

English As a Bridge Between Cultures: Scotland, Carolina, and California

- This paper examines the function of holy texts in unifying diverse societies. Scotland and South Carolina, usually considered to be monolingual and homogeneous societies, are compared with contemporary multicultural California. How Scotland and South Carolina used specific written texts to unify peoples speaking many languages is discussed, with implications for California. The established church and school in Scotland, the competing churches and schools in Carolina, and the public school system in California are examined as agents in social and language change. The texts that might serve as unifying ones for a society like that of contemporary California are discussed, as well as the central role of educators in choosing texts that express shared social and spiritual values.

As a teacher of prospective high school English Teachers, I often ask my students to participate in a Language Heritage exercise. In it, they first list the important points in their personal language history and then write an essay on their family language history—stretching as far back as their families have provided data in the form of stories and incidental memories (Heisch, Lamendella & Nichols, 1987). I do this because I have learned to expect diverse language backgrounds among Californians. Even those who are not immediately aware of the diversity within their own families become intrigued with the backgrounds of their classmates, as I ask groups from different language backgrounds to form panels and discuss their language experiences together and invite questions from the class. Sometimes, by the end of the course, students miraculously remember hearing about a Native American woman on one side of their family tree. Some suddenly remember speaking Yiddish as children. A larger number wonder at the silence in their families about what must have been rich German language backgrounds. Many make pilgrimages to the elders in their families to ask, before it is too late, who spoke what to whom—and how often, in what circumstances. Occasionally a student takes advantage of the miracles of modern technology to videotape a mother and a grandmother talking together in the ancestral and the adopted languages. Always this exercise in getting in touch with personal roots illuminates and educates before we move on to the abstractions of

Scotland

what and whom these prospective teachers will encounter in this generation's English classes.

As we focus here on the larger topic of how English has formed a bridge between diverse cultures, I ask that each individual reader pause a moment to think about four sets of great-grandparents: what languages each of them probably (or possibly) spoke.

Most of us will remember that at least one of the eight ancestors spoke a language other than English or, at the very least, that some of them spoke a nonstandard or creolized variety of English. Very few of us will have great-grandparents who all spoke the variety of English that we now speak.

How then, did we evolve into an "English-speaking" nation, into a state whose official language is now English? While that question is our primary focus here, related questions have to do with where we are going with this language that is not ours in some profound personal and cultural sense; with what we might have lost—or gained—in adopting this alien language; and with how we together are changing this thing we keep calling *English*. The question we must continually focus on as we try to see the larger picture is how we personally are linked with the struggles of our students to acculturate and assimilate into this English-dominant culture.

I pose this particular question because I have learned that teachers connect most profoundly with students' experiences when the teachers themselves are engaged in a search for connections to both the past and to the potential future. As a teacher, I understand the struggles reflected in my classrooms best when I understand the struggles behind my own self. When I can imagine myself linked through blood or experience to the more immediate experiences of my students, my imagination allows me to create a classroom atmosphere in which the contemporary generation of English learners can explore the meanings of their experiences. Because many of my own students are the first of their families to attend college, I use their experiences of dislocation to help them connect with the sharper dislocations of immigrants from Central America, Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, and even the as-yet-unknown immigrants from the next political hot spot.

Just as our family language histories can help us to understand the struggles of the contemporary students before us, the communal language histories of older multicultural societies can help us to understand the struggles underway today in contemporary California. I propose to examine two societies that are usually thought of as primarily English-speaking and relatively homogeneous: Scotland and South Carolina. The evolution of these originally multilingual and multicultural societies into ones united by English as a common language will help us to understand both what is happening with us today and also how we might help make the birthing of our new society a joyous, rather than a bitter, one.

Our story begins in Scotland, land of the first public-school system in all of Europe and model for the public-school system of North America. This was a land of three major languages: Gaelic, Scots, and English (Nichols, 1977)—a language diversity seldom recognized in the usual charts of the Indo-European language family or in the accounts of language variation in the British Isles printed outside Scotland. The Scots themselves know about the variation within their domain and are quite indignant about the failure of their United Kingdom cousins to recognize both the diversity and the literary excellence of the Older Scots tongue. They understand all too well that those who rule are the ones who determine which books get published—and thus establish the canon of literary works that get read. But they also revere and read daily a holy text written in the common language that unites the Protestant portion of the British Isles: the King James translation of the Bible.

Their own King James VI had become King James I of England just after the Protestant Reformation and had initiated the translation of this religious book that became so important in unifying his people under one language. Before ascending the English throne, James had been an active author in his native Scots; after the Union of the Crowns in 1603, he moved his court down to London and both he and his court began to use English as their literary and court language. If we look at Scottish history leading up to this unification of the two countries, we will not find it surprising that this ruler saw the necessity for a language of wider communication. The city of Edinburgh had been captured in 450 A.D. by a Germanic tribe called the Angles, invaded in 500 by the Picts from Ireland, and invaded yet again by Norse-speaking Scandinavians in 800. After the Norman conquest of England in 1066, French speakers made their way into the Scots countryside and into the government as well. Out of this coming together of Germanic, Celtic, Scandinavian, and French languages, a national language referred to as *Inglis* had evolved by 1398, when Chaucerian English was being spoken down south in London. Renamed *Scottis* by 1450, it had become a vibrant literary as well as legal language by 1500.

Scotland was a small and sparsely populated country, however. And not all of this small population spoke Scots. In the Catholic north and parts of the southwest, Gaelic was still spoken; on the borders with England and in the homes of many aristocrats who took English wives, English was spoken. A breakthrough in technology—the printing press—and the control of this technology by the wealthier and more numerous English meant that English, not Scots, would be the language of print and thus the language of the holy texts. In 1560 the translation of the Bible into English by Protestant refugees in Geneva initiated this process. By 1579 the Protestant Scots Parliament had decreed that every householder of a certain standing must have a bible and psalm book in the vulgar language. Under King James' guidance,

Sunday Schools were established in each village to teach at least one adult in each household how to read these holy texts. Thus began the first free public school system in Europe, and its language was the English of the country to the south rather than the native Scots of the Lowlands. Not only was the school language now English, but also the official legal language, following the 1603 union of the Crowns. English literature became very popular in Scotland and some 14% of the Scots peers married English wives and sent their sons to school in England. Today on the Sabbath one hears the holy texts read and sung in English, while the discussion of the text—of the sermon—may well be in a variety much closer to the Scots spoken by King James. In the Catholic Highlands, Gaelic can still be heard; in the Orkney Islands a Scandinavian language known as Norn may be found. Scotland remains a multilingual society, united by English as a written language.

Carolina

The same King James of Scotland and England who ushered in this educational infrastructure also paved the way for the immigration of many Scots descendants to the colony of Carolina, beginning in 1670. These Scots had been “planted” in Northern Ireland as part of King James’ plan to secure control of Ireland. Having immigrated once, primarily from the counties of Dumfries and Galloway in the southwest, these Scots-Irish (as they came to be called) and their descendants were receptive to the move to America when conditions in Northern Ireland became intolerable. Often entire congregations moved together, bringing both their Presbyterian preacher and the holy texts written in English. In America they established both the church that united them, as well as the schools that promoted literacy. The upcountry of South Carolina is dotted with small colleges founded by Protestant religious groups. The lowcountry, settled by English more heavily than by Scots-Irish, had fewer institutions of higher education since the English landowners could and did send their sons to schools in England. A long-standing tension between the English Anglicans and the Scots-Irish Presbyterians figured prominently in the difficulty the early colony experienced in establishing the first public-supported schools. Although both groups believed strongly in public education, each wanted the schoolmaster to belong to its own faith and to give religious instruction from its own catechism (Joyner, 1985). Both catechisms were written in English, however, making no difference for language development which one the children studied.

English and the Scots-Irish were far from the only cultural groups represented in the early colony. From almost the beginning, the settlement near Charleston included African, Jewish, and French immigrants, as well as English, Scots-Irish, Scots and probably a few Irish. The land had been “given” to eight supporters of Charles II, grandson of King James, and these eight Lords Proprietors bankrolled the initial settlements. Because the financial backers of this enterprise were En-

glish, their language and their customs held a prominent place in the colony, as they selected leaders who spoke and wrote in the language variety that they themselves used.

When the English-financed Europeans entered Carolina in 1670, they encountered indigenous peoples whose ancestors had lived on this continent for some 15 centuries. Although their numbers had been decimated through diseases contracted from earlier Spanish and French explorers, these native peoples were still numerous and enjoyed a high standard of living. Their economy was primarily agricultural, with corn as the major crop. When the Spanish explorer, De Soto, had visited one of their leading towns in 1540, it had had some 500 houses overlooking a river gorge, temples for storing weapons and ceremonial objects, and granaries for storing excess maize. At least 40 different linguistic groups existed in Carolina, belonging to four different language families: Iroquoian, Siouan, Algonquian, and Muskogean. They do not seem to have had a *lingua franca* at the time of contact. Perhaps the widespread practice of adopting captives of war into the family living groups as replacements for lost members would have provided the necessary bilingual interpreters between the groups. The women practiced abortion, before giving birth in the late twenties to one or two children, thus helping to keep the population stable (Waddell, 1980).

By 1710, a generation after initial settlement, Native Americans still comprised the majority of the population (66%), with Africans next at 22%, and Europeans trailing with 12%. Of this 12%, not all were English speakers. Alarmed by the paucity of their numbers and by the large numbers of Native Americans and growing numbers of Africans imported as slaves to work the rice plantations in the lowcountry, the colonial government issued a call to “poor Protestants” of Europe to come to the Carolina colony. With the promise of fertile land, free of taxes initially, an even help with tools and provisions, they came into the colony from France, Switzerland, and the German Palatinate. From colonies to the north came the Welsh and vast numbers of the Scots-Irish in search of better lands and more space for their growing numbers. Coexisting with these Protestants was the second-largest Jewish synagogue in the colonies, a Sephardic group in Charleston probably speaking the Spanish-related Ladino. The small percentage of the colony which was European, then, were speaking some five or six different languages besides English: Welsh, German, French, Spanish/Ladino, Scots, and Gaelic on Cape Fear (now in North Carolina). The variety of English spoken by the majority of the Scots-Irish so horrified the planters of the lowcountry that one of their main worries after the Revolutionary War was that their children would be tutored in the Scottish dialect.

By the time of the 1776 Revolution against England, a century after the English settlement at Charleston, the majority of the population was of African ancestry. Settled primarily along the coast above and below Charleston, Africans who came mostly from Senegal, Gambia,

Nigeria, and Angola spoke some 30 different languages and had no common language save English. The variety of English that developed where large numbers of Africans lived together came to be known as Gullah. A creole with roots in both English and in African languages, Gullah can still be heard on the more remote Sea Islands of Carolina and Georgia and along the rivers where the old rice plantations existed before the American Civil War.

Clearly the original English speakers were outnumbered by Africans, Native Americans, and other Europeans in the colony of Carolina. Why, then, did their language prevail over all the others? Certainly the legal and economic status of the speakers had a great deal to do with what language was used in government and business dealings beyond the local sphere. But, perhaps less clearly, the choice of English as the language of religious and educational instruction was probably even more significant. The English and the Scots-Irish brought with them their holy texts, printed in English. They brought with them their preachers to read and interpret these texts and, most importantly, to set up schools to instruct the young in the reading of these texts for themselves. Because the European population was primarily Protestant, intermarriage was common between English and French, between German and French, between Welsh and Scots-Irish. We can trace the disappearance of French in the wills recorded by French Huguenot family heads and by requests for bilingual preachers for congregations whose children no longer spoke French and whose older generation did not yet speak English. We can see the much quicker assimilation of German groups who more often had no preacher to interpret their texts in the native language. And we can see the Welsh Baptists coming with a holy text written in Welsh, but as they mothered dozens of new Baptist churches in the new colony and brought in an overwhelming number of non-Welsh speakers, adopting English as the language of wider communication in their own churches.

In the churches, then, English came to dominate as people met for worship, as they intermarried, and as they heard and learned to read from the holy texts shared by the European Protestants. In the public schools, English also was used as the common language. One early public school at Charleston in 1712 reportedly had a Scots teacher, who taught Latin and Greek, as well as reading, writing, and arithmetic in English; he probably used a Presbyterian catechism for religious instruction. A nearby public school at Goose Creek in 1713 had an Anglican missionary school teacher who used the catechism of that faith for his 27 white students of Anglican, Presbyterian, and Anabaptist faiths and for his 1 black and 2 Indian students. Certainly the English religious text served as a unifying one for this multicultural school. Although we have no record of their education, the Jewish males in Charleston, as prominent merchants, would have seen to it that their sons learned to read and write English so that they might continue their fathers' commercial activities within and outside the colony.

The African portion of the population was largely unprovided for in terms of formal education in the early colony, but their inclusion in the Protestant churches (if only in their segregated balcony seats) meant that they, too, were exposed to formal English as used in the King James Bible. When many of them learned to read, even if illegally, it was often using this holy text as a primer (Birnie, 1927). The Anglicans supported one important school for blacks in Charleston, taught for almost two decades by a slave who had been trained for just this purpose (Joyner, 1985). The missionary society supplied spelling books, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and Bibles as texts, all of which were written in English (Bolton, 1982). By the late 1770s some black churches were established as separate institutions, taking charge of their children's instruction themselves. These churches became vital cultural vehicles for molding English into a language that transmits and transforms African values and textual forms, as Ellen Sebastian has recently shown in her dramatic rendering of Zora Neale Hurston's life (Sebastian, 1988). The metaphors and stories of the Hebrew and Greek texts, translated into English and transformed by descendants of African slaves, now punctuate the rhetoric of African-Americans like Jesse Jackson, a native son of South Carolina.

California

Our story continues on the other edge of the North American continent, along the Pacific Rim in California. Like Carolina, California was home to significant numbers of indigenous peoples at the time of European contact; it is currently home to more Native Americans than any of the other states—more than 250,000 in the 1980 census count. Originally these native Californians spoke more than 60 different languages belonging to the four major linguistic families of Penutian, Na-Dene, Aztec-Tanoan, and Hokan (Crystal, 1987); earlier classifications divide them into the six language families of Algonkian, Athabascan, Penutian, Hokan, Uto-Aztekan, and Yukian (Heizer & Elsasser, 1980). Some 300,000 Native Americans were probably living in California before the initial Spanish settlement. Like the Indians of South Carolina they practiced abortion, as well as contraception and infanticide, which helped keep their numbers in line with the food supply (Heizer & Elsasser, 1980). Their economy was primarily a hunter-gatherer one.

In 1776, when the 13 English colonies along the Atlantic were revolting against the mother country, the Spanish were establishing a military outpost at Yerba Buena—now San Francisco. The Franciscans had already begun to establish missions from San Diego to Sonoma, in which the Native Americans were forced to work as manual laborers. An 1811 report from 16 of these missions to the Spanish colonial government in Mexico reflects great linguistic diversity among the Native Americans gathered at the missions: Two or more languages were used at half of them, with San Francisco reporting 5 and San Luis Obispo reporting 15 (Kroeber, 1908). With such linguistic diver-

sity, the Spanish of the soldiers and the priests who controlled the laborers would have served as a common language. After the Mexican revolution against Spain, Spanish-speaking settlers from Mexico occupied huge tracts of land formerly associated with the missions, from Sonoma south to San Diego. In the first half of the 19th century, Native Americans worked as manual laborers on these large ranches, as they had previously worked for the missions. To the north of San Francisco, Russian fur traders established a settlement at Fort Ross, bringing with them Native American fur trappers from the Aleutian Islands. Most of Northern California prior to 1850, however, remained occupied by Native Americans much as it had prior to the coming of the Europeans.

In the mid-1800s numbers of English-speaking settlers began to come into the territory, after Mexico formally ceded it to the United States in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Attracted by the discovery of gold, these miners actively competed with the Native Californians for food and land. By the later 1870s the Indian population had been decimated by disease, starvation, and outright massacres by this new wave of Europeans.

When California became the 31st state of the Union in 1850, it was clearly a multilingual and multicultural society. In the north were speakers of a number of Native American languages little influenced as yet by European ones. South of Bodega Bay and Sacramento, Spanish was a vigorous language around the original mission settlements; its near-century of use at the missions and subsequently on the rancheros meant that an increasingly large *mestizo* population used it as a first language. Many of the rivers, towns, and counties in the state retain Spanish and Native American names, and many common terms for vegetation and foods have been adopted by English speakers from the languages spoken by these earlier inhabitants. Other Europeans joining the speakers of Spanish, Russian, and English were the French, Italian, and German immigrants who came into the new state after 1850.

Since its initial multilingual beginning as the 31st state, significant numbers of speakers of Asian languages have also contributed to California's multilingual and multicultural environment. By the late 1860s Chinese languages were being spoken by the large numbers of Chinese men who came in to help build the railroad linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. After them came significant numbers of Japanese speakers, many of them farmers until their lands were confiscated during World War II. When the Philippines and the Hawaiian Islands became U.S. territories in the late 1800s, immigrants from these areas came into California in significant numbers, speaking Japanese, several Chinese and several Filipino languages. In this century, many immigrants and refugees have come in from Southeast Asia and have established communities where languages like Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Cantonese are spoken in shops, restaurants, temples and churches. Spanish-speaking refugees from civil wars in

Central America join the large Hispanic population already living in urban centers like San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Jose. And several thousand speakers of Pashto or Afghani have established small communities most recently.

Despite the multilingual origins of California's population, figures on language use provided by data from the 1980 U.S. census indicate that English is the language spoken at home for the vast majority of the population (78%). Spanish is a distant second (13% for adults and 17% for children), followed by Chinese and Filipino languages, German, Italian, French, Greek, and Polish. As Susannah MacKaye (1988) has so persuasively argued, English is already the common language for this diverse population, and no actual linguistic purpose was served by the recent adoption of a constitutional amendment to make it the state's official language. Insuring access to this common language is a far more complicated matter, however, and one for which educators have considerable responsibility.

Because the Spanish-speaking population comprises 10% to 20% of the population, despite the dominance of English, this group commands our initial attention. Alexander Sapiens (1988) has presented impressive evidence that Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in California and has discussed the educational implications of their concentration in specific rural and urban areas of the state. Although not all Hispanics are using Spanish as a home language, a considerable proportion are, especially in the pre-school age group in certain counties. Recent figures from the California State Department of Education (1987) indicate that children who do not speak English as their primary language are apt to be concentrated in particular school districts and counties. In 1987, more than half of the children in 11 school districts spoke limited English: 3 districts in Monterey County, 2 in Imperial County, and 1 each in Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Tulare Counties. In two of these districts, Calexico Unified in Imperial County and San Ysidro Elementary in San Diego County, more than 80% of the children had limited proficiency in English. The concentration of these districts in southern and central California suggests that here the older colonial language, Spanish, still predominates and thus lays claim to being a stronger second language for California than simple percentages would suggest. When children play and study with non-English speakers in such overwhelming numbers, it should be clear that their acquisition of English will be difficult at best. In 17 counties from Sacramento south, between 20% and 50% of the children speak a language other than English in the home: Solano, Sacramento, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Merced, San Benito, Monterey, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern, Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino. In Imperial County, on the border with Mexico, over 50% of the children speak a language other than English at home; that language is of course Spanish.

For such concentrations of children speaking one specific language

other than English, a bilingual program is clearly indicated. In other districts where the languages are diverse, another approach is more feasible. But for all the children in this contemporary multicultural society, we need to address the question of which texts in the common language are suitable for this time and place.

Holy Texts for Contemporary California

We have seen that earlier multilingual societies used texts which were deemed holy by the dominant culture as vehicles for fostering literacy in a common language. In Scotland, which was a relatively stable society at the time literacy became widespread, only three primary languages were in contact and all belonged to the Indo-European language family. Moreover, a shared religious faith, however fragmented by the struggles of the Reformation, meant that all of the major groups shared a reverence for the primary holy texts. South Carolina, with many more languages and cultures converging in a small territory, had no holy texts which were initially shared by all groups. Its solution was to promote the texts of the dominant English-speaking group for the education of all. The African majority transformed these texts in ways that preserved their own traditions, but the Native Americans largely resisted or ignored them.

In California of the 21st century it seems less and less feasible to promote only the texts traditionally revered by the European minority. We want universal literacy, not just an elite education for a select few as was the case in earlier societies. To achieve this end, the schools must meet this multicultural and multilingual population where they are in their private lives and help them become public citizens, understanding and using the public language. As both Alan Dundes and Scott Enright made clear at the 1988 CATESOL Conference in San Francisco, the most important resource educators have at their disposal are the stories and traditions of home and community that students bring with them into the classroom. These classrooms, in a very natural evolutionary process, have replaced the Sunday schools of Europe, as well as the church-related public schools of early English colonies, as our institutions where both literacy and communal values are transmitted. As educators, we have been slow to realize what the struggle over reading lists and cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) is all about: it is about selection and transmission of spiritual values, not about mere acquaintance with cultural trivia. Building on the specific cultural understanding of the world that students come to school with, teachers can help students gain access to the wider culture through the public language of English. As African-Americans have been demonstrating for two centuries through their rich literature written in English (Bontemps, 1969), this public language is one that clearly can embrace non-European experience.

Our initial task is to identify those texts in English which embody the common values we are hammering out together from our separate traditions—expressed in aesthetic forms that compel our attention and

invade our memory. Certainly some of these texts continue to be the Hebrew and Greek ones translated into English and Spanish as Holy Bibles, representing the highest values in their respective Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities. Others are surely the classical Greek and Roman texts that are honored in courses labeled "Western Civilization." The holy texts that have served European cultures at other places and at other times, however, are neither sufficient nor adequate for contemporary multicultural California.

The emerging California culture represents the convergence of people of the American, European, Asian, and African continents, as well as the Pacific Islands. Our students require texts which speak to our common purpose at this place and time. Some of the texts that command our attention are those that embody the oral traditions of the Native American population of California—often portraying far different, even conflicting values, from those embodied in the European holy texts. Others certainly are the written and oral traditions of the Asian population of California.

Many of our native-born authors provide accessible texts that, using the common language, explore diverse cultural traditions and the spiritual values integral to them: Rudolfo Anayo's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*, Ole Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, Ernest Gaines' *A Gathering of Old Men*, Luis Valdez' *Bernabe*, Mitsuye Yamada's *Campnotes*, and Lorna Dee Cervantes' *Emplumada*.

As educators, we have a strong voice in what our students read and discuss together. I urge that we assume our responsibilities with seriousness, as well as zest, for the difference that these choices can make. Some of our students will perhaps find their own public voices, expressing in the common language the uncommon yearnings of the spirit that unite us at this moment in our being on this planet. Together we can make new connections and discoveries within the emerging holy texts of this new culture along the Pacific Rim. ■

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