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Language ideology and national propaganda in 18th-century British dictionaries of arts and sciences

Elisabetta Lonati

Università del Piemonte Orientale

ABSTRACT

The study examines the entry Language in three major British dictionaries of arts and sciences published between 1728 and 1778. The aim is to highlight the ideological gaze which contributed to the construction of the emerging nation-state as represented by language. In other words, the analysis is focussed on the discourse about and around the British national and linguistic identity as promoted in the *Cyclopaedia* (1728), the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1771), and Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1778-1788). The investigation demonstrates how the ideological load is carried out over time by using similar linguistic expressions and rhetorical strategies s.v. Language, and how language is pivotal in establishing the British nation and the expanding British Empire.

Keywords: language ideology, national propaganda, 18-c. dictionaries of arts and sciences, 18th-century encyclopaedias, language and nation, language identity, British empire, the expansion of English.

1. Introduction

At the start of the Eighteenth century, a newly emerging genre helped change the representation, the conceptualisation, and the vernacularisation of the world: this turning point was marked by the publication of *universal dictionaries of arts and sciences*, also known as encyclopædias. These reference works, “as the products of a cosmopolitan Republic of Letters, a kingdom and a nation” (Yeo 2001: xviii),¹

¹ “The English dictionaries of arts and sciences can therefore be seen as a significant presence in the early-eighteenth century Republic of Letters. They assumed,

promoted the dissemination of traditional and contemporary knowledge, values and ideas in eighteenth-century British society and across Europe (cf. Yeo 1991, 1996, 2003; Neumann 2009; Abbott 2010). Language and sociolinguistic issues, along with the construction of cultural prestige and identity, represent major fields of interest.

The general aim of this paper is a close examination of the most relevant linguistic attitudes, ideologies and cultural assumptions as they emerge from the long and complex entry Language in British dictionaries of arts and sciences published between 1728 and 1788. These two dates represent, on the one hand, the starting point of the study with the publication of Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1728; hereafter *Cy*), a milestone in 18th-century British and European dictionaries of arts and sciences; on the other hand, the close of the century with the first edition of Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1778-1788; hereafter *RCy*). This latest work is the first in-depth revision, as expansion and updating, of Chambers's 1728 version. They delimit the time span under scrutiny here, sixty years that testify to the dynamic complexity in the elaboration of the linguistic and sociolinguistic thought across decades. For their similarities, *Cy* and *RCy* represent a continuum between the first and the second half of the century. However, *RCy*'s innovations also emphasise the adaptation of the role of language, and English in particular, to the new socio-historical and socio-political context of the emerging, expanding, and consolidating nation-state within and beyond the British Isles (cf. Sklar 1989: 373; Brewer 1989: 1270-1271):

There is a noticeable change in the emphasis between the dedication of Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* in 1728 and that given in the edition by Rees in 1786 [...]. Whereas in both there was the suggestion that the

and facilitated, the cross-national communication of knowledge, a feature of the European magazines and journals. [...] they advertised their main content [...] as especially suitable for a 'universal' audience." (Yeo 2001: 57). However, contemporary ideology and national propaganda, as well as the expansion of the British Empire are overt and mark the construction of linguistic and national identity. For these specific aspects, and their detailed treatment and argumentation, cf. Newman (1987) and Brewer (1989) on the rise of English nationalism and its cultural issues; Sklar (1989) on the interdependence among linguistic adequacy, linguistic patriotism, imperial interests, and gender issues; Neumann (2009) on the rhetoric of national character, its forms and functions, and its gender-based issues; Abbott (2010) on the relevance of rhetorical education and eloquence for supporting nationalism and the British Empire; Sebastiani (2014) on the ideas of *nation*, *nationalism* and *national character* in the Enlightenment debate; Rodríguez-Álvarez (2018) on the construction of 'linguistic heritage' through the early histories of the English language, particularly those included in dictionaries and grammars.

flourishing state of the arts and sciences reflected the personality and cultivation of the king as a member of the Republic of Letters, in Rees' dedication there was a more specific national slant, making the 'genius of Britain' an actor in its own right. Rees explained that although he had recorded 'every kind of information which may do justice to the merit of those, of *every country*, who have distinguished themselves in the cause of Science', he had been especially careful to include 'those inventions and improvements, which do honour to *his own country*, and to the distinguished munificence of his Sovereign' [Dedication, 1786, vol. 1, i-ii]. This shift from cosmopolitan to national focus is also apparent in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which began with no dedication at all. (Yeo 2001: 239)

According to Del Lungo Camiciotti (1990a: 7), the decades between 1725 and 1775 are characterised by the elaboration of a linguistic model which encompasses and represents the ongoing civil, cultural, national, and intellectual transformations in the contemporary British context. This is also confirmed by Rodríguez-Álvarez (2018) in her analytical work on the early histories of the English language. She declares that "the prefatory matter of many dictionaries and grammars started to include brief historical sketches of the language" and that "though these sketches were mainly devised to extol the excellence of the language, they also gave historical legitimacy to the English language, and endowed the vernacular with an ancient lineage that could vie with those of the prestigious classical languages" (Rodríguez-Álvarez 2018: 100), especially from 1750 onwards.

Within this chronological and diachronic frame of reference, the second half of the century is mainly characterised by the publication in Edinburgh of another major dictionary of arts and sciences, "compiled upon a new plan": the first edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1771, cf. title page; hereafter *EB*). This dictionary of arts and sciences is the first to include in its title the word encyclopaedia and, more relevant for the aim of the present study, to qualify it as British: *Britannica* is "a national allusion [...] part of the cultural strategy pursued by Lowland Scots in the decades after the Act of Union" (Yeo 2001: 177), one of those strategies used to construe and represent "a shared sense of Britishness which could be superimposed over an array of internal differences" (Neumann 2009: 280; cf. also Brewer 1989: 1271). This means to refer to (Great) Britain as a unique entity and, for this reason, to suggest shared institutional and socio-political issues (Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 12; 1990b: 105), beyond cultural ones, "[r]eflecting developments in

intellectual culture” which associated “the English language [...] with the rise of the sciences” (Percy 2010: 41). Language is seen “as a unifying factor [...] among the different regions of Britain [...] a ‘national language’” (Hickey 2010: 15), a ‘uniform’ variety which underpins the ideology of a standard in English. The need of one common national tongue “throughout Britain (and its colonies)” (Jones 2010: 226), of a “general, or national Language” (*Cy*, s.v. Dialect), or of English “as a growth industry” in education (Percy 2010: 42) become pivotal to national identity:

English-language advocates sought to promote English as a language worthy of national pride, one that could be perceived, moreover, as competitive within an international linguistic community that had long held it in contempt. [...] To understand the connection between language and national self-image, we must turn to a branch of linguistic theory [...] that might be described as a judgmental precursor of comparative linguistics (Sklar 1989: 373)

In this multifaceted perspective, the study will start from *EB* to trace back how language ideology and national propaganda are overtly constructed and disseminated in the entries Language with specific reference to the rhetoric of nationalism, nation’s prestige, and national progress (Abbott 2010: 123): it was “the responsibility of a good nation to refine its language [...] since the state of the language was regularly interpreted as a mirror of the state of the nation” (Muggleston 2003: 24). The idea of “a single nation and a single form of language” is not only relevant, but central in the eighteenth-century “national language complex” (Hickey 2010: 11, 2012: 8) understood as, for example, public and disseminated use, as central is the need of codification (Beal 2010: 23), and standardisation (Jones 2010: 227). These aspects are extremely relevant in the process of selection, refinement, codification, and representation of English which characterise the second half of the century. The previous notions and processes will be at the core of the following discussion.

2. English “will yield the palm to none”

Towards the end of the entry Language in *EB*, the long and complex discourse on the origin of language and its main functions in any society focusses on English in particular and achieves its climax when the appraisal definitely unfolds in the words of the compiler. The sequence and the conciseness of

positive and hyperbolic expressions is directly connected with the strength and the effectiveness of its impact on the readership. In comparison with the classical languages and other more prestigious modern languages,

- (1) although, in mere pleasantness of sounds, or harmonious flow of syllables, our language [*English*] may be inferior to the Greek, the Latin, Italian, and Spanish; yet in point of manly dignity, graceful variety, intuitive distinctness, nervous energy of expression, unconstrained freedom of harmony of poetic numbers, it will yield the palm to none. (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 879)

This concluding section sums up the key points of a process which represents the English language as the cultural, historical, national paradigm, before being a linguistic one, and inseparable from it. It is worth highlighting here a recurrent and pivotal theme: the question of a “gender-based” attitude to language (Neumann 2009: 275-276). *Manly dignity* essentially represents middle-class (male) values, and is systematically associated with Britishness, against ‘aristocratic effeminacy’ (Neumann 2009: 288). In particular, according to Sklar,

during this period, the politics of gender [...] was deployed in the service of linguistic patriotism and the politics of imperial conquest. The notion of English as a masculine language [...] assumed special significance for eighteenth-century England, as a response to the related pressures of imperial aspiration and sociolinguistic anxiety. [...] to promote English as a language worthy of national pride [...]. Representing English as a ‘manly’ language was a key strategy in this undertaking. (Sklar 1989: 372-373)

The last forty years of the eighteenth century emphasise what had been going on for at least the two previous centuries: the need to identify a variety which would be adopted at a national level (cf. Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 9, 12-14; 1990b: 100, 103, 105; Hickey 2010: 10-11; Mugglestone 2003: 7-11, 24-25), a prestigious variety to be codified and to be used in any circumstance. Over the century, it is around this idea(l) that British universal dictionaries of arts and sciences receive and epitomise the debate on language and its multifaceted perspectives, including national propaganda.

If the quotation (1) taken from *EB* is here the starting point of the discussion, because it clearly outlines the ideological gaze on language and the people who use it in the second half of the century, it is worth going back

chronologically to the entry *Language* in *Cy* (1728), and the related notions and concepts involved in the discussion. Contents will also be compared for the same entry with those included in *RCy* (1778-1788), to highlight similarities (e.g. more traditional issues) and differences (e.g. updating, adaptations, additions and omissions). This method of approaching the primary sources and commenting on them would trace that conceptual continuum over time which characterises eighteenth-century linguistic and sociolinguistic thought, made of forward and backward shifting moves and apparently opposite coexisting forces in the historical and diachronic perspectives.

2.1 Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1728) and Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1778-1788)

The entry *Language* in *Cy* and *RCy* is of medium length, three dense folio columns in small typeface. In both dictionaries the first sections overlap with tiny differences and, after a general definition, "a Set of Words which any People have agreed upon, in order [*RCy*: whereby] to communicate their Thoughts to each other" (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. *Language*), they introduce some of the major issues of the debate. The notions of usage and custom are said to be "the Rule of a Language", and the rules are just reflections of "a *Language* already introduced by Use" and represent "the Manners of speaking used in the *Language*" (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. *Language*). However, there are differences in usage, it may be bad or good, and this distinction is here said to be "derived from the Expressions used by the most eminent Persons among the People; [...] Quality and Authority [...] Learning and Reputation of writing well" (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. *Language*). From this point of view, it seems that the authors and literary works still play a major role in defining good usage, reflecting a seventeenth-century outlook on language, until about 1725 (Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 10-11). At the same time, innovative hints are introduced: not "the best Part", as suggested by Vaugelas, but "the *greatest* Part, [...] the most numerous Part being something fix'd and palpable", as stated by Buffier (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. *Language*).² If good usage is grounded on 'elite usage', this same usage should represent the greatest part of this elite, suggesting that language is perceived as and is becoming a social entity, and this approximately happened between 1725 and 1775 (Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 10-11). It is at this point that the discussion shifts from general

² For an in-depth reading on Buffier's (meta)linguistic approach and theoretical perspective, see Swiggers (1983).

language issues, moving between more traditional insights (e.g. the best Part of the Authors) and a more recent and contemporary outlook (e.g. usage, custom, rules as reflections, *greatest Part*), to the notion of genius “or Natural Complexion of each People and the *Language* they speak” (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. Language). The identification of language as the expression of precise characteristics of a given people is set forth, and opens to highly evaluative sections in which the other European languages and peoples are definitely made to overlap and match:

- (2) There is found a constant Resemblance between the Genius or Natural Complexion of each People and the *Language* they speak. Thus [...] the *Italians*, are sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, which is as visible in their *Language* as their Manners. The *Language* of the *Spaniards* is full of that Gravity and Haughtiness of Air which makes the distinguishing Character of the People. The *French*, who have a World of Vivacity, have a *Language* that runs extremely brisk and lively. And the *English*, who are naturally blunt, thoughtful, and of few Words, have a *Language* exceedingly short, concise, and sententious [*RCy*, “more concise and sententious, though far from being deficient in respect of copiousness”]. (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. Language)

This passage marks the first step in associating the English and their language with positive qualities, against the more stereotyped ones associated with the neighbouring countries which are introduced first in the sequence (cf. Sklar 1989: 373-374; Abbott 2010). This sequence also seems to represent the state of the art of the traditionally prestigious Latinate languages against the still uncertain role of English in the contemporary context. However, if English comes later, either on the European scene or the textual space, it clearly emerges for its ‘natural’ (i.e. positive, not ornamented/-al) qualities, intrinsic to the language (*exceedingly short, concise, sententious*, not deficient in *copiousness*), as well as to the people using it (*blunt, thoughtful, of few Words*; cf. Abbott 2010: 109). On the other hand, the other European (formerly) prestigious peoples – or countries – and languages are eventually marked by some sort of decline (*sunk, full of, runs extremely*), and by imbalance and redundancy (*softness and effeminacy*, cf. Sklar 1989: 375, 377; *gravity and haughtiness, world of vivacity/extremely brisk and lively*). According to Neumann (2009: 288), by “maximising the difference between the British self and the national others the rhetoric of national character throws into high relief the uniqueness of Britishness, thus making the British appear as a rather homogenous nation sharing a number of positive qualities” and, at the

same time, obfuscating internal socio-cultural and political differences and contradictions in order to shape “a collective consciousness, of imagining communities” (Sebastiani 2014: 604).

The previous passage definitely and subtly marks the introduction of genius, the English genius (cf. Abbott 2010: 109-110 on the ‘British genius’; Sklar 1989: 374 on linguistic anthropomorphism). The tight and steady correspondence between the genius of the people and their language becomes clear in the following passage, which is noticeably more marked, as well as the overlapping of language-tongue and people:

- (3) The *Spaniards* seem to place the Nobleness and Gravity of their *Language*, in the Number of Syllables, and the Swelling of Words; and speak less to make themselves understood, than to make themselves admired [...] their language cannot paint a Thought to the Life; it always magnifies it, frequently distorts it; and does nothing if it do not exceed Nature. The *Italian* Tongue does not swell up Things to that Degree, but it adorns and embellishes them more; yet these Ornaments and Embellishments are not real Beauties. The *Italian* Expressions, thus rich and brilliant, are like those Faces cover’d with Patch and Paint, which make a fine Show; but that Finery, all Deceit. The *French* Language [...] is simple without Lowness, bold without Indecency, elegant and florid without Affectation, harmonious without Swelling, majestic without Pride, delicate without Softness, and strong without Roughness. As to the Points of Strength and Majesty, the *French* must give Way to the *English*, which in these, as well as in Copiousness, exceeds most of the living *Languages*; as far as it comes behind some of them in Smoothness and Delicacy. (Cy, and RCy with minor typeface differences, s.v. Language)

English is introduced at the end of the paragraph and, in comparison with Spanish, Italian, and French, essentially displays fairly recent, positive, and functional qualities: the ‘old’ gives way to the ‘new’, and the ‘new’ only seems to require some refinement as “it comes behind some of them in Smoothness and Delicacy” (Cy, and RCy with minor differences, s.v. Language). If Spanish is characterised by *nobleness and gravity* (*number of syllables, swelling of words, magnifies and distorts*, etc.), Italian by *ornaments* (*it adorns and embellishes, finery [is] all deceit*), and French as a more balanced language (*bold vs. indecency, elegant vs. affectation, harmonious vs. swelling, majestic vs. pride, delicate vs. softness*) without excess, English is only apparently inferior, since it is not only the most copious but also

- (4) Of all the modern *Languages*, the *English* is allowed to be the closest and the most clear [*RCy*: most clear, and fit for philosophical and critical subjects; the chastest], the chastest and the most reserved in its Diction, the most judicious and severe in its Ornaments: Of all others it is the most honest, open and undesigning; it won't bear double-meanings, nor can it palliate or hide Nonsense: bad Sense and good *English* being Things inconsistent [it won't ... inconsistent: not included in *RCy*]. With all its Sublimity it is gay and pleasant on occasion; but its Gaiety is still moderated and restrained by good Sense; it hates excessive Ornaments, and for the greater Simplicity, would almost chuse to go naked: It never dresses more than Decorum and Necessity requires. (*Cy*, and *RCy* with minor typeface and textual differences, s.v. Language)

The ancient and more traditional prestige of the European languages gives way to the more recent communicative potential and effectiveness of the English language. A series of superlatives emphasises its qualities and describes it in absolute terms. Linguistic conciseness, precision and accuracy (*closest, hates excessive ornaments*), perspicuity and plainness (*most clear, greater simplicity*), and, not least, adequacy (*philosophical and critical subjects, only in RCy*) are the sublime qualities (*its Sublimity*) to express and discuss any content in any context. However, many of the qualities retrieved in the passage and attributed to English represent extra-linguistic values and principles, especially the socio-cultural and moral principles of eighteenth-century British polite society: “[t]he more civilized and intellectually sophisticated the culture, the more perfect its language. [...] the status of a nation was measured in part by the merits (or lack thereof) of its language; linguistic inadequacy inevitably betrayed an inferior culture [...] In its quest for empire, England required at the very least a ‘good’ language” (Sklar 1989: 373). The “merits” of English represent ‘sublime’ human qualities and attitudes: some of them are more general (*most judicious and severe, good sense, most honest, open and undesigning, decorum and necessity*), others are usually associated with the virtues of the female sex, especially middle and upper-middle urban society and well-off women in general (*chastest and the most reserved, gay and pleasant, gaiety ... moderated and restrained*). English does not need any embellishment since it already possesses the linguistic potential to express anything: “for the greater Simplicity, would almost chuse to go naked” (*Cy*, and *RCy*, s.v. Language). On the one hand, language descriptions and strictly linguistic observations are not included (cf. Rodríguez-Álvarez

2018: 118-119); on the other hand, the display of those values and attitudes that are the pillars of that particular country or, rather, nation-state, are at the core of the entry. Language is a socio-political institution (Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 12) whose socio-cultural and national propaganda culminates towards the end of Chambers's entry in highly metaphorical terms (cf. Appendix 1, column 3 hyperbole/climax; this section is omitted from *RCy*), which make the ideas that were introduced in the preceding paragraph (examples 3 and 4 above; Appendix 1, columns 1 and 2) more concrete though highly hyperbolic and biased. Table 1 below summarises the major qualities attributed to English and the other European languages (*Cy* and *RCy*). The scheme includes a three-stage pattern: 1-labelling (less marked attitude and evaluation), 2-expansion/crescendo (more qualities and details are added), 3-hyperbole/climax (highly marked and biased attitude). The full text is instead provided in Appendix 1, at the end of the study. The three stages reflect the approach used by the compilers: the opening paragraphs introduce the main characteristics – stereotypes, clichés – attached to peoples (the *Spaniards*, the *Italians*, the *French*, the *English*), and later on in the entry these features are converted into biased language issues. The scheme can be read from left to right (same language), or from top to bottom (comparison between languages):

Table 1. English and the other European Languages (*Cy* and *RCy*)

People and language	1-labelling	2-expansion/crescendo	3-hyperbole/climax
Spaniards	Gravity and Haughtiness of Air	–	–
Spanish	–	Gravity of their Language, Swelling of Words, language magnifies, distorts, exceed[s]	Rivers [...] always swelling, muddy, turbulent, overflowing, haughty Dame, excess and extravagancy
Italians	Softness and Effeminacy	–	–
Italian	–	adorns and embellishes, Ornaments and Embellishments, not real Beauties, Patch and Paint, Finery-Deceit	pleasing Rivulets, a Coquette, fine Airs, shewing her Finery, to be admired

French [people]	Vivacity, brisk and lively	–	–
French [language]	–	simple, bold, elegant and florid, harmonious, majestic, delicate, strong (vs. lowness, indecency, affectation, swelling, pride, softness, roughness)	beautiful Streams, briskly but smoothly and equally, easy Prude, Modesty, Discretion
English [people]	blunt, thoughtful, of few Words	–	–
English [language]	short, concise, sententious	Strength and Majesty, Copiousness, closest and most clear, chastest and the most reserved, most judicious and severe ... Ornaments, most honest, open, and undesigning, no double-meanings, Nonsense, bad Sense, Sublimity, gay and pleasant, moderated and restrained, greater Simplicity, Decorum, Necessity	the Nile, Majesty, Abundance, waters roll rapidly, Depth, never roars, nor overflows without enriching the Soil, Masculine Temperament, of a different Sex [from the others, represented as 'female sex'], Virtues of a Man, Faculties more extensive, Conduct more ingenuous, Views more noble

The descriptions devoted to Spanish, Italian and French are more concise than the more detailed and expanded section on English, but in all of them the same rhetorical strategy is applied: lexical repetition and repetition with variation of the same concepts, accumulation of negative qualities (ex. Spanish and Italian), contrast and balancing between positive vs. negative qualities (French), emphasis on highly positive qualities (English), reproduce the same or similar text and discourse patterns. Two metaphors are effectively used across languages, to make the comparison more easily understandable, that is to say running water and female behaviour vs. male virtues: "If virility characterizes a language at the height of its perfection, a language in decline degenerates into effeminacy" (Sklar 1989: 377). Spanish is represented by *swelling rivers-haughty dame* (excess) and Italian by *pleasing rivulets-coquette* (finery and deceit); French is a more balanced language, something like

beautiful streams-easy prude (i.e. modesty and discretion); whereas the English-Nile (*majesty* and *abundance*) is the ‘male river’, the language is characterised by its *masculine temperament* (*of a different sex, virtues of a man*) and opposed to “the three former, [...] the Daughters [of their common mother, Latin] have very different Genius’s and Inclinations” (*Cy*, s.v. Language; not in *RCy*).

After “Decorum and Necessity requires” (cf. example (4) above and Appendix 1, end of column 2, *Cy* and *RCy*), Rees omits Chambers’s long and highly biased metaphorical paragraph (Appendix 1, column 3), and updates the text with a concise section on *regularity* and *analogy*, two principles which become fundamental in the end-of-the-century debate on language (cf. Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 61; 1990b: 20). The passage, not included in *Cy*, reads as follows: “The English language is derived from so many and such different sources, that, on this account, it is deficient in regularity and analogy. Yet we have this advantage to compensate the defect that what we want in elegance, we gain in copiousness, in which last respect few *languages* will be found superior to our own” (*RCy*, s.v. Language; cf. Rodríguez-Álvarez 2018). The need for regularity, uniformity, and analogy as similarity of functions characterises the end-of-the-century interest in standardisation.³ Rees updates with pivotal contemporary metalinguistic debate the last paragraph of his entry, which comes to a close a few lines later without further relevant details.

2.2 Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768-1771)

As regards *EB*, the entry Language is a very long one, in comparison with the medium length of *EB* entries and *Cy-RCy* Language. It seems to be a long essay of thirty-four quarto columns (*EB*, s.v. Language, pp. 863-880), densely written in small typeface. The entry opens with a general definition of language as the privileged means by which humans communicate “the several sensations and ideas of one man [...] to another” (*EB*, s.v. Language,

³ The interconnected notions of regularity, uniformity, analogy, and the processes of codification and standardisation are extremely complex to be discussed in this study and would require a study on their own. For in-depth reading on these specific topics, it is worth mentioning the following studies, beyond those already cited in the body: Beal (2004), focussing on phonological and morpho-syntactic changes in Late Modern English, and the standardisation process; Curzan (2014) and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2010) and (2020), discussing the standardisation process, the notion of prescriptivism, and the role of usage between past and present. As regards the present investigation, it only focusses on and analyses the relationship between language and national propaganda.

p. 863), and later on the entry discusses the artificial and social nature of language which derives from a “particular compact” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 863) among people, and is “different in different parts of the globe [...] from the different genius of every society [...] unintelligible to every other body of men, but those belonging to the same society where that language was originally invented” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 863). Not only does language, as a human and historical invention, undergo change, but it expands in “those nations which have improved their reasoning faculties, and made some progress in the polite arts” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 864; cf. also *RCy*, “fit for philosophical and critical subjects”, s.v. Language; cf. Sklar 1989: 373). The relationship between language, civilising progress, and nation is overtly recognised and emphasised as an essential feature, and the notion of genius as a remarkable difference – “Natural Complexion of each People and the *Language they speak*” (*Cy* and *RCy*, s.v. Language), “different sources” (*RCy*, s.v. Language) – is promoted in the opening paragraphs. The tight relationship nation ⇌ language ⇌ genius is here established:

- (5) It may be considered as a general rule, that the language of any nation is an exact index of the state of their [i.e. people] minds. [...] by the GENIUS of a language we mean to express *the particular set of ideas which the words of any language, either from their formation or multiplicity, are most naturally apt to excite in the mind of any one who hears it properly uttered*. Thus, although the *English, French, Italian, and Spanish* languages, nearly agree in the same general idiom [i.e. general mode of arranging words into sentences]; yet the particular genius of each is remarkably different: [...] *The English [...] the French [...] the Italian [...] the Spanish [...]*. (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 864; cf. Tables 2 and 3, and Appendices 2 and 3)

The first section of the long entry sets the scene (*EB*, s.v. Language, pp. 865-871), the end-of-the-century perspective on language/s and their historical background and heritage which mark their own particular distinction, or genius. The modern languages, such as English, or French, and “every language of Europe” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 865) can now rival “in *some respect*” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 865) with the admired classical ones. The status of the modern European languages has been changing over time to adapt them to the social values and needs of their users (cf. Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 47 and 61, 1990b: 21; Hickey 2010: 15). *EB* reflects this issue by expanding the notions of genius and differentiation already introduced:

- (6) all languages [...] are the means of conveying the ideas of one man to another; yet as there are an infinite variety of ways in which we might wish to convey these ideas, sometimes by the easy and familiar mode of conversation, and at other times by more solemn addresses to the understanding, by pompous declamation, &c. it may so happen, that the genius of one language may be more properly adapted to the one of these than the other, while another language may excel in the opposite particular. (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 871)

Later on, language is explicitly associated with the idea of usefulness (i.e. *beneficial, effectually*), society, and progress, which also are the essential values of *EB*:⁴

- (7) we must surely consider that language as the most beneficial to society, which most effectually removes these bars that obstruct its progress. (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 872)

The second section of the entry Language, focusses on each of the four main modern languages: Italian, Spanish, French, and English “with a few observations upon the particular nature and genius of those languages which are now chiefly studied or spoken in Europe” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 872). In this case, as in *Cy* and *RCy*, some qualities are attributed to these languages in relation to the people-users and the countries they represent, their past and present status. As it appears in *Cy* and *RCy*, some European languages are somewhat stigmatised in comparison with English, and the English people. The overlap between the genius of the people-users, their society, the emerging nation-state, and the genius of the language is overt (Neumann 2009: 288; Abbott 2010: 109-110). As in Table 1 above, Table 2 below summarises and highlights all these aspects for Italian, Spanish, and French, whereas English is represented and discussed in Table 3 (cf. also Appendices 2 and 3). The languages are chronologically arranged as they appear in the entry, and the information provided by the compilers is redistributed in the three columns (cf. also Appendix 2, for the full text). The descriptions, or representations, devoted to Italian, Spanish, and French are more concise than the long section assigned to the English language. Some

⁴ The very concise preface of *EB* (1768-17771) introduces the notion of utility (or usefulness) as a key principle and reads as follows: “UTILITY ought to be the principal intention of every publication. [...] To diffuse the knowledge of Science, is the professed design of the following work”. (*EB*, Preface, p. v).

of the features attributed to the three European languages reaffirm both the attitude and the lexical choices – or, lexical stereotypes and clichés – already found in *Cy* and *RCy*, but with a less involved tone and emphatic bias:

Table 2. The European Languages – *EB*

People and language	1-labelling	2-expansion/crescendo	3-hyperbole/climax
Italian [people]		inhabitants of Italy = sunk and enervated, luxury, depression of mind, anarchy, effeminate	
Italian [language]	soothing and harmonious	debility, softened and enfeebled, flowing and harmonious but destitute of [...] nerves [i.e. strength and vigour]	excelling in fewer branches of literature, tender tone of elegy
Spanish [people]		military prowess and dignity of mind	
Spanish [language]	grave, sonorous, stately	sonorous and solemn, dignity as the Latin	elegant and courteous for conversation; torpid inactivity in advancing knowledge/improving language
French [people]			sprightly genius-surmount difficulties, gay and loquacious-invented an infinity of words, words/vague and unmeaning compliment-politeness, attention of the fair sex
French [language]	weaker and more flowing	poorest languages of Europe, words run into one another/ indistinctness, incapable of measure and harmony	most generally esteemed, most universally spoken, use of French-never be at a loss

In Table 2, as in *Cy* and *RCy*, Italian is still associated with softness and effeminacy (e.g. *softened*, *effeminate people*), Spanish with gravity, magnificence and solemnity (e.g. *grave*, *stately*, *solemn*, etc.), and French with more balanced

qualities whose weaknesses are compensated by its strengths, such as, for example, *indistinctness* of vowels and/or words vs. *vivacity* and *sprightly genius, excess* and *superficial accomplishments-infinity of words* vs. ‘dignified politeness’, a language so widely *esteemed* and *spoken* in Europe (e.g. *one who uses the French can never be at a loss*).

As regards the English language (cf. Table 3 and Appendix 3), the long section opens by emphasising the straightforward continuum between English and Great Britain (cf. Sklar 1989: 375-376), to conclude with the “majestic gracefulness” of this language at the end of the entry (cf. Sklar 1989: 376). In this section, English gradually becomes the language of overt national propaganda and the expressions used to highlight this function clearly emerge from the three-stage approach used in the entry and summarised below:

Table 3. English and Great Britain, the Nation and the Empire – *EB*

People and language	1-labelling	2-expansion/crescendo	3-hyperbole/climax
English [people]		bold, daring, impetuous, strong passions, absolute freedom and independence, great emotions, intrepid mind, no nation of Europe do the lower class of people speak their language with so much accuracy, mind [...] enlightened by knowledge	– admired and revered by all the world
English [language]	naturally bold, nervous, strongly articulated	greatest degree of excellence + number of defects vs. other languages, strongest [...] distinction from the genius of the people, [it is] bold, daring, abrupt, free from the contagion, primitive simplicity	– more peculiarly circumstanced, language of great and powerful nation-fleets surround the globe vs. less known; – more perfect treatises on every art and science vs. other language[s]; – superior powers for every purpose, models of perfections vs. neglected, despised, vilified by the people who use it;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – trodden under foot, many wounds vs. holds up its head, comeliness and vigour-its distinction; – healthy oak, rich and fertile soil, sprung up with vigour, vigorous/additional vigour/flourish, amazing magnitude and perfection, majestic gracefulness [How would the astonished world behold, with reverential awe, the majestic gracefulness of that object which they so lately despised!]
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In Table 3, the stunning characteristics attributed to the English language and people are strictly interwoven, and the text highly cohesive. The people are *bold, daring, and impetuous*, as well as passionate, free, and independent (*passions, freedom, independence*), and their language can only mirror and assume their *genius*, qualities and values (*bold, daring, abrupt*), and display its “primitive simplicity”, its original *free-from-the-contagion* essence. This is the reason why even the illiterate, “the lower class of people”, would speak it with *accuracy* (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 877-878). The essence of the English language is a mark of *excellence, vigour, and superior powers*, a mark of distinction corroborated by the many works and treatises (*models of perfection, in almost every particular; EB*, s.v. Language, p. 879) produced over time. The pairs people-genius, language-knowledge, language-nation represent the main semantic fields that overlap and unfold the same or similar concepts and lexical sets (word repetition and repetition with variation). English not only highlights and epitomises the ‘essence’ of the emerging and consolidating nation-state and its overt propaganda, but also the expansion of the empire in the expression “a great and powerful nation, whose fleets surround the globe” (*EB*, s.v. Language, p. 879), that is to say the British Isles and the British dominions around the world. In a few decades, and not only s.v. Language, *EB* “came to be regarded as an emblem of the British Empire: in the early nineteenth-century it was spoken of as the ‘national Encyclopaedia’ and seen as a carrier of British values to the colonies” (Yeo 2001: 1) since it embodied and supported a promotional and resolute national propaganda campaign.

3. Final remarks

This study examined the connection between the English language and eighteenth-century national propaganda s.v. Language in three major dictionaries of arts and sciences: Chamber's *Cyclopaedia* (1728), *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1771), and Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1778-1788). The investigation was focussed on sixty years during which the metalinguistic and linguistic debate deeply changed the role and function of English: the need to identify, select, and codify a prestigious variety able to express the identity of an emerging nation-state and its expanding British Empire became pivotal. In other words, especially between 1725 and 1775 a variety able to express the ongoing civil, cultural, national, and intellectual transformation in the contemporary British society was established (cf. Del Lungo Camiciotti 1990a: 7).

British dictionaries of arts and sciences and the three entries Language examined refer to English as an emerging social entity (Del Lungo Camiciotti (1990a: 10-11) and national paradigm: the debate on and around the English language laid the background for the ideological rhetoric of nationalism or "the mirror of the state of the nation" (Mugglestone 2003: 24). The notion of genius is central in the discussion carried on s.v. Language: it expresses the *natural complexion* (cf. ex. 2) of each people and the language they use (cf. Abbott 2010). The traditional European languages, once prestigious and admired ones, are stigmatised and are constantly associated with negative qualities and decline, particularly Italian and Spanish. Italian displays *softness, effeminacy, embellishments and ornaments, finery and deceit* (see Table 1, Appendix 1); Spanish is haughty and grave, and with its emphasis *magnifies and distorts* reality (cf. Table 1, Appendix 1); the French language is more balanced, and still admired, but it always runs *briskly* (cf. Table 1, Appendix 1). Only English has those qualities which reflect the highly positive values of British contemporary civil society, and is characterised by *strength and majesty, copiousness, simplicity, decorum, necessity, and the virtues of a man*. Only English can definitely embody the emerging prestige of the gentlemanlike nation-state (cf. Sklar 1989; Neumann 2009).

The entry Language in *EB* becomes a long essay. The first half of it focusses on the general linguistic features of the most known European languages, the second half is completely devoted to the role and function of each of them. The section devoted to the European languages other than English is concise, and the stereotypical features of Italian, Spanish, and French trace back to what was already included in *Cy*, and later on partially repeated in *RCy*. Italian is *softened and enfeebled*, Spanish is *sonorous and solemn*, in French *words run into one another*, but is still "more generally

esteemed" (cf. Table 2, Appendix 2). In the contemporary world which expands beyond Europe and the British Isles, English is the only language to have achieved the "greatest degree of excellence" (cf. Table 3, Appendix 3). The genius of English (*bold, daring, abrupt, nervous, free, strongly articulated, passionate and simple*; cf. Table 3, Appendix 3) perfectly overlaps with the genius of its people. Moreover, language, genius, and the nation are still and inextricably interwoven, but the nation-state is now represented by a "more peculiarly circumstanced language" which also displays its *powers and superiority for every purpose*, in "more perfect treatises on every art and science" (cf. Table 3, Appendix 3). The nation-state is not only powerfully represented by its geographical expansion, but by the role that English assumes in producing and disseminating knowledge, understood as heritage and new contemporary knowledges, scientific progress, and technological discoveries (arts and sciences, cf. Table 3, Appendix 3).

In conclusion, the period under scrutiny highlights the pivotal function which the English language assumes in defining and institutionalising the nation-state, and the expansion of the British Empire. The rhetoric of national and linguistic identity, and the promotion of English by associating social values (e.g. *decorum, good sense, honest, undesigning*, etc., cf. Table 1, 3, Appendix 1, 3) with language features (e.g. *copiousness, simplicity, accuracy*, etc., cf. Table 1, 3, Appendix 1, 3) is clearly documented in the national propaganda discourse emerging from eighteenth-century dictionaries of arts and sciences.

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APPENDICES

Appendices 1, 2, 3 below summarise and schematise the three stages in which the four major European languages are defined and described, from labelling (less marked) to hyperbole/climax (highly marked). Appendices 1, 2, 3 can be read from top to bottom (comparison between languages), or from left to right (observations on the same language). The extracts do not reproduce the same order in which they are found in the original entries, whereas the three stages reflect the approach used by the compilers.

APPENDIX 1

English and the other European languages –
Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* and Rees's *Cyclopaedia*

Starting point: s.v. Language	There is found a constant Resemblance between the Genius or Natural Complexion of each People and the <i>Language</i> they speak [...] (Cy and RCy)		
Stages:	1 (first) labelling (Cy and RCy)	2 expansion/crescendo (Cy and RCy, with minor differences)	3 hyperbole/climax (not included/ completely omitted in RCy)
Spanish the Spaniards	The <i>Language</i> of the <i>Spaniards</i> is full of that Gravity and Haughtiness of Air which makes	The <i>Spaniards</i> seem to place the Nobleness and Gravity of their Language,	The <i>Spanish</i> resembles those Rivers whose Waters are always swelling, and always muddy

	Character of the People.	in the Number of the distinguishing Syllables, and the Swelling of Words; and speak less to make themselves understood, than to make themselves admired [...] their language cannot paint a Thought to the Life; it always magnifies it, frequently distorts it; and does nothing if it do not exceed Nature.	and turbulent; that never keep long within the Channel, but are ever overflowing, and their Overflowings ever noisy and precipitate. The <i>Italian</i> [...] The <i>Spanish</i> , a hughty Dame, that piques herself on her Quality, and loves Excess and Extravagancy in every thing. The <i>Italian</i> [...]
Italian the Italians	[...] the <i>Italians</i> , are sunk into Softness and Effeminacy, which is as visible in their <i>Language</i> as their Manners.	The <i>Italian</i> Tongue does not swell up Things to that Degree [as the <i>Spaniards</i>], but it adorns and embellishes them more; yet these Ornaments and Embellishments are not real Beauties. The <i>Italian</i> Expressions, thus rich and brilliant, are like those Faces cover'd with Patch and Paint, which make a fine Show; but that Finery, all Deceit.	The <i>Italian</i> is like those pleasing Rivulets that purl agreeably among the Stones, and glide in Meanders through Meadows full of Flowers. The <i>French</i> [...] The <i>Italian</i> a Coquette, full of fine Airs; always appearing dress'd, and taking all Occasions of shewing her Finery: to be admired, being all she aims at. The <i>French</i> , [...]
French the French	The <i>French</i> , who have a World of Vivacity, have a <i>Language</i> that runs extremely brisk and lively.	The <i>French Language</i> [...] is simple without Lowness, bold without Indecency, elegant and florid without	The <i>French</i> resembles one of those beautiful Streams that always run briskly, but at the same time smoothly

		Affectation, harmonious without Swelling, majestic without Pride, delicate without Softness, and strong without Roughness. [more balanced description in comparison with Spanish and Italian]	and equally; without much Noise or much Depth. The <i>English</i> [...] The <i>French</i> , an easy Prude, that has her Share of Modesty and Discretion, but on occasion can lay them both aside. The <i>English</i> [...]
English the English	And the <i>English</i> , who are naturally blunt, thoughtful, and of few Words, have a <i>Language</i> exceedingly short, concise, and sententious.	As to the Points of Strength and Majesty, the <i>French</i> must give Way to the <i>English</i> , which in these, as well as in Copiousness, exceeds most of the living <i>Languages</i> ; as far as it comes behind some of them in Smoothness and Delicacy. Of all the modern <i>Languages</i> , the <i>English</i> is allowed to be the closest and the most clear [RCy: most clear, and fit for philosophical and critical subjects; the chastest], the chastest and the most reserved in its Diction, the most judicious and severe in its Ornaments: Of all others it is the most honest, open and undesigning; it won't bear double-meanings, nor can it palliate or hide	The <i>English</i> like the Nile, preserves a Majesty even in its Abundance; its Waters roll rapidly, notwithstanding their Depth; it never roars but when its Banks are so narrow, nor overflows without enriching the Soil. The <i>Latin</i> is the common Mother of the three former, but the Daughters have very different Genius's and Inclinations. The <i>Spanish</i> [...] The <i>Italian</i> [...] The <i>French</i> [...] The <i>English</i> is of a more Masculine Temperament. 'Tis not only of a different Family from the others, but appears of a different Sex too: Its Virtues are those of a Man; indeed 'tis the Product of

	<p>Nonsense: bad Sense and good <i>English</i> being Things inconsistent [it won't ... inconsistent; not included in <i>RCy</i>]. With all its Sublimity it is gay and pleasant on occasion; but its Gaiety is still moderated and restrained by good Sense; it hates excessive Ornaments, and for the greater Simplicity, would almost chuse to go naked: It never dresses more than Decorum and Necessity requires.</p>	<p>a colder Climate and rougher People, and its Features may be somewhat coarser than those of its Neighbours; but its Faculties are more extensive, its Conduct more ingenuous, and its Views more noble. [this section is omitted from <i>RCy</i>]</p>
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APPENDIX 2

The European Languages – *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Starting point: s.v. Language p. 864	It may be considered as a general rule, that the language of any nation is an exact index of the state of their minds [i.e. people]. [...] by the GENIUS of a language we mean to express <i>the particular set of ideas which the words of any language, either from their formation or multiplicity, are most naturally apt to excite in the mind of any one who hears it properly uttered.</i> Thus, although the <i>English, French, Italian, and Spanish</i> languages, nearly agree in the same general idiom [i.e. general mode of arranging words into sentences]; yet the particular genius of each is remarkably different: [...] (cf. below, 1 labelling) <i>The English [...] the French [...] the Italian [...] the Spanish [...].</i>		
Stages:	1 (first) labelling	2 expansion/crescendo	3 hyperbole/climax
Italian the Italian	the <i>Italian</i> more soothing and harmonious (p. 864)	[...] as the natural inhabitants of Italy, before the last invasion of the	Hence, it happens that this language is fitted for excelling in fewer branches

		<p>barbarians, were sunk and enervated by luxury and that depression of mind and genius which anarchy always produces [...] their language partook of the same debility as their body. [...] a language [...] softened and enfeebled by every device which an effeminate people could invent. [...] Thus the Italian language is formed flowing and harmonious, but destitute of those nerves which constitute the strength and vigour of a language. [...]. (p. 875)</p>	<p>of literature than almost any other [...]. (p. 875)</p> <p>The only species of poetry in which the Italian language can claim a superior excellence, is the tender tone of elegy [...]. (p. 876)</p>
<p>Spanish the Spaniards</p>	<p>the <i>Spanish</i> more grave, sonorous and stately (p. 864)</p>	<p>as the Spaniards have been always remarkable for their military prowess and dignity of mind, their language is naturally adapted to express ideas of that kind. Sonorous and solemn, it admits nearly of as much dignity as the Latin. (p. 876)</p>	<p>For conversation it is the most elegant and courteous language in Europe. [...] all the polite arts have been neglected: so that, while other European nation [sic] have been advancing in knowledge, and improving their language, they have remained in a state of torpid inactivity [...]. (p. 876)</p>

<p>French the French</p>	<p>the <i>French</i> is weaker, and more flowing (p. 864)</p>	<p>it will perhaps, by some, be thought an unpardonable insult, if we do not allow the French the preference of all modern languages in many respects. [...] to be obliged to rank it among the poorest languages of Europe [...] for in that language the vowels are so much curtailed in the pronunciation, and the words run into one another in such a manner, as of necessity to produce an indistinctness which renders it incapable of measure or harmony. (p. 876)</p>	<p>[...] although it can neither equal the dignity or genuine politeness of the Spanish, the nervous boldness of the English, nor the melting softness of the Italian; – although it is destitute of poetic harmony, and so much cramped in sound as to be absolutely unfit for almost every species of musical composition; – yet the sprightly genius of that volatile people has been able to surmount all these difficulties, and render it the language most generally esteemed, and most universally spoken, of any in Europe: for these people, naturally gay and loquacious, and fond of excess of those superficial accomplishments which engage the attention of the fair sex, have invented such an infinity of words capable of expressing vague and unmeaning compliment, now</p>
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		dignified by the name of <i>politeness</i> , that, in this strain, one who uses the French can never be at a loss (p. 877)
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APPENDIX 3

English and Great Britain, the Nation and the Empire – *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Starting point: s.v. Language p. 864	It may be considered as a general rule, that the language of any nation is an exact index of the state of their minds [i.e. people]. [...] by the GENIUS of a language we mean to express <i>the particular set of ideas which the words of any language, either from their formation or multiplicity, are most naturally apt to excite in the mind of any one who hears it properly uttered</i> . Thus, although the <i>English, French, Italian, and Spanish</i> languages, nearly agree in the same general idiom [i.e. general mode of arranging words into sentences]; yet the particular genius of each is remarkably different: [...] (cf. below, 1 labelling) <i>The English [...]</i> <i>the French [...]</i> <i>the Italian [...]</i> <i>the Spanish [...]</i> .		
Stages:	1 (first) labelling	2 expansion/crescendo	3 hyperbole/climax
English the English	The <i>English</i> is naturally bold nervous, and strongly articulated (p. 864)	The English is perhaps possessed of a greater degree of excellence, blended with a greater number of defects, than any of the languages that we have hitherto mentioned. As the people of Great Britain are a bold, daring, and impetuous race of men; subject to strong passions, and, from the absolute	Such are the principal outlines of the language of Great Britain, such are its beauties, and such its most capital defects; a language more peculiarly circumstanced than any that has ever yet appeared. It is the language of a great and powerful nation, whose fleets surround the globe, and whose merchants are in

freedom and independence which reigns among all ranks of people throughout this happy isle, little solicitous about controuling these passions; our language takes its strongest characteristic distinction from the genius of the people; and being bold, daring, and abrupt, is admirably well adapted to express those great emotions which spring up in an intrepid mind at the prospect of interesting events. (p. 877)

[...] we have preserved ourselves free from the contagion, and still retain the primitive simplicity of our language [...] we may boast, that in no nation of Europe do the lower class of people speak their language with so much accuracy, or have their mind so much enlightened by knowledge, as those of great Britain. (p. 878)

every port; a people admired, or revered by all the world; and yet it is less known in every foreign country, than any other language in Europe. In it are written more perfect treatises on every art and science, than are to be found in any other language; yet it is less sought after or esteemed by the literati in any part of the globe, than almost any of these. Its superior powers for every purpose of language are sufficiently obvious from the models of perfection, in almost every particular, which can be produced in it; yet it is neglected, despised, and vilified by the people who use it [...]. Neglected and despised, it has been trodden under foot as a thing altogether unworthy of cultivation or attention. Yet in spite of all these inconveniencies, in spite of the many wounds it has thus received, it still holds up its head,

and preserves evident marks of that comeliness and vigour which are its characteristic distinction. Like a healthy oak planted in a rich and fertile soil, it has sprung up with vigour [...]. Should this plant, so sound and vigorous, be now cleared from those weeds [...] who can tell with what additional vigour it would flourish, or what amazing magnitude and perfection it might at last attain! How would the astonished world behold, with reverential awe, the majestic gracefulness of that object which they so lately despised! (pp. 879-880)

Address: ELISABETTA LONATI, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Via Galileo Ferraris 116, 13100, Vercelli, Italy.

elisabetta.lonati@uniupo.it

ORCID code: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1350-6735>