

A case for the 'European' Dictionaries¹

Giacomo Leopardi on German translations

Let me thank the organisers of this Seventh International Symposium on Eurolinguistics for inviting me to speak here, in this splendid city of Berlin, one of the most splendid European cities, which naturally recalls to my memory the great German culture of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Winckelmann, Schiller, Goethe and, obviously for an historian of political thought as I am, the great philosophers, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, who explained the *mysteries* of human society: not to forget, obviously, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, to whom the Berlin University owes its existence.

I think we should all pay homage to what this great nation has given to the advancement of knowledge, with its universities that were the pride of nineteenth-century Europe, when almost every discovery came from Germany, both in the scientific and in the historical and philological field. And, as for myself, I want to add that I was tempted to deliver this paper in German, but the circumstance that, nowadays, English is the official language of communication, prevented the accomplishment of this desire.

On the occasion I have read with a renewed attention, and with a fresh interest, a few pages from Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone* (*Commoplace Book*, or *Loci Communes*), that the Italian Romantic poet jotted down on 29-30 June 1823, and that were brought to my attention by my distinguished colleague and friend Dr. Francis Celoria, of the university of Keele.²

The reasoning of Count Leopardi, an expert in the Greek language, -who was offered by Georg Barthold Niebuhr, then ambassador at the papal court, a chair of Greek philosophy in Prussia,³ - but apparently not equally expert in German language and literature, appears rather confused and illogical, since it moves from premises that lead its author to conclusions that should be logical, but that are not.⁴

Nevertheless, they are the typical reflections of a great spirit of the Romantic age, when the idea of nation, or *Nation*, was paramount, and had conquered hearts and minds. It represented, in fact, the *liberation* from the concepts of the previous century, when, in the name of the goddess Reason, the kingdoms were thought of according to principles often disrespectful of their historical development, in consequence of which local communities, and countries, and nations, had acquired their peculiar features. They used to be formed, instead, according to *abstract principles of rationality*, that considered past history as a sequel of deviations and errors, and only aimed at *enlightening* minds against superstition.

But the great German philosophers were then taking a vigorous step forward, towards the knowledge of society. Immanuel Kant, with his *Kritizismus*, the most mature fruit of Enlightenment, had taught our minds no mere *abstract rationality*, but *how* to reason *critically* about contemporary society and history, and his principles paved the way towards the more mature concepts of liberalism in politics.

And Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, soon after him, moving from the concept that 'the real is the rational', so deeply penetrated into the science of history, that the historical method, we can safely assume, if considered as a mature consciousness, substantially dates back from his great works, although Giovan Battista Vico, 'the Neapolitan', as he was called, need not to be forgotten.

But Leopardi, although a great spirit, although an enlightened one, was a man of his own age, as all of us inevitably are, and had to confront himself with ideas then current, and necessarily destined to be superseded by ideas proper to subsequent ages.

The 'European' dimension

The world has been rapidly changing since then, more rapidly than ever in the past, thanks to the new means of communication, and we wonder whether the world of learning is actually confronting itself with these changes. The idea of a European constitution, in particular, has been rejected, and this proves how the Dutch feel more Dutch than we could suppose, the British more British than ever, and so on.

The problem is, whether the respective 'worlds of learning' are still merely *national*, or whether they begin to perceive the *European* dimension, and the *Western* dimension, of our civilization.

To be more explicit, the 'European' nations are substantially the product of post-medieval and modern age, and received their emphasis with the Protestant Reformation and, later on, with Romanticism. But while, from the point of view of commercial intercourse, the world is substantially unified, in Europe and the West we still live in linguistic islands, scarcely capable of communicating and of understanding each other.

¹ This paper was delivered on 6 October 2006 at the 'Humboldt Universität zu Berlin', Nordeuropa Institut, for the 7th International Symposium on Eurolinguistics.

² G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, G. Pacella ed., in two vols (Milano, 1992), & 2845-60, pp. 1508-15.

³ See A. Ranieri, 'Notizie intorno agli Scritti, alla Vita ed ai Costumi di G. Leopardi', in Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, I, 15.

⁴ Leopardi substantially concludes, unflatteringly, that the then celebrated translations of the principal literary masterpieces into German 'meritano poca lode' (deserve little praise), *ibid.*, p. 1513 & 2856, but the reasons he gives for this conclusion are confused and contradictory.

This is not only a matter of education. The roots are in fact so deep, that it will take generations to eradicate them. If we go back to medieval and Roman times, by contrast, we find a substantial unity of European civilization and world of learning.

We do not want to emphasize beyond measure the role of Latin as the common cement of our civilization, as it actually is. Nevertheless, the abandonment of Latin, the product of nationalisms, is recent. Still in 1742 Francis Hutcheson published in Latin his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria* and, while lecturing at the university of Glasgow, it was the opinion of a former student that 'he wrote and spoke, at least we thought so, better in Latin than English'.⁵ Elsewhere⁶ we have spoken about the role that Latin exerts in English and German languages today, a role that is not replaceable. But, while in German the Latinate vocabulary is an evident borrowing, because it has very few roots, highly disputable this is for English, where the learned vocabulary is 90% of Latin origin, while in the daily use the vocabulary of Germanic origin, we willingly admit, occurs with more frequency. In any case, to use the words of John Toland, *nothing mysterious* in the European languages today, and the world of learning is becoming, and must become, growingly aware of this.

A language of learning

Therefore, are we proposing a language of learning? A language that, in the vocabulary of *Historicism*, as opposed to the category of *Enlightenment*, is not *natural* but *artificial*, destined, consequently, not to take roots and to perish?

It would be true were the Latinate vocabulary without roots in the European languages today, but this is not the case.

Apart from the Romance languages and English itself, Russian vocabulary, for example, is 20% of Latin origin. The Russian world of learning in the 18th century realized that the cultural history of their country must be 'European', because there was no alternative. "In 1685 wurde die berühmte Moskauer Slavo-Graeco-Lateinische Akademie begründet, die 'Academia Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitana'; Publikationsorganen waren die *Commentarii* und *Acta*, as Karl Vossen puts it in his brilliant book *Mutter Latein und ihre Töchter. Europas Sprachen und ihre Herkunft*.⁷

Later on, in the eighteenth century, Latin was displaced by French, and the 'Academia Petropolitana' became 'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Petersburg'. But the reform of the educational system at the beginning of the 19th century "gab dem klassizistischen Charakter der Ausbildung erneut Auftrieb, wobei das deutsche Gymnasium als Muster diente. So war die klassische Ausbildung zu Beginn des 20sten Jahrhunderts weit verbreitet. Tatsächlich existierte der humanistische Gymnasialunterricht bis 1917. Entsprechend gehörten Latein und Altgriechisch zur Ausstattung des gebildeten Russen".⁸

In Hungary, the official language of the Diet until 1843, was Latin.⁹

The conclusion is that we must decide between a language of learning, that, at least, allows comprehension, and the language of the vulgar, or of the *natural* development of society, between John Milton and Shakespeare, as for English.

Advocacy for Latin

We are passing, in these international symposia, and at the eyes of the readers of our journal, 2000. *The European Journal*, as the advocates for Latin, as nostalgic people who look at a past that is irrecoverably gone, and our papers have the character of a *political manifesto*.

Nevertheless, we see no alternative to the Latinate vocabulary, if we want to understand each other, at least as for what concerns the world of learning.

The language of learning we are submitting to the attention of our colleagues is in fact the common cement of European and Western civilization. To support this idea we have descended into the arena with our little journal, that was founded for this very purpose.

⁵ See James Moore in *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004), p. 999.

In Edinburgh, in Professor's Stevenson class of Logic, in which prize essays were submitted from 1737 to 1751, about half were written in Latin, and the other half in English. Latin survived longest in the Faculty of Medicine, where theses were composed solely in that language until 1833: see D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh 1556-1889* (Edinburgh, 1967), 47. Similarly, in Germany, "in die Hörsäle der Universitäten drang das Deutsche erst seit 1687 durch Christian Thomasius in Leipzig. Noch bis in 19. Jh. mußten in einigen Fächern Doktordissertationen lateinisch verfaßt werden": see P. von Polenz, *Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache* (Berlin-New York, 1978), 93.

⁶ See 'On the Difficulties of founding a European Journal', in *Studies on Eurolinguistics* (Logos Verlag, Berlin 2005), reprinted in 2000. *The European Journal*, no. 2, Dec. 2005, and 'Europe as a linguistic unity. The legacy of Latin', paper delivered at the univ. of Tsadar on 19 Sept. 2002, now in 2000. *The European Journal*, no. 2, Dec. 2006, forthcoming.

⁷ Stern Verlag Jaunssen & co, (14 Auflage, 1999), 'Moskau, das dritte Rom', p. 207.

⁸ Vossen, *ibid.*, p. 208.

⁹ In the Cathedral of Uppsala, that I visited in September 2005, I observed that the names of the Archbishops are recorded in Latin to the end of the 18th century, and only afterwards they began to be recorded in modern Swedish language.

Furthermore the inscriptions in Latin on the sepulchral stones on the pavement are unprotected, people walk above them, and are progressively erasing them. This is barbarity.

In the 1950s the distinguished scholar Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963) bemoaned the destruction at the Renaissance of 'everyday Latin in favour of a forced classicism', writing the following words:

"Utinam pestifera illa 'Renascentia' quam Humanistae effecerunt non destruxerit (dum erigere eam se jactabant) Latinam adhuc possemus toti Europae scribere" ('if only that plaguey Renaissance which the Humanists brought about had not destroyed Latin- and destroyed it just when they were pluming themselves that they were advancing it! We should then still be able to correspond with the whole of Europe').¹⁰

Lewis substantially mourned for a language that could be used for scholarly exchanges across Europe. But, if his own was the dream of something impossible to achieve, the project of the five-language dictionaries that we have been campaigning for in these Symposia, by contrast, has a deeply historical and political aim.

Historical, in the sense of showing *how* history and philology prove the unified entity of the European tradition.

Political, in the sense that it *aims at boosting* the consciousness of this tradition.

While, in fact, politicians represent local communities, and substantially *separate society into parts*, the task of the intellectuals is that of re-unifying it, is that of a superior consciousness, of a synthesis that apprehends no more the *particular*, but the *whole*, in the Hegelian sense. The world of learning must have consciousness of this, and act accordingly.

Multilingual Dictionaries

Until now most the dictionaries have been bilingual,¹¹ simply because they reflected the concept, still current but on the wane, of *nation* and of *national languages* and, consequently, that of the relations *between* nations. But now we are facing the concept of Europe and of the *European* world of learning, that we must consider as a unified entity, with a common history and tradition.

Therefore, the current bilingual dictionaries will soon be superseded, at least in Europe, less in America, by multilingual dictionaries.

In the past, and more numerous recently, there have been attempts, on the part of publishers, towards multilingual dictionaries: attempts at a very rudimentary level, indeed. Their compilers do not seem to have any idea of what the European world of learning was, and is. The result of their work is no more than a mere bringing near of words, without a soul, without an organic programme.

Among these dictionaries I wish to cite in particular, in the editions which I have come across:

- 1) *Polyglot Dictionaries based on the 'One-Language-System'*, Otto Holtzmann Hg., vol. 1 'General Technical Terms' (Oldenbourg, München und Berlin, 1937);
- 2) *Elsevier's Nautical Dictionary*, Third completely revised edition English/American, French, Spanish, Dutch, German (1994); in the editions 1965-6 and 1978 Italian was comprised, but it disappeared in the 1994 edition, to be replaced by English/American;
- 3) *Harrap's 5-Language Dictionary, English-French-German-Italian-Spanish* (Harrap's Books Ltd, Bromley, Kent, 1991);
- 4) *Größes Euro Wörterbuch, Grund-Wortschatz Deutsch, English, Französisch, Italienisch, Spanisch, in 5 Sprachen* (Buch und Zeit Verlagsgesellschaft MbH Köln);
- 5) *Europa Wörterbuch Simultan Dictionary, Deutsch English Französisch Spanish Italienisch*, (Eurobooks by Lechner, Geneva);
- 6) *Visual 5-Language Dictionary, English. French. German. Spanish. Italian* (Dorling Kindersley Ltd, London 2006);
- 7) *Visual Five-Language Dictionary. English French German Italian Spanish* (Oxford UP, 2006);
- 8) Last, Harper-Collins have put on the internet an online *English to French-Italian-Spanish Dictionary*, that seems to be the most advanced attempt towards a multilingual dictionary, although still missing the concept of an organic project. It is, in fact, *the product of technology, not of culture.*

Could this mean that we are winning our battle? We are confident that we will win it, or that somebody else will, because the cultural necessity of 'thinking European' is now in the air that we breathe.

Nevertheless, for this ambitious project the help of the world of politics is necessary, because we are no more in the age in which the capitalists or, if one prefers, the Smithian 'merchant and manufacturer', used to modify society, and were averse to State-intervention. Nowadays many tasks are proper to the State, i.e. of politicians, who are certainly clever in devising the means of emptying the pockets of the taxpayer, not equally wise in the way of spending the money they administer.

¹⁰ See *Letters, C. S. Lewis, Don Giovanni Calabria. A Study in Friendship*, translated and edited by Martin Moynihan (Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988), pp. 9-10. This letter has been brought to my attention by Francis Celoria. Dr. Celoria, an active bibliophile, also offered for my attention a satire by Alfred Edward Housman (1859-1936) entitled *The Eleventh Eclogue*, where the fun is that the Oxford classical scholars converse in an 'absurd Latinate English'. According to Archie Burnett, the source of Housman is in *Æstivation. An Unpublished Poem, by My Late Latin Tutor*, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, written in Anglo-Latin macaronics (see *Notes and Queries*, vol. 247 of the continuous series [New Series, vol. 49], no. 4, Dec. 2002, p. 493).

¹¹ Merely erudite is the Calepino, or *Ambrosii Calepini Dictionarium Undecim Linguarum*, first edition 1502, last edition by Jacopo Facciolati, 1772.

Etymological dictionaries and classics

In the last few years dictionaries, at least the ones in the principal European languages, have re-discovered etymologies. This further proves, we believe, that we are right in our campaign towards the *multi-lingual dictionaries, and that etymologies will be, we assume, the next step.*

Nevertheless, if this is true in general, it is less so for the Oxford dictionaries.

For example, the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, edited by C. T. Onions, with the assistance of G. S. Friedrichsen and R. W. Burchfield (1966), does not have Greek type. This is astonishing for a *dictionary of etymology*, and means no more and no less than vulgarising learning.

The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (first ed. 1933, repr. 1985) correctly had Greek type, that unfortunately was replaced, in the subsequent edition (1993, repr. 2002), with Roman type. *This means cutting the links with our past, means knowing less and less who we are, and from where we come. In the long run, this will not pay.*

When opening Eric Partridge, *A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1958, fourth ed. 1966), when checking the entry *abbot*, one finds Greek type in the corresponding Greek word. When going on, and checking the entries under *church, cinder, catharsis*, Greek type disappears, to be replaced with Latin type. A true barbarity!

The *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, the pride of American philology, does not use Greek type, nor does so *Le Robert de la Langue Française*. But, if in the case of *The Barnhart* this is in some measure, in little measure, indeed, understandable, it is less so in the case of *Le Robert*. This probably helps to sell, in the intentions of the publisher, *mais ça signifie, en même temps, vulgarisation de la culture.*

By contrast, the splendid *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, in two vols, that one can find in the principal bookshops all around the world, does retain Greek type. This is highly gratifying for the world of learning.

The Oxford English Dictionary

The Oxford English Dictionary is obviously a major undertaking, the second edition having taken its origin from the *Supplement* edited by Robert Burchfield between 1957 and 1986.¹²

In *Unlocking the English Language*, Burchfield narrates how his ancestors, who were of Scottish and English descent, had settled in New Zealand.

In the 1920s and 1930s the boy "acquired the typical day-to-day vocabulary used by all the New-Zealanders words like *bach* (beach cottage), *booay* (back country), *heka* (Maori war dance), *kowhai* (a shrub).... remain firmly in my mind some forty years after changing places..."¹³

Furthermore, the 'ingredients' of the *OED* "have turned out to be the etymology or derivation of each word to its earliest form in English, and the establishment of its cognates in other Germanic languages or, if it is a loan-word, of its form in the borrowed-from language".¹⁴

In these lines we are probably reading more than their author actually meant, but they are certainly revealing of a cultural background, and explain several things.

As is well known, and as I said above,¹⁵ the English vocabulary is mostly of Latin and Greek origin, although, one must admit, in everyday speech words of Germanic origin occur with more frequency.

In my solitary work of compilation of the *European Dictionary*, vol. 1, with English as *langue de départ*, according to the premises of my methodology, I try to identify first of all the etymologies. Obviously, as the ultimate authority, I consult the etymologies as given in the *OED*, that I have in a CD-Rom, it being difficult either to buy the printed copy or to subscribe to the on-line edition.

In this work I have come across a number of difficulties, until I have decided to annotate them, beginning with the word *cabaret*.

cabaret: the *OED* writes the following words: 'F: of unknown origin: see Littré and Scheler'; according to *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* (1988) it is 'a borrowing of French *cabaret*, Old Picard *camberete*, L *camera*';

camp: according to the *OED* Kluge claims the word as "native Teutonic but gives no satisfactory answer for this".

Der Kluge, 24 Auflage, writes the following words: "Camp. Entlehnt aus ne. *camp*, dieses aus frz. (nordfrz.) *camp* m, aus l. *campus* m". *Der Kluge*, therefore, does not claim the word as 'native Teutonic', in any case much less than the *OED* does.

Furthermore the *OED* does not mention the Greek cognate *καμπή*, that occurs in *The Barnhart*, while Skeat¹⁶ emphasizes that the word is 'certainly non-Teutonic, and borrowed from L *campus*';

¹² The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1989, has in p.1: "combined with *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* edited by R. W. Burchfield".

¹³ *Unlocking* (London, 1989), chap. 4, pp. 61-2. By contrast, in the late 1950s the author of this paper attended the Classical Lyceum at Arpino, the ancient Arpinum, in South-Latium, the town where Cicero was born, becoming familiar with Cicero and Greek authors, translating Thucydides and Homer.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 6, p. 168.

¹⁵ See above, text corresponding with n. 6, and n. 6.

caries: L *caries* but does not mention the Greek cognates κήρ death ακήρατος inviolate intact, which is cited by *The Barnhart* and other dictionaries;

carnage: cites F *carnage*, It *carnaggio*, LL *carnaticum*, but does not cite L *caro-carnis*, its ultimate source;

carnal: as in *carnage*, does not cite L *caro-carnis*, its ultimate source;

cathedral goes back to L *cathedra*, not to Greek καθέδρα, that nevertheless occurs under *cathedra*;

cēde: does not record the Greek cognate ἔξοδος, which occurs in *The Barnhart* and other dictionaries;

cerebrum: does not go back to the Greek cognate κάρα, recorded by Skeat with the following words: "The former part of cerebrum is allied to Gr κάρα the head", and by *The Barnhart*;

cerise: does not give the Greek κερασός cherry-tree, which nevertheless occurs under *cherry*, to which there is no cross-reference;

chalk, gives L *calx* but not Greek χάλιξ which does not occur in Skeat; it occurs in *The Barnhart*, instead;

chamois: does not record LL *camōx*, that is recorded in *Barnhart*, nor does Skeat record *camōx*; nevertheless *OED* writes: "but the relations between the Teutonic and Romanic words have not been ascertained, and no etym. is known either in L. or Teutonic. See Kluge".

Der Kluge, 24Auflage, writes the following words: "chamois ist die Gemse (aus spl. *camōx*)". Therefore, Kluge has no doubts about the Late Latin origin of the word.

charcoal: according to *OED* "the first element is of uncertain origin; but from the earliest instances it appears to be *char*; *charke*, *cherke*, found from beg. of 16thc, being app. due to erroneous analysis of the spoken word A current suggestion is that *-char* is an application of *chare* v. or n., as if *turn-coal*, i.e. wood turned or converted into coal; but for this no actual evidence has been found"; the probable derivation from Old and Middle French *charbon*, L *carbōnem*, given by *The Barnhart* and other dictionaries, is ignored at all by the *OED*, unclear whether because it is considered as less, or not at all probable, or because of lack of interest for the classics on the part of the etymologist;

chart: gives L *carta*, but not the Greek χάρτης, which is recorded in Skeat, instead;

cheap: On the word *cheap* Skeat writes: "Curtius holds that all these words, however widely spread into the Teutonic tongues, must be borrowed from Latin; so that OHG *choufō*, a huckster, is merely the L *caupō*, a huckster. But this is now held to be unlikely (Kluge, Franck)".

Following Skeat, the *OED* has no doubt about the 'Teutonic' nature of the word: "the coincidence of the stem *kaup-*, and esp. the identity of the WGer agent-n. **kaupo-*, *-on* trader, merchant, dealer, with L *caup-ōnem* petty tradesman, huckster, tavern keeper, has suggested that the Teut. word and its family are of Latin origin. But there are serious difficulties". Nevertheless the *OED* does not mention the 'serious difficulties'.

The Barnhart, after citing the Germanic forms, writes: "The noun forms probably represent an early Germanic borrowing from L *caupō* petty tradesman, ... which is perhaps from the same foreign source as the Greek κάπελος retail dealer, huckster, innkeeper".

chime: *OED* gives L *cymbalum*, but not Gr κύμβαλον, which occurs nevertheless under the entry *cymbal*;

chimney: does not record Gr κάμινος, which occurs in *The Barnhart* and in other dictionaries;

chip: the *OED* makes of it a Teutonic word, and ignores at all L *cippus*, correctly referred to by *The Barnhart*, and the assumed Late Latin **cippare*;

churl: does not mention that it is cognate with Gr γέρον, an old man, that occurs in Skeat, instead, and in *The Barnhart*;

cinder: it is undoubtedly a Germanic word, but Gr κόμης dust is probably cognate; it is ignored by the *OED*;

cinematography: correctly *OED* gives the Greek etymology κίνημα movement, adds that it derives from κινεῖν set in motion, but does not add, as *The Barnhart* does, that κινεῖν is cognate with L *ciēre* to stir up;

cite: does not add that L *ciēre* is cognate with Gr κίω, κινέω, κινεῖν set in motion, that occurs in Skeat, instead, and in *The Barnhart*;

coerce: refers to L *arcēre*, ignores Gr ἀρκεῖν.

These are certainly minor flaws (*aliquando dormitat Homerus*), if they actually are, in a work so complex, the product of a long tradition and of the collaboration of distinguished scholars, but they are worth examining.

I hazard here, at my own risk, a judgment. In fact, as you know, and as I repeat, I am not a linguist, but an historian of political thought, and what I do in the field of linguistics is a function of my specific field of studies. I do not presume to add anything to the science of linguistics. By contrast, my efforts aim at influencing the European civilization, rendering easier the mutual understanding, and helping overcome the separation between nations. This is my social, cultural, political aim. From this point of view my research work must be judged.

For the etymologists of the OED Skeat is the supreme authority, as was obvious. Not only they fear to depart from it, but sometimes they do not give due attention to Latin and, more often, to Greek etymologies. In sum, they seem to be 'modernizing' Skeat, thus abandoning, slowly but inexorably, the origins of our civilization.

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¹⁶ W. Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Oxford, 1910).

Summary

The author, an historian of political thought, makes the case for multilingual, 'European' dictionaries, which should replace the current, bilingual dictionaries.

While these are the product of a 'Europe of nations', the multilingual dictionaries, from a historical point of view, prove that European history is a unified entity, while, from a political point of view, they aim to render more complete the consciousness of such a unity, and to create a more 'common' civilization.

In the second part of the paper a number of entries in the OED are closely scrutinized, reaching the conclusion that often they do not give due attention to Greek and Latin sources, thus abandoning, slowly but inexorably, the roots of our civilization.