

Editorial

Earlier this year Mr Jean Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, remarked in French that ‘English is losing importance in the Europe’. Last year, Robert Ménard, the mayor of the French town of Béziers, said on Twitter that ‘the English language has no more legitimacy in Brussels #Brexit’. These comments suggest that even before political decisions regarding Brexit are made, the English language has already been sentenced to the guillotine. And it is no coincidence that the loudest accusations are voiced in French. French was the leading language of international diplomacy until around World War Two, when English took over not only political but also scientific, educational, and travel communications in Europe. English also began to appear in everyday French conversations, with words such as *download*, *software*, *email* used instead of *télécharger*, *logiciel*, *courriel*, respectively. This development did not go unnoticed by the Académie Française, which has recently mobilised its forces to ‘reconquête de la langue française’ from the ‘menace’ of the ‘péril anglais’ and urged the public to return to ‘la langue de Molière’¹.

But since a good 50% of vocabulary used in the last paragraph is of French origin maybe we should look at the French conquest of the English language? 2016 saw the 950th anniversary of the Norman Conquest. This historical event marked the opening of a communicative channel through which French words entered the English language *en masse*. And, at times Englishmen did not like that. For instance, 16th-century writers came up with an idea to replace borrowed French (as well as Latin) vocabulary with revived words used by Chaucer (that is, Chaucerisms) because they signalled the Anglo-Saxon origin of English language. Thus, *yblent* was suggested for ‘confused’, *algate* for ‘always’, *sicker* for ‘certainly’, and *mooned* for ‘lunatic’. How many of those words are now in use in English? You have guessed correctly.

Top-down interventions into how languages should look and sound, which words should be

used and which ones avoided, rarely work. Concentrating energies to reincarnate the language of the past, whether it is that of Chaucer or Molière or some other great writer, is an unrealistic idea, since it neglects the communicative needs and lifestyles of current language users. Looking into past discussions on that topic teaches us that such debates are not about language use *per se* but about identity and nationalism, and various insecurities associated with these notions.

So how can we respond to Juncker or Ménard with authoritative statements on the place of the English language in Europe and the wider world? *English Today* authors are constantly documenting the growth of a living, developing language. As editors of *English Today* we see that English is here to stay and we look forward to seeing new directions this language will take in the future.

The geographical range of this issue of *English Today* is from Lithuania to China, via Nigeria, Singapore, and Malaysia. Topics range from the nationally-focused factual to the theoretically problematic and contentious. Three articles on English in China relate to terms of address, language policy, and *yangjingbang* pidgin. Consideration of shop signs in Singapore, attitudes towards English in Lithuania, and noun-phrase structure in Nigeria keep us with English use within distinctly national settings, while the focus widens with the questioning – from a localised perspective – of the ‘World Englishes’ paradigm and, more loosely still, with consideration of the possessive apostrophe. Among the reviews in this issue, one covers the latest edition of Fairclough’s seminal *Language and Power*, and another a new resource for teaching global English varieties.

The editors

Note

1 <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/la-reconquete-de-la-langue-francaise>

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.