.

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