

## “The Poe Test: Global English and The Gold Bug”

Michael Malouf

*This essay examines the production of Global English through literary texts by examining three adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Gold Bug” in the 1930s by competing figures in the vocabulary control movement—Harold Palmer, Michael West, and C. K. Ogden—leaders in the formation of the field of applied linguistics. The first part of the essay explains the colonial origins of the vocabulary word list and its ascendant value in the interwar period for the new discipline of applied linguistics, and as part of the competition for English language textbooks. This leads to an analysis of these three simplifications of Poe’s story that demonstrates how the language politics in Poe’s story provides a structure through which to express a nascent Global English ideology regarding race, vernacular, and auxiliary languages.*

**Keywords:** Global English, vocabulary control, auxiliary languages, Poe, colonial readers

### Introduction

In 1932, the Institute for Research in English Teaching (IRET) in Tokyo, led by the linguist Harold Palmer, published a simplified version of Edgar Allan Poe’s 1843 short story “The Gold-Bug” as “The Gold Beetle.” Around the same time, in Cambridge, C. K. Ogden published a version of Poe’s story in the international language of Basic English as “The Gold Insect.” Soon after, a third version, restoring the original title, was adapted by Michael West as a “New Method Reader” for teaching English in India.<sup>1</sup> More than a coincidence, they were all participating in a test devised by Palmer to compare their respective language systems, which were competing over a model English vocabulary to be used in global textbooks. Although only a minor instance in the history of English Language Teaching (ELT), the “Poe test,” as I refer to Palmer’s coordinated effort, provides insight into more than bugs, beetles, and insects. Rather, because of the

Michael Malouf is an associate professor of English at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. He has published on modernism and postcolonialism including a book, *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics* (UVA Press, 2009) and essays in various journals and book collections. (Email: [mmalouf@gmu.edu](mailto:mmalouf@gmu.edu))

<sup>1</sup> Harold Palmer, *The Gold Beetle, This being the simplified version by Harold E. Palmer of The Gold Bug by Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Institute for Research in English Teaching, 1932); A. P. Rossiter, *The Gold Insect. Being the “Gold Bug” put into Basic English. By A. P. Rossiter*. Preface by C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, 1932); Michael West, “The Gold Bug,” in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination: Edgar Allan Poe*, simplified by Roland John and Michael West, Longman Classics Stage 4 (London: Longman, 1988), 15–27.

influence that Palmer, Ogden, and West had on the shape of Global English as an auxiliary language, their adaptations of Poe's story provide insight into the ways that literature, colonialism, and globalization are articulated within the banal apparatus of word lists and simplified readers. By selecting a story concerned with language, race, and codes, Palmer unwittingly transforms a text intended to merely test the immanent content of Global English—its words—into one that expresses its nascent ideology.

At the root of the Poe test was a debate over word lists. Where English as a national language was standardized through dictionaries, the process of standardizing it as a world language was through vocabulary lists. In the history of applied linguistics, the works of Palmer, West, and Ogden are referred to as the vocabulary control movement because of their emphasis on learning efficiency through pedagogical word lists.<sup>2</sup> Yet this label masks the intense competition among them in the interwar period. In the 1920s, Palmer and West were the two most important figures in the new discipline of applied linguistics. Palmer worked for the ministry of education in Japan, where he developed the "Palmer method," which emphasized oral-based learning; concurrently, West taught at a teacher training college in Dacca, where he developed his "New Method," which emphasized "reading first." This binary field was drastically disrupted by Ogden's Basic English, which took their implicit concept of English as an auxiliary language to a radical extreme through its minimalist vocabulary of 850 words. Where West and Palmer developed regional-based language systems (teaching English in Japan or in Bengal), Basic English claimed to use English as a universal language in the sense previously used by invented languages such as Esperanto and Novial. The early success and publicity surrounding Basic English ultimately led to West and Palmer combining their efforts as part of a foundational conference organized by the Carnegie Foundation in 1934 on the teaching of English as a world language that had a significant influence on postwar ESL curricula.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these inter-disciplinary differences, Palmer, Ogden, and West all shared an interest in developing scientific methods of teaching English as a practical, instrumental language to be used for science, business, and technology.<sup>4</sup> This had implications for the ways in which they used literary texts as part of their pedagogy. Where earlier British language textbooks conveyed the virtues of empire through literary and philological methods based in canonical English literature, their "simplified" editions of British and

2 On the vocabulary control movement, see Robert Carter and Michael McCarthy, *Vocabulary and Language Teaching* (London: Longman, 1988), 1–7. On Palmer and West see A. P. R. Howatt and H. G. Widdowson, *A History of English Language Teaching* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 264–93.

3 On the significance of Carnegie, see Howatt and Widdowson, *A History of English Language Teaching*, 288–93; Richard Smith, "Introduction," in *Towards Carnegie* (London: Routledge, 2003), xi–xxix. The major works from West and Palmer cited here are reprinted in *Teaching English as a Foreign Language, 1912–1936: Pioneers of ELT*, ed. Richard Smith, vols. I–V (London: Routledge, 2003). Hereafter cited as Smith, *Pioneers*.

4 On auxiliary English, see Allan James, "Theorising English and Globalisation: Semiodiversity and Linguistic Structure in Global English, World Englishes, and Lingua Franca English," *Apples—Journal of Applied Language Studies* 3.1 (2009): 79–92; M. A. K. Halliday, "Written Language, Standard Language, Global Language," in *The Handbook of World Englishes*, eds. Braj B. Kachru, et al. (London: Blackwell, 2006), 362–63. On language and ideology see Marnie Holborow, "Language, Ideology, and Neoliberalism," *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6.1 (2007): 53–57; Mario Saraceni, *World Englishes: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 135–68.

American novels and stories served as didactic texts to help shape their subjects as international, global citizens. My argument about their adaptations of “The Gold Bug” depends greatly upon its timing: they occur amid the disruption caused by Basic English and before the professional consensus on the status of English as a “world language” established at Carnegie. In this context, the Poe test represents a desire to legitimize their own conceptions of English as an auxiliary form—whether it is in Palmer’s “Plain English,” Ogden’s Basic English, or West’s New Method. Occurring within the ideological interregnum between nationalist and internationalist language ideologies, these simplifications of Poe’s story are not pedagogical texts as much as they are sites for working out the meaning of Global English.

Although most popular histories of Global English downplay or ignore its basis in colonialism, this essay suggests one way that postcolonial literary criticism might attend to the politics of curriculum, literature, and linguistic theory that were part of its early formation.<sup>5</sup> In this way, it contributes to recent postcolonial scholarship on Global English, which has suggested provocative ways of linking contemporary literature to linguistic histories of empire.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Rebecca Walkowitz has observed, literary studies of the Anglophone have mainly focused on the politics of literature written in English either as a linguistic phenomenon (such as World Englishes) or as a literary field dominated by Global English (such as prizes, translations, reviews).<sup>7</sup> This essay provides a genealogy of Global English that demonstrates the role of literature in its formation. Reading Poe’s “The Gold Bug” through the lens of vocabulary control recasts this story about a treasure hunt into an exemplary narrative on the virtues of auxiliary languages and the natives who need them.

### Control and Colonialism

The ideological differences among the vocabulary control movement members was often expressed as a methodological debate over word lists. This concept was defined as “subjective” word lists, such as Basic English where Ogden chose the words himself, versus “objective” word lists such as Palmer’s and West’s respective lists, which were based on statistical measurements of word frequency, such as the ten thousand item word list developed by the educational psychologist Edward Thorndike. Although West and Ogden argued over commercial markets and copyright infringement, Palmer sought a scientific means of determining the correct method. Palmer argued that because it would take too long to test the lists with students and measure their proficiency over

5 For examples of the popular, positivist version of Global English, see Robert McCrum, *Globish: How English Became the World’s Language* (New York: Norton, 2010); David Crystal, *The Stories of English* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2004).

6 Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); David Huddart, *Involuntary Associations: Postcolonial Studies and World Englishes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); Simon Gikandi, “Provincializing English,” *PMLA* 129.1 (2014): 7–17; E. Varughese Dawson, *Beyond the Postcolonial: World Englishes Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

7 Rebecca Walkowitz, “Response,” *Interventions* 20.3 (2018): 362. “World Englishes” refers to the theories associated with the academic journal *World Englishes*.

time, a more immediate and possibly more provocative method would be to adapt the word list to fiction. As Palmer explains in a companion volume to *The Gold Beetle*, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material*, this experiment measures the degree of difficulty for the adapter in rewriting literary material within the given limited vocabulary. Palmer argues that one should be able to take a word list, apply it to “a quantity of literary material,” and if it “proceed[s] rapidly and naturally,” then it can be considered successful, “it *worked*.”<sup>8</sup> In this case, success is measured by the efficiency of the “linguistic symbols” in the list. The list should not be lacking in needed symbols, nor should there be “superfluous” symbols. As Palmer blithely concludes, “Just as the proof of the pudding is in its eating, the proof of the vocabulary is in the degree of its smooth and natural functioning when put to the test.”<sup>9</sup> How this “naturalness” is to be measured is never addressed by Palmer, and although each of them produced their adaptations, they were never discussed nor compared as a group. But the test does show how they were able to use literary adaptations to express the logic of their respective systems.

This is nowhere more apparent than in how they describe their tasks. Palmer refers to his version as a “simplification” of Poe’s story, whereas Ogden describes A. P. Rossiter’s version as a “translation,” and West elsewhere refers to his New Method readers as “adaptations.”<sup>10</sup> In Palmer’s simplified versions, the original is printed on the opposite page. Palmer argues that this allows the student and the teacher to analyze the revision, a process that he refers to as “an important form of literary criticism.” Keeping the original text is designed as “a corrective to abuses of stylistics,” or, as he puts it “to cure lapses into ‘foreigners’ English.”<sup>11</sup> In the preface to *The Gold Beetle*, Palmer observes that stylistic differences “are a mystery” for foreign learners of English and consequently they speak “Babu English, or Pidgin English, or Japanese English, or French English, or Slavonic English.” Palmer argues that exposure to a “bad” original and a “good” adaptation can teach the student how to avoid mixing high and low forms of diction. Palmer describes the English in the adaptation not as a simplified or standardized English but as “Plain English,” a style not even used by native speakers. Unlike Basic English, Palmer’s “Plain English” does not exist as a stand-alone, “island,” vocabulary but is a style specifically for foreign language learning contexts. Thus, Poe’s prose on the opposite side of the page is not there to expand the reader’s sense of English style but to limit it. Poe’s text enacts paratextually the tension in auxiliary English between its limited instrumental role and the vernaculars, dialects, and national languages that it seeks to supplement and make more efficient.

Because the Basic English and New Method versions do not explain their adaptations to the same extent as Palmer, one has to examine the adaptations to find how it reflects their logic. For instance, the Basic English use of the Latinate “Insect” for its title aligns with its purpose as an international scientific language. Similarly, the Basic “translator” A. P. Rossiter uses periodic table notations for the chemicals cited in

8 Harold Palmer, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material: A Memorandum* (Tokyo: Institute for Research in English Teaching, 1934); reprinted in Smith, *Pioneers*, vol. V, 309.

9 Palmer, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material*, 311.

10 For the purposes of this article, I use *adaptation* as a generic term and use their respective terminologies when describing them specifically.

11 Palmer, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material*, 272.

Legrand’s explanation of the changes in the paper and even includes footnotes correcting Poe’s science.<sup>12</sup> Rossiter’s translation resonates with the impetus behind Basic English—to eliminate ambiguity in language and to make it a scientific instrument for communication. By referring to it as a translation, Ogden seeks to distinguish Basic English from national varieties of English. In contrast to both Palmer and Rossiter’s adaptations, which changed vocabulary and left the plot mostly intact, West’s “Gold Bug” reduces the story to a few events—finding the bug, digging the treasure, and Legrand’s explanation. This is consistent with West’s suggestion that New Method adaptations feature a “strong plot” without too much “local colour.”<sup>13</sup>

Maybe it is not surprising that each of the adaptations claim to have “improved” upon Poe’s original. Palmer often uses “clarification” synonymously with “simplification” so that the original text is more than just a supplement, rather its competitor. In a Derridean formulation, Palmer boasts of his version that “One not having before him the original version might even suppose that the simplified text was the original.”<sup>14</sup> Ogden also claims that the Basic translation “gives all that is of value in Poe’s somewhat unequal work.”<sup>15</sup> He finds the “Gold Bug’s” formal value in its “changes in rhythm,” which, he asserts, can be found only in the Basic translation. Although such claims make commercial sense, they also reveal their belief that their auxiliary forms of English are improvements over national, standard varieties. This comes through in their use of the internal language politics of “The Gold Bug” to demonstrate the inadequacy of vernaculars, which, I argue, are implicitly associated with colonized subjects.

Although only West’s New Method was developed explicitly for colonial classrooms, each of these auxiliary forms has a basis in colonial histories and perspectives that is significant for how we read the role of race and vernacular in their adaptations of Poe’s story. Even Palmer and Ogden, who developed their methods in Belgium and Cambridge, have latent connections to colonial and anthropological perspectives on the language use of native “Others.” This comes through in Palmer’s dedication to his mentor, the Belgian Charles Lemaire, written in French, which prefaced his foundational 1921 work, *Principles of Language Study*. A former lieutenant in the Belgian army who served in the Congo, he has been described as a “soldier, explorer, cartographer, and amateur ethnographer,” as well as a “prolific colonial propagandist.”<sup>16</sup> He began his career as a linguist in the Belgian Congo, where he developed a popular multilingual word list, *Vocabulaire pratique* (1895), which used columns of words in English, French, Kikongo, Mongo, and Bangala to manage native labor forces in the extraction of rubber.<sup>17</sup> After his return to Belgium, Lemaire became, like Palmer, a dedicated

12 Rossiter, *The Gold Insect*, 62, n. 1.

13 Michael West, *Bilingualism (with Special Reference to Bengal)*, Bureau of Education, India, Occasional Reports, no. 13 (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1926); reprinted in Smith, *Pioneers*, vol. III, 277.

14 Palmer, *The Gold Beetle*, vii.

15 C. K. Ogden, “To the Reader,” in Rossiter, *The Gold Insect*, 13.

16 Vincent Viane, “King Leopold’s Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80.4 (2008): 767.

17 Charles Lemaire, *Vocabulaire Pratique: Francais, Anglais, Zanzibarite (Swahili), Fiote, Kibangi-Irèbou, Mongo, Bangala*, 2nd ed. (Brussels: Bulens, 1897); Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Esperantist, even writing his Congo memoirs in Esperanto.<sup>18</sup> In his dedication, Palmer states that he built his scientific models of language acquisition on Lemaire's "many factual findings collected during [his] long years of observation in the heart of Africa": "Nature, you said, is a fertile source of teaching and methodology; she's the only schoolmistress for blacks. Therefore, these related facts about primitives—some of which corresponds to the teaching of whites—are, better than us, naturally, and are the true experiments."<sup>19</sup> Palmer's evolutionary concept of language acquisition was similarly based on the adaptability of "very young children, idiots, or barbarians of the lowest scale."<sup>20</sup> In this way, Palmer's scientific method depends upon colonial modes of knowledge in which European modernity is produced through the management of a premodern Other.

Similarly, West's New Method was derived from his experiences as a school inspector in Bengal. In his major work, *Bilingualism* (1926), he defined English's value as a stable auxiliary language within a chaotic multilingual culture. West based his method in social theories of group psychology often citing the theory of the "Great Society" by Fabian intellectual Graham Wallas, a form of prewar liberal internationalism in which it is imagined that, as West puts it, "the whole world is one: it is only linguistic barriers and the artificial boundaries of tribal feeling that separate."<sup>21</sup> For West, the impediment of "tribal feeling" came from the proliferation of Bengali language activism that arose as part of the anticolonial movements in the 1920s. West's language teaching methods adapted traditional English colonial educational policies to the conditions of late empire. More than anyone, he successfully developed a method attuned to the recommendations of the postwar Advisory Committee on Education in the colonies to adapt English education to local populations. Unlike the filtration theory, the traditional British colonial educational policy in which English-language teaching is limited to elites, West sought to bring English to the masses. Where Thomas Macaulay, in his infamous "Minute on Indian Education" from 1835, described English-language education as producing an ideal subject who is "native in body and English in intellect," West's ideal subject retains his mother tongue for all except the terrain of modernity in which he uses English as an auxiliary language.<sup>22</sup>

This tension between a global, modernist future and a local, traditionalist past is also apparent in Ogden's critique of language, which he cowrote with the literary critic I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, which included a supplemental essay by the

1986), 19–22; William J. Samarin, "Language in the Colonization of Central Africa, 1880–1900," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 23.2 (1989): 232–49.

18 Charles Lemaire, "Tra Mez-Afriko (A travers l'Afrique centrale)," *The Geographic Journal* 29 (1907): 86. This article is described in the journal as "an account of Major Lemaire's journey given before the Geneva Esperanto Congress in September, 1906."

19 Palmer, "Préface Dédicatoire: à mon vieil ami le commandant Charles Lemaire, actuellement Directeur de L'Institute Supérieur Colonial à Anvers," in *The Principles of Language Study* (London: Harrap, 1921), 5, reprinted in Smith, *Pioneers*, vol. II, 1–186. My translation.

20 Palmer, "Préface Dédicatoire," 34.

21 West, *Bilingualism*, 32–33; Graham Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (London: MacMillan, 1914).

22 For more on Macaulay and interwar language policy in the colonies, see Stephen Evans, "Macaulay's Minute Revisited: Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-Century India," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 23.4 (2002): 279.



anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski titled “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages.” Malinowski’s contributions to British linguistics in this essay and in his later works are based on his functionalist view of language, which he claims to derive from native behavior.<sup>23</sup> Ogden often uses the rhetoric of primitivism in his advocacy of Basic English as a cure for what he calls “Word Magic,” the belief that words are intimately connected to things or have a causal power. Malinowski’s Trobriand Islanders provide a striking model for his claim that language is always bound by context and interpretation, yet more importantly functions as an ironic criticism of standard English as “primitivist.” Ogden’s methods for Basic English explicitly derive from Benthamite utilitarianism such as the Basic English method of “panoptic” conjugation on its word wheel.<sup>24</sup>

Each of these language systems differ in their use of a native Other: Palmer identifies African natives as a model for his own instinctive, oral-based teaching method, West criticizes Bengali speakers as limited without an English auxiliary, and Ogden draws on primitivist rhetoric and utilitarian models for managing primitives to define his artificial version of English.

What they share is a dependency upon the simultaneous invention of those opposing English as a world auxiliary language as tribal and backward. To create a market for English as a world language, it follows that all three methods need not only to invent an accessible form of English but also create the sense in its audience that the communicative ideal associated with their auxiliary language is necessary and desirable. Unlike nationalist standard languages, which claim to exist as “linguistic fortresses” that assimilate all other forms within them, auxiliary forms are supplemental, contingent, and always in a dependent relation to vernaculars, mother tongues, and other native, premodern types that they need to *manage* more than they need to replace.<sup>25</sup> Auxiliary English’s ideological reproduction requires this sense, suggested by Palmer, Ogden, and West, that the auxiliary form is merely coexisting in a sea of languages. Unlike Macaulay’s desire to use language in order to re-create subjects, English as an auxiliary form does not seek hegemony. Reading auxiliary English ideology in literature involves recognizing language dynamics that do not involve silencing other languages as much as they are with their hierarchical management.

### Translating Jupiter

One of Poe’s earliest stories of ratiocination, “The Gold Bug” is a tale about a treasure discovered through the clever decoding of a cryptograph left behind by the

23 Terence D. Langendoen, *The London School of Linguistics: A Study of the Linguistic Theories of B. Malinowski and J. R. Firth* (Cambridge: M.I.T Press, 1968); Jerzy Szymura, “Bronislaw Malinowski’s ‘Ethnographic Theory of Language,’” in *Linguistic Thought in England, 1914–1945*, ed. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1988), 106–31.

24 In writing about the colonialist influence of Basic English in China, the critic Yunte Huang classifies word lists as an apparatus of modernity “where the cultural logic of Panopticism is manifested and the technology of control applied.” In “Basic English, Chinglish, and Translocal Dialect,” in *English and Ethnicity: Signs of Race*, eds. Janina Brutt-Griffler and Catherine Evans Davies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 82.

25 I am following here Brutt-Griffler’s theory that world English derived more from British imperialism’s “reactive policy of containment” than from a desire to dominate other languages; see Janina Brutt-Griffler, *World English: A Study of Its Development* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2015), 78.

famous pirate Captain Kidd. Poe's use of a cryptogram inspired a series of imitators and contributed to the story's immense popularity. It also signals the importance of language to the story's narrative. As Poe critics have observed, the three characters are marked by distinctive speech habit and vocabulary: for instance, the language of the unnamed narrator, who lives in Charleston, reflects his social position as an urban elite, much as the refined French-English speech of the main character, Legrand, reflects his upbringing as a member of a plantation family in Louisiana with Huguenot ancestry.<sup>26</sup> Yet he is now an impoverished eccentric living on Sullivan's Island, just a few miles off of Charleston's coast, with his black servant, Jupiter. A former slave who has remained with Legrand out of loyalty, Jupiter speaks a controversial form of African American vernacular that critics have identified as anything from a minstrelsy stereotype to "a believable Gullah speaker," a creole spoken by Blacks on the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

Poe helped to promote the latter interpretation by drawing attention to the authenticity of Jupiter's characterization in his anonymous reviews of the story, where he wrote: "The negro is a perfect picture. He is drawn accurately—no feature overshadowed, or distorted. Most of such delineations are caricatures."<sup>28</sup> Yet Toni Morrison criticizes Poe's depiction for its use of "eye dialect" (e.g., "nose" for "knows") and for Jupiter's ignorance, which associates him with minstrelsy.<sup>29</sup> Her claim is supported by one linguist, quoted by the Poe critic Liliane Weissberg, who argues that Jupiter uses "such vocables as might have been used by a black sailor on an English ship a hundred years ago, or on the minstrel stage, but were never current on the South Carolina coast." Weissberg concludes that "Jupiter's dialect designates him as different, but it does not ground its speaker in a specific geographic and cultural setting."<sup>30</sup> Thus, it might be most helpful not to think of his speech as representing either a race or a place but cultural expectations about those two things. Weissberg distinguishes between the racism in Jupiter's speech and the fact that Poe creates an African American character with more freedom of speech than was found in conventional representations. It is here that an auxiliary English interpretation differs from the standard interpretation followed by Morrison and Weissberg. For instance, what happens to the language dynamics once Jupiter's speech is rendered without its dialect markers in simplified English?

This is not to deny the significance of those markers. In fact, one point that becomes clear in the simplified versions is how important Jupiter's dialect is for the story. Jupiter commits malapropisms such as "tin" for "antennae" and "syphon" for "cipher," and, perhaps most significantly, has colorful figurative language such as referring to the bug

26 On language politics in "The Gold Bug," see Jennifer Dilalla Toner, "The 'Remarkable Effect' of 'Silly Words': Dialect and Signature in 'The Gold-Bug,'" *Arizona Quarterly* 49.1 (1993): 1–20; Michael Williams, "The Language of the Cipher: Interpretation in 'The Gold Bug,'" *American Literature* 53.4 (1982): 646–60.

27 Quoted in Liliane Weissberg, "Black, White, Gold," in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, eds. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 139.

28 Quoted in Terence Whalen, "Average Racism: Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism," in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, eds. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31.

29 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13.

30 Weissberg, "Black, White, Gold," 139–40.



as “gold.” Poe critic Michael Williams observes that Jupiter’s speech is limited by admitting only a single reference for a word or sound. For instance, the “tin/antennae” error suggests that he “believes the middle syllable has only one referent.” Similarly, Williams argues that Jupiter’s misunderstanding of “cause” as “claws” or translating “message” into the dialect “pissel” (for epistle) indicates that he is limited to a naive conception of names, sounds, and their single referents. This also accounts for his mistake with his left and right hands, which occurs when he is dropping the bug through the eye of the skull because, for Williams, “such a linguistic practice also inhibits abstraction.”<sup>31</sup> Williams’s description of Jupiter’s language as naive suits the perspective that Palmer, Ogden, and West had toward all vernacular “mother tongues” that are opposed to global auxiliary forms, which suggests the problems that it poses for their adaptations, particularly Palmer’s.

My analysis will focus mainly on Palmer because he wrote an accompanying article in *Bulletin* regarding the IRET simplification of Poe’s story titled, *A Memorandum on Grading and Simplifying Literary Material*. In his *Memorandum*, Palmer advises that any story that has a “considerable quantity of dialect” that is also “essential to the enjoyment of the text” is not suitable for simplification.<sup>32</sup> Because Jupiter provides a quantity of dialect and is essential to the overall story, it is worth wondering why Palmer selected this particular Poe story. He claims it was because of Poe’s worldwide celebrity and the value of using a suspenseful story that keeps the reader involved until the end. “A Tell-Tale Heart” or many other Poe stories, however, would have suited these requirements as well, if not better, and did not have any of the drawbacks associated with correcting the story’s extensive vernacular. That is, unless one considers performing the rectification of vernacular as integral to the reader’s overall purpose. For these reasons, I believe that Jupiter presented an opportunity for Palmer to demonstrate the strength of his method for simplification. Because the vernacular appears on the opposite side of the page in the IRET version and because the speech is rendered phonetically as eye dialect made its deviation from standard English evident even for a foreign reader, its rectification can be more apparent and particularly suited to his suggested model of “literary criticism.”

Palmer addresses Jupiter’s speech in a brief section in the *Memorandum* titled “The Rectification of Dialect”: “In the simplifying of *The Gold Bug* the negro talk of Jupiter was recast in intelligible English. We may note here that all this negro dialect *necessarily disappears* in the French translation.”<sup>33</sup> Nowhere else does Palmer refer to the practice of using a translation as a basis for the simplification (though it is implied in the title, which resembles the French use of “*Scarabée*”). Palmer does not claim that the simplification followed the French translation, but rather cites it to justify his “rectification.” As Ineke Wallaert argues, translators reveal an “ideological stance” in the way that they choose to translate or not translate literary sociolects.<sup>34</sup>

31 Williams, “The Language of the Cipher,” 650.

32 Palmer, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material*, 328.

33 Palmer, *The Grading and Simplifying of Literary Material*. Emphasis mine.

34 Ineke Wallaert, “The Translation of Sociolects: A Paradigm of Ideological Issues in Translation?” in *Language Across Boundaries*, eds. Janet Cotterill and Anne Ife (New York: Continuum, 2001), 171. For more on this problem of an “adequate equivalent patois” as well as how nineteenth-century French translations differ in their treatment of Jupiter’s dialect, see Clayton Tyler McKee, “Translation and Audience: Edgar

Palmer was fluent in French, so it is no surprise that he refers to a French translation. Clayton McKee has noted the nineteenth-century French translations of Poe's story differed in how they treated Jupiter's speech depending on their audiences.<sup>35</sup> The anonymous translation for *Le Magasin de desmoiselles* was "intended to educate young, bourgeoisie French women," and therefore it standardizes Jupiter's speech and condenses the dialogue into narrative that minimizes not only his speech difference but his impact as a character in a way similar to what West does in his New Method adaptation.<sup>36</sup> Palmer was, however, most likely referring to Baudelaire's 1856 translation of Poe's story in *Histoire Extraordinaires*. Baudelaire sought a "*traduction positive*"—a faithful translation—in contrast to the "free" translations of other Poe stories by his contemporaries.<sup>37</sup> According to Léger, Baudelaire was using "positive" to refer to "interested" or "utility,"<sup>38</sup> a sensibility that is shared by these simplified versions. As part of this, Baudelaire avoided using archaisms or slang in order to create a clean, readable version, and like West, he sought to downplay its American context.<sup>39</sup> And, like Ogden and Palmer's boasts about their editorial decisions with Poe's style, Baudelaire saw his translation as improving upon the English original. Yet despite these convergences between the French translation and the English simplifications, it is not exactly the case that the negro dialect "necessarily disappears," as Palmer puts it, in Baudelaire's translation.

Palmer's phrase suggests that Baudelaire removed Jupiter's speech without much thought, yet in fact Baudelaire devotes two footnotes to the problem of rendering Jupiter's speech. The longest is the footnote that appears following Jupiter's "antennae/tin" error where Baudelaire explains that Jupiter's comment is an untranslatable pun ("*Calembour intraduisible*") and that there is no adequate French equivalent for Jupiter's "*patois anglais*." He explains that it could not be rendered in "*le patois nègre français*" any more than Breton can be used as an equivalent for Irish Gaelic. It is not clear what he is referring to as "*le patois nègre français*" given there was no literary equivalent at the time, according to Waellert and McKee. Although this is in keeping with the belief in the impossibility of translation, Baudelaire does raise another option of reconfiguring the spelling of the words as Balzac has done in his "*orthographes figuratives*," or creative spellings. He decides against it, however, because it would make the story comical. For our purposes here, it is important to note that Baudelaire's final rendering of Jupiter in normative French speech comes about by default, due to a perceived lack of choice, and that Jupiter's vernacular proved a more complicated question of culture and translation for Baudelaire than Palmer suggests.

Aside from the vernacular, Palmer's simplified version alludes to Jupiter's different status as reinforced by his speech. When he is first introduced in the story, Palmer retains the original sentence except for changing "Massa" to "Master" yet including the former in

Allen Poe's 'The Gold Bug,' " *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 5.4 (2017): 1–10.

35 McKee, "Translation and Audience," 2

36 McKee, "Translation and Audience," 4.

37 The phrase "*traduction positive*" quoted in Benoit Léger, "*Traduction négative et traduction littérale: les traducteurs de Poe en 1857*," *Études françaises* 432 (2007): 97.

38 Léger, "*Traduction négative et traduction littérale: les traducteurs de Poe en 1857*," 98.

39 Alistair Rolls and Clara Sitbon, "*Traduit de l'américain*" from Poe to the *Série Noire*: Baudelaire's Greatest Hoax?" *Modern and Contemporary France* 21.1 (2013): 43.

a parenthetical explanation: "He always refused to abandon what he considered his right to attend his 'Master Will' (whom in his negro speech he called 'Massa Will')." Following this explication, Palmer chooses to keep having Jupiter refer to "Massa Will."<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, A. P. Rossiter, in the Basic English version, changes "Massa" to "Master" throughout. Notably, both replace Jupiter's reference to himself as a "nigger," with "negro." Rossiter also removes the pun on "tin" and "antennae," neither of which fits in the Basic vocabulary. But like Palmer, Rossiter retains almost the entire plot including the interactions between Legrand and Jupiter. As a result, the politics of these adaptations change from questions of linguistic standardization to those of linguistic distribution. It is no longer the *use* of standard English that distinguishes the characters but rather their ability to manage and control their speech. When seen in terms of the distribution of speech acts, Jupiter's character does not change by being rendered into Plain or Basic English.

In his post-structuralist reading, Williams argues that the three characters are distinguished by their relationship to language. Where Jupiter is limited, as noted previously, and the narrator mired in received language (and opinions), it is Legrand's skepticism about language that distinguishes him as the hero of the tale. In this way, Jupiter plays an important role in the first half of "The Gold Bug" as a motivator to the plot and as an intermediary between the narrator and Legrand. Beyond this role in the plot, however, in a story with three characters whose characterization depends largely upon their relation to language, Jupiter also acts as a supplement to the other characters' modes of expression. In Poe's story, this comes through in his vernacular, which has to be interpreted by the two other White characters. Their ability to decipher Jupiter's speech foreshadows Legrand's interpretation of Kidd's code later in the story.

When the vernacular is removed, however, the difference among the characters in terms of their use of language remains. The narrator possesses and controls language for most of the story until Legrand takes over with the concluding monologue. The narrator's speech mimics an observer's distance from the eccentric Legrand that, as critics have noted, betrays a difference in class. He controls speech yet uses cliché and often appears incapable of interpreting either Jupiter's speech or Legrand's behavior. In contrast, Legrand speaks either in excited bursts or, more often, broods silently in a manner that suggests the withholding of speech rather than its lack. Between these two extremes is the verbose figure of Jupiter, who possesses but does not control language. He neither has the luxury of cliché nor the self-control to remain silent. But it is precisely this negative role that is needed for the plot to take place. It requires his "silly words" about the bug being "gold," his puns on "tin/antennae," and misunderstanding of abstractions such as left and right to create the suspenseful plot. What is created, therefore, is not a relationship of standard to vernacular Englishes but a hierarchy of speech positions within the story that mimics the relation between Poe's variety of Englishes and their adaptation into these auxiliary forms.

In this way, Jupiter is distinguished as much by his role in the story's linguistic hierarchy than by the nonstandard orthography of his speech. This can be seen in the confusing dialogue he has with the narrator when he comes to deliver Legrand's letter.

40 Palmer, *The Gold Beetle*, 3, 5, 9.

Although already noted for its comical malapropisms and misunderstandings, as well as Jupiter's threat to beat his master, this scene illustrates the story's initial language politics insofar as Jupiter acts as an intermediary between the narrator's conventional urban perspective and Legrand's feigned madness. Yet more than just Jupiter's vernacular leads to the miscommunication between the narrator and Jupiter in this scene; rather it is Legrand's silence, his refusal to speak, at least to Jupiter, that causes the confusion. The fact that this is not a sign of madness and more about asserting Legrand's control over speech comes through in the fact that Legrand's letter demonstrates his controlled and measured use of language against Jupiter's excitable nature (i.e., "old Jup annoys me").<sup>41</sup> This hierarchy of speech positions might be seen to take an absurd turn if one were to also include the dog, "the large Newfoundland"<sup>42</sup> who accompanies them on their treasure hunting expedition and appears to understand only Jupiter's speech and even to have its own "speech" controlled by Jupiter.

Although Palmer and Rossiter retain the latent master-slave relations from the original, West omits Legrand's plantation background, deracinates the former slave woman who helps Legrand, and removes many of the scenes that humiliate Jupiter either directly or indirectly. For example, Jupiter's "silly words" in Poe stay "silly" in Palmer and are made "foolish" in Basic, but are left out entirely in the New Method version. He is introduced as an "old African man" and, though the narrator refers to Legrand as Jupiter's master, it omits any dialogue where Jupiter himself refers to Legrand as "Master Will." In addition, the references to his violent nature—threatening to whip Legrand and silencing the dog—are removed. West does retain the mistake that is crucial to the plot, where Jupiter confuses his right and left, yet this is simply stated, without the consequence of Legrand's insults; rather, he appears supportive: "Look man—this is your left eye. We must try again!"<sup>43</sup> The treatment of Jupiter changes how we see Legrand's character as well; instead of Poe's unstable character, we encounter a rational leader of men, an ideal image of the colonizer as an intelligent and benevolent master. This reflects West's sensitivity to audience coming from his experience as a colonial educator in Bengal where English textbooks have long been under intense scrutiny for imperialist bias.<sup>44</sup> West anticipates this criticism in the disclaimer on the copyright page: "Nothing is included in this book which is unintelligible or offensive to any foreign child." Although the pedagogical word lists account for its intelligibility, it is the latter part of the statement that refers to a Global English ideology that distinguishes between English as a language and as a national, cultural identity. Legrand's status within a sociolinguistic hierarchy, then, does not simply reflect colonial status, rather, Legrand's skepticism about language suggests a model attitude toward language as an auxiliary form within a multilingual context. Unlike Jupiter and the narrator, who remain fixed in race and class-determined "mother tongues," Legrand sees language as an instrument and a commodity. For Palmer, Ogden, and West, he represents an ideal global reader within a multilingual society who

41 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Gold Bug," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Tales and Sketches, 1843–1849*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 813.

42 Poe, "The Gold Bug," 809.

43 West, *The Gold Bug*, 20.

44 See Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

manipulates language in such a way that will substantially change (or reinstitute) his social position. However, skillful decoding requires a code. Having established Legrand as the story’s model for a reader, now I want to consider the text that he reads and the significant role of cryptography in the story’s allegory of Global English.

### Secret Writing: Cryptography and Global English

In the denouement, Legrand offers an extensive explanation of how he found the treasure by solving the code left by the pirate Captain Kidd. Notably, his tone becomes more balanced and authoritative than its erratic bursts in the first part of the story. He even takes control of the narration, reducing the narrator to merely asking prompting and unctuous questions. Jupiter falls silent, too, essentially disappearing from the story. His place in the story’s triangulated language dynamics is replaced by the absent figure of Captain Kidd. Where earlier in the story the two White men derived their status by their differentiation from Jupiter’s speech, now Legrand acquires it from his ability to decipher and “master” the clues created by the illiterate Kidd. The foremost reason that Legrand gives for attempting to solve the mystery is that he believed Kidd was a mostly illiterate pirate, a “crude intellect.”<sup>45</sup> Legrand’s success depends upon Jupiter as well because it was “Jupiter’s *silly words*, about the bug being of solid gold”<sup>46</sup> that inspired his search. Although Jupiter’s figurative use of language is depicted as a form of uncontrolled speech, it is Legrand’s ability to decipher such speech that becomes valuable for deciphering Kidd’s code. Legrand states that the “first question” of all “secret writing” is the “*language of the cipher*.”<sup>47</sup> Although Spanish and French are primarily associated with their geographical location, he determines that it is English because of the visual-linguistic pun in the goat’s head as a crude signature for “Captain Kidd” that leads him to recognize that it *has* to be English, which is the only language in which the pun would make sense. It seems that Legrand’s skill in deciphering code derives in part from a lifetime of listening to—even taking inspiration from—Jupiter’s speech. The mastery involved in recognizing the serious meaning in Jupiter’s “silly words” and in deciphering Kidd’s code constitute status, whereas the production of those codes does not. Both of these relationships—to Kidd and to Jupiter—suggest how these three global auxiliary forms depend upon the local vernaculars that they seek to supplement. Not unlike the word list under vocabulary control, English is established as the natural target for all of these illiterate codes, and LeGrand stands in for the professional linguist, philosopher, or statistician with the expertise essential for their comprehension.

Notably, a hundred years after Poe helped make cryptograms a national fad, cryptography took on another significance as a source for machine translation. As Rita Raley and others have documented, the “cryptographic-translation idea,” as she calls it, was articulated by Warren Weaver in his writings about machine translation in the 1940s where one could input “a text from a source language and [output] the same text in a target language with the basic meaning preserved.”<sup>48</sup> Weaver imagined machine

45 Poe, “The Gold Bug,” 835.

46 Poe, “The Gold Bug,” 833. Italics added.

47 Poe, “The Gold Bug,” 835. Italics in original.

48 Rita Raley, “Machine Translation and Global English,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16.2 (2003): 291.

translation as producing a mediating, auxiliary language that was neither an invented language, like Esperanto, nor British standard English. According to Weaver, the machine translation conception of English was not just as a target language but also as a hidden source for all languages: “When I look at an article in Russian, I say: ‘This is really written in English, but it has been coded in some strange symbols. I will now proceed to decode.’”<sup>49</sup> By conceiving of translation as a mode of cryptography, Weaver assumes English as both source and target, much as Kidd’s English is the source and target for Legrand to decipher. Although Weaver’s theories were developed more than a decade after the Carnegie conference, it was inspired by Ogden’s Basic English and shares with all three vocabulary control systems the ideology that all languages can be simply converted into English.

Similarly, this assumption of English as a global language—that all other languages are simply encoded versions of English—can be seen in Legrand’s assumption that the “secret writing” is *really* English. This rhetoric of decoding and cryptography is reinforced by the fact that the treasure has to be converted from foreign currencies into American money just as linguistic value depends on conversion into English. This is particularly important for auxiliary languages; unlike standard languages whose logic is tied to nationalism, an auxiliary language justifies itself through its efficiency in converting expert knowledges.<sup>50</sup> Legrand’s ability comes from his ability to convert Jupiter’s speech and Kidd’s code into material, practical form. That is the difference between Jupiter’s use of “gold” to describe the bug and Legrand’s interpretation of it to refer to real gold. Legrand’s skill comes in translating Jupiter and Kidd’s metaphors into the language of information.

In addition to its allegorical significance, cryptography also offered Palmer a means to resolve the methodological dispute over word lists that divided the vocabulary control movement. In a way that suited Palmer, “The Gold Bug” can be seen as performing the dispute between objective and subjective methods of counting words (notably, deciding in Palmer’s favor).<sup>51</sup> This can be seen in the way that Legrand uses a mixture of objective statistics and subjective judgment to decode the cryptograph, just as Palmer recommends. In fact, Legrand’s mind resembles a word list in that he intuitively understands language in terms of use frequency both at the level of the letter—identifying “E” as the first part of the code—and at the level of the word—arriving at “the” as the second part of the code. He then relies on his own subjective judgement—in Palmer’s sense—to identify the rest of the words. His method corroborates Palmer’s solution to the methodological dilemma facing vocabulary control: use objective measures to identify the most instrumental features of the language, and then use subjective judgment to create the final list. Legrand resembles the linguists in that he provides a method to decipher a code, yet, like the vocabulary control movement, there are limits in that instrumental language depends upon noninstrumental words and phrases to create meaning.

49 Quoted in Raley, “Machine Translation and Global English,” 295.

50 This view of English as “a virtual language” for “specialist communication” is one of the definitions of Global English given by James, “Theorising English and Globalisation,” 84–85.

51 For cultural associations with Legrand’s methods of deduction see Shawn Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).



Legrand encounters these limits when he arrives at the part of the code he has translated as “Bishop’s Hostel.” He is able to link it with the name of an old family, “Bessop,” yet they owned a plantation, not a hotel, and it is one of its former slaves who helps Legrand identify the spot. Once again he needs the assistance of an illiterate Black figure who can explicate the code but not master it, as Legrand states: “At length one of the most aged of the women said that she had heard of such a place as *Bessop’s Castle*, and thought that she could guide me to it, but that it was not a castle, nor a tavern, but a high rock.”<sup>52</sup> As Weissberg acutely observes, this woman preserves the memory of the landscape that is lost to the White characters.<sup>53</sup> I would add that this memory is preserved through an act of translation, from “Bishop” to “Bessop,” from “Hostel” to “Castle,” and from “hotel” to “a high rock.” The phrase Bessop’s Castle does not refer to a seat of property or power, which might be associated with the language of Legrand and the narrator, but simply a rock. Legrand needed her to decode the doubled meaning of the rock-as-castle, or, rather, a rock in the shape of a chair, the “devil’s seat” mentioned in the cipher. Like Jupiter and Kidd, the old woman contributed to Legrand’s success because of her historical memory, which provides a similar function as the vernaculars of Jupiter and Kidd. But in the end, she is forgotten by Legrand, who only requires these illiterate figures to provide him with material—coded words for him to decipher. Like Palmer, Rossiter, and West, Legrand’s skill is in the art of simplification. He does not produce meaning; he reduces it.

Poe’s story mixes linguistic and material dominance by having the recovery of Legrand’s lost family fortune, which included owning slaves in Louisiana, depend upon using African American vernaculars: a linguistic dominance over Black tongues used to recover material dominance over Black bodies. In itself, this “castle” has only an indexical value. It matters because of what can be seen from its peak: the spot in the distance where the treasure is buried. Similarly, the vernaculars of Jupiter, Kidd, and the old woman are, by the terms of the story, worthless as rocks, acting only as supplemental labor for Legrand’s “expert knowledge,” which consolidates it, literally, into a commodity form.

If Legrand figures in this allegory as both the ideal colonial figure and the skillful linguist, what is Jupiter and the old woman but the natives about whom Palmer wrote, “nature is a schoolmistress”? *The Gold Beetle* adapts Poe’s story into an extended metaphor for the ideology and practices of the vocabulary control movement. In the process, it evokes unlikely comparisons between pre-Civil War South Carolina to the Belgian Congo in the 1880s and Tokyo, China, and Bengal in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>54</sup> Through the figure of Harold Palmer, who created the conditions in which Poe’s story became a measure for judging English pedagogical word lists, the fraught racial background of Poe’s American story evokes the symmetry of codes and black labor in the early word lists created by Charles Lemaire in the Congo. However unusual it may seem, such a reading comes from the transnational circulation of “The Gold Bug” within a late imperial system that was in the process of transforming into a new global order and inventing new global codes.

52 Poe, “The Gold Bug,” 841.

53 Weissberg, “Black, White, Gold,” 140.

54 On I. A. Richards in China, see Rodney Keoneke, *Empires of the Mind: I. A. Richards and Basic English in China, 1929–1979* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).