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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of the World History Journal, a print and electronic journal aiming at bringing an inter-relative view of the development of human history.

At Free World Publishing, we believe that History is not a self-contained discipline, limited to dates and names or places. We believe in fact that human activities inter-relate in all types of activities and that this influences bring about inter-actions and consequences that result in what we term history.

For this reason, the World History Journal is an instrument that accepts as much historic articles in the « traditional » sense (description of places, actions, individuals and dates) as that of other types of history, such as the development of languages, linguistics, letters, the arts, the economy, anthropology, palaeontology, etc. Therefore, if you have an article on the historical perspective and development of any subject, we always welcome submissions of this type.

History is the development of the past, explaining our attainments today. It is an inter-relating chain of ideas, events, actions and individuals that have driven us to who and what we are today. This key to the past is a powerful instrument to comprehending future events and should therefore benefit from analysis and perception.

We therefore encourage you to submit articles, notes, book review or comments on any subject of historical perspective, whether regional, local or international, in order to share this common understanding of our shared past and the drive to our future.

We also encourage you to think outside the box and project ideas and hypothesis for discussion. In this issue, an article on languages and prediction of successes of civilization will project such an idea. If you have similar thoughts, this is the place to project them.

Thank you for joining our publication and let us begin comprehending through research what we are and how we got here !

Sincerely,

Louis-Philippe F. Rouillard

Editor-in-Chief, Free World Publishing Inc.

**COULD LANGUAGES BE PREDICTORS OF
CIVILIZATIONS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS ?**

BY LOUIS-PHILIPPE F. ROUILLARD

There are many theories as to the origins and the developments of languages. None are without controversies. Some argue of multi-polar development of language, *ergo* defining respective developments away from one another, while others argue for one common origin followed by multiple divisions throughout the millenniums.

Perhaps one of the most interesting theories is that by which language were created in one place, but spread and divided (relatively) rapidly (since we are currently speaking in thousands of years), and might have been joined in the Fertile Crescent in a common form to re-divide thereafter and propagate throughout the world.

Regardless of which theory might be the most sensible and the most acceptable, the simple fact is that while the thesis of a common root is very hotly contested, some genetic and linguistic facts tend to support it – if weakly.

The answer to this question would have us know whether there is a common linguistic root to all language and, if so, would support the very simple thesis that the current branch of Homo Sapiens Sapiens is indeed all of the same family and therefore the idea of race subdivisions does not hold anymore. But this debate is to be left to the specialists.

More importantly for our current understanding of the world and factual results in contemporary life, is the question of result of these subdivisions. In other words, to know, as languages sub-divided and evolved, whether some develop in such a way as to provide a distinctive advantage in some field of endeavours.

This might seem at the same time ridiculous and biased : one could argue that it is much more the cultural element that will define such an advantage over the relatively simple and isolated matter of language.

I submit here as a hypothesis that the link between language, productivity and accomplishment is indeed related to culture, but more importantly that it has a direct impact of its own as a predictor of productivity and accomplishment.

I will do so with the idea of comparing scientific, legal, military and literary accomplishments and approach through English, French, German and Hungarian. This will in no way give an answer to the question I raise here, but it will throw a debate forward that I believe is worth pursuing in order to predict accomplishments.

The Age of Empire

Throughout Man's history, the aim of all societies has been to improve its situation and taking advantages of its strengths while exploiting the weaknesses of its neighbour in order to do so. This has been done through countless means, from pre-arrange marriages to pure and simple wars of annihilations.

In order to do so, interpreters were often needed and cross-cultural emissaries often were the norm, if only on a temporary basis.

But as contacts evolved between cultures and periods of peace increase, so did commerce and the development of the means to conduct it. Building pyramids was indeed complicated, but was possible through the supervision of one man other whose absolute authority the decision process could convey in clear and simple terms the tasks to accomplish.

By comparison, the invention of the musket, the wind mill, the sewing machine or the automobile required ever further inventions of

terminologies and manners of explaining how to build and use these devices.

And it is perhaps there that languages have – or not – advantages one over the other. And as our world evolves ever more so complex, perhaps there is a need to analyse whether language has indeed been a determining factor of accomplishment and whether it can be a predictor of future accomplishments.

Let us take a military example. Throughout the Middle Ages, all kingdoms adopted forms of knights, chariots, archers and infantry. The balance of these forces was adapted in function of the ground of the country expected to defend. For example, countries with great plains often opted for long bows, due to the distance of visibility to the enemy (desert kingdoms, Hungarian and Mongol populations), while enclosed spaces put some emphasis on heavily armoured knights (English, German and French Kingdoms). Countries with mountains and forests balanced these forces with light infantry (mainly sword bearing footmen from the peasantry), while countries with wide open spaces put more emphasis on the cavalry.

All and any of these mixes was function of an environment and build a cultural “warrior tradition”. For example, Sparta was recognised for its *hoplites*, the Swiss for its lancers, the French for its heavy knights, the English for their long bows, the Hungarians for their cavalry, etc. But once outside the environment that prompted these warrior traditions, only those who adapted to the new surroundings survived. And some did longer and better than others.

But as warfare became ever more complex, bringing new type of weaponry, longer range of action to reach one’s enemy and mass armies, there seem to have appeared a beneficial aspect to a way of perceiving the military problem in logical terms. And these, in turn, seem to be amply influence by the language.

To this, French appears to have been well suited to the mathematical approach to warfare that dominated the earlier part of the 19th century. The Napoleonian successes are certainly the product of a cultural revolution in France and the logical development of the Cartesian approach, but nonetheless French is a language where one word has usually a precise meaning while another will have a totally different one.

While this might appear rather a large statement, it does nonetheless capture the fact that the French language, as it became more and more unified in the 18th and 19th century, does have a precision to it that favoured directives being giving in clear terms through an authoritarian approach. A dictator such as Napoleon could therefore more easily issue orders as statements and have the letter of these statements followed on and off the battlefield as the language itself became a clear instrument of conveyance of meaning.

But this was true where situations and actions were to be explained in complete phrases. Theory is then brought to bear through complex explanations and using time as a delaying factor in bringing that explanation to be understood fully.

In the same manner, Hungarians of the same period were renowned for their cavalry, especially of the *Hussar* kind. Hungarian, while not part of the Indo-European branch, also has an approach similar to French whereby concepts are explained through full phrases.

Both languages did well for much of the 19th century on the battlefield as the tempo of operations was limited to existing physical conditions; i.e. cavalry and infantry could only move so fast in a day and that speed permitted to predict in large part actions to be taken by belligerents.

But as the rhythm of operations increased in the second part of the 19th century, we can see a marked decreasing of the performance of these countries at war, losing more and more battles or wars.

Compare that with the English and German approach. The English language is one of direct lineage from the Germanic branch of Indo-European languages. English has a certain fluidity where a word may mean many things depending on the context in which it is used. For example, the verb “to charge”. You can charge the enemy or charge the account. The action is absolutely unrelated to one another. A charge in military terms is meant as a direct, rapid and brutal attack, while in economic term, it means to add to your credit debit.

In French, the word charge (“la charge”) is viewed also as a direct, brutal and rapid attack (“l’infanterie chargea”, “la charge de la cavalerie légère”), but this is differentiated from adding a charge to an account (“porter au crédit”). The same is true in Hungarian (tamádas).

Therefore, when the relation to context is well known, English bring a flexibility to the expression of an action to be taken that is not as apparent in French or Hungarian.

The result of this is a difference of perception of the surrounding world and its expression in concepts. English as multiple senses for the same words and explain often explain concepts in a word or in some. For example, the English psyche will speak of “war of attrition”. But the French will say “guerre d’attrition à outrance”.

While the English mind explains briefly that the war discussed is one where attrition of the ranks will decide its outcome, thereby implicating large numbers of casualties, the French feel the need to define this attrition as one where the usual attrition expected from war is surpassed and is “overdone” to a point where it becomes outrageous.

Compare this with German conceptions of war such as kesselschlacht, swerpunkt, blitzkrieg, where a whole concept of the double envelopment, concentration of forces and combinaison of speed, concentration of firepower and bypassing of points of resistance are respectively explain and one can see a perception that goes from the

long definitions to a simple expression explaining a large and complex theory.

Does this have an effect ? Yes. It has the effect of rendering the comprehension more rapidly accessible and gives a wider discretion of use of the term. This, in turn, permits to borrow and improve an idea. It permits, in fact, people of little familiarity to a concept to rapidly grasp its guidelines and to act on their own cognisance.

While precise languages are very effective for a “top-down”, bureaucratic approach to leadership, such as French and Hungarian, fluid languages permit a more equilibrated approach where both “top-down” and “from the grass-roots” can evolve, fluctuate, meet and adapt to new circumstances.

Here, the military example is used as it is common knowledge, but I submit that this is true in all fields of life. And perhaps the easiest approach to demonstrate this would be through the Hungarian Nobel prize laureates.

The Hungarian Nobel Prize Example

There are 13 Hungarian Nobel prize laureates as follows:

Philipp Eduard Anton von Lenard (1862-1947): 1905 (Physics). Born in Bratislava (then part of Hungary); became Professor of Physics at Heidelberg University (Germany); awarded the prize for his work on cathode rays.

Robert Bárány (1876-1936): 1914 (Medicine). Born in Vienna; studied in Vienna and at various German universities, then conducted his research first in Vienna and later mainly in Sweden; awarded the prize for his work on the balancing apparatus in the inner ear.

Richard Adolf Zsigmondy (1865-1929): 1925 (Chemistry). Born in Vienna; studied in Germany; professor at Göttingen University from 1907; awarded the prize for his work as a pioneer of colloid chemistry.

Albert von Szent-György Nagrapolt (1893-1986): 1937 (Medicine). Born in Budapest; professor at Szeged and Budapest Universities; emigrated to America and was director of the Institute of Muscle Research in Massachusetts from 1947 to 1975, then scientific director of the National Foundation for Cancer Research, awarded the prize for his work in isolating Vitamin C.

George de Hevesy (1885-1966): 1943 (Chemistry). Born in Budapest; worked with Niels Bohr, became professor at Freiburg University, then at Stockholm University after moving from Denmark to Sweden in 1940; awarded the prize for his work on isotopes; founder of nuclear medicine.

Georg von Békésy (1899-1972): 1961 (Medicine). Born in Budapest; studied the human; did research in Sweden from 1945 and then moved to the United States in 1949; awarded the prize for his work on aural physiology conducted in Hungary.

Eugene P. Wigner (1902-95): 1963 (Physics). Born in Budapest, educated partly in Berlin; professor of mathematical physics at Princeton University from 1938 to 1971; awarded the prize for his work in nuclear physics.

Dennis Gabor (1900-79): 1971 (Physics). Born in Budapest; studied partly in Berlin; moved to Britain in 1930s and joined staff of Imperial College, London, in 1948, becoming professor of applied electron physics in 1958; famous as the inventor of holography, which won him the prize.

John C. Polanyi (b. 1929): 1986 (Chemistry). Born in Berlin;

educated in England and later moved to Canada; awarded the prize for his contribution to reaction dynamics.

Elie Wiesel (b.1928): 1986 (Peace). Born in Budapest, Holocaust survivor; moved to Paris in 1945, becoming a well-known writer in French; moved to the United States in the 1960s; awarded the prize for his intellectual leadership in times of violence, oppression and racism.

George A. Olah (b. 1927): 1994 (Chemistry). Born and educated in Budapest; after twelve years of research in Hungary, was enabled to work with his colleagues in a specially founded hydrocarbons chemical research institute in Los Angeles; awarded prize for his contribution to carbocation chemistry.

John C. Harsanyi (1920-2000): 1994 (Economic Sciences). Born and studied in Budapest; escaped to Austria in 1950, then moved to the United States in 1957; professor at Berkeley University in California from 1964 to 1990; won the prize for his work on game theory.

Imre Kertész (1929-): 2002 (Literature). Born in Budapest, deported to Buchenwald in 1944, he spent his much of his career translating the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Elias Canetti, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Joseph Roth, Arthur Schnitzler, Tankred Dorst.

As this short summation of their life and career projects clearly, 6 of these laureates either worked or studied in Germany voluntarily for part or much of their lives and 1 did so involuntarily but then worked mainly in German. Another was also deported to Germany, but did not continue apparent links with the German language. This represents 7 out of 13, or a percentage of 53,8% having a direct Germanic language influence on their work and approaches.

Of the whole of the laureates, 6 (again 46,2%) have also worked in Anglo-Saxon countries prior to receiving their prizes; of these, 4 (67%

of these six and 30,7% of the overall number of laureates) had links with the German language either through birth, studies or work and immigration.

What can be gathered from this is that 6 had direct links with the German language as working vehicle for the transfer of ideas and 4 with the English language – although this does not represent the true scope of crossing of either language barriers from English to German and back at least 2 of those with Germanic background have also substantial exposure to English and 4 of the Anglo-Saxon background have extensive exposure to German.

In fact, all these laureates actually were born, educated or worked in one extensive capacity or another in either German (up to 7 out of 13, 53,8%) and/or English (up to 46,2%). None has been isolated in Hungarian and the other intervening languages in this equation (Danish, Swedish and French) do not bear much on the equation, with the exception of French by which the laureate for the 1986 Peace Prize (Elie Wiesel) wrote extensively in French.

However, even in this later case it is interesting to note that the Nobel Peace Prize goes much more toward a ‘position’ and a ‘commitment’ than any other prize and that humanities are subject that must be explained at length through comparative analysis and reasoning, as opposed to most other disciplines, where empirical process and results can be and are expected.

Conclusive example ? No.

First, the list presented here – the Nobel Prizes – is one of limited applicability so much the standard is elevated. Furthermore, it is such a restrictive analysis as one would need to go through all the Nobel Prizes from their inception to try and discern a pattern. But even then, the sampling would be too small to truly bring a clear answer.

Furthermore, there is here a “chicken or the egg” factor to take into account here, as to know whether these laureates performed so well because of their exposure and work in the Germanic languages (including German and English, but also Danish and Swedish), or simply because they already had the knowledge and talent prior to this exposure and it is the financial and material means they have found in the places where they immigrated or worked that actually tipped the balance in their favour.

Even more importantly, nothing tells us that they did not do all their research in Hungarian and translated them in a Germanic language (an odd proposition, but one that must be taken into account nonetheless).

It must therefore be stated that the military example above suffers from historical perspective and is not backed by any empirical studies, and that the Hungarian Nobel Prizes laureates’ examples do not lead to any serious conclusions. They cannot be said by any means to be definitive and conclusive examples.

Conclusions

Still, while the examples presented here are in no manner indicative of any truism, they do nonetheless present a rare approach into thinking critically about advantages on the world scene and force civilisations in general.

By this, I first will retake the hypothesis of a clash of civilization as presented by Huntington¹. Like him, I support the idea that civilizations – as understood as fluid concept of population groupings – are always in competition and that in this competition some advantages come from cultural factors.

¹ Huntington, Samuel P., « The Clash of Civilizations? », (1993) 72(3) Foreign Affairs 22-49.

But I will go one step further in saying that a critical element of these cultural factors is, above many others, the language factor.

I propose that there are languages that have an approach to structuring a way of thinking that promotes innovative and developmental approaches that other do not as well.

In fact, it appears that the capacity for a language to resume and compress complex meaning in simple terms helps the understanding, promotes its spread and further helps to develop them. The Germanic languages may – perhaps – be an example of such languages and may – in part – explain why as the world becomes more complex in technology, Germanic languages seem to have helped develop an edge for some civilizations (Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian) over others (Romane, such as the French, Spanish and Italian civilizations).

Still, this is in no way whatsoever made to represent an irreproachable truth; it is solely a working hypothesis and it needs to be confronted to empirical studies and to other cultures (the Japanese and Chinese examples would come readily to mind), as well as taking into account historical factors affecting this hypothesis (and this hypothesis affecting the historical development of these cultures and civilizations).

Perhaps this hypothesis will be infirmed from a first challenge. But somehow, I think there might be a grain of truth to the overall idea of a direct contribution or obstacle from language as a predictor of success for civilizations. The more complex a language, the best suited it seems to the explaining of complicated subjects (human behaviour) and the less it seems to become to practical applications (so-called ‘hard’ sciences).

It now seems necessary to challenge this new idea that I project forward.

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Sincèrement,

Louis-Philippe F. Rouillard
Éditeur-chef, Free World Publishing Inc.

BOOK REVIEW : MENZIES, GAVIN, 1421 : THE YEAR CHINA DISCOVERED THE WORLD, LONDON, BANTAM, 2003, 650P.

BY TIMOTHY ROBBINS

Our historical knowledge is the result of our education. We are taught that Columbus discovered the new world in 1492 and we promptly pass to the winning of the Second World War and the ‘victory’ of the Cold War.

1421 shatters our educational universe. Through its subtitle, Gavin Menzies gives us the fruits of his research, insight and knowledge and brings an alternative forward : that China had in fact known of much more of the world than the European of the times did and that it established a contact with much of the world much sooner than the nations of Europe.

The revelation of this book in that sense is not earth-shattering as it does not change the fact that Europeans did establish a permanent presence in the America and Australia, while China did not, but it is in the sense that it brings totally new perspective to our understanding of the regions subsequently explored by Europeans.

Indeed, perhaps the most interesting aspects of this book is the hypothesis of plant and faunas colonization of the America – in particular South America – by the importation of chicken and vegetable of Asian origins. Even the genetics of Amerindian tribes in North America and of aboriginals in Australia present a vastly more complicated picture of the world than does our classic understanding of history.

Still, the most amazing feat of this book is as much the effort of imagination of the author to think, plan and follow the course of an enormous expedition that spanned the five oceans and all the seas.

His methodology in reconstructing the whole voyage from traces of its existence in Columbus' own voyage to its origins in planning in China and its subsequent cover-up is both esoteric and refreshing.

While he pushes the envelope of the proven and that of the imaginable, he nonetheless takes an approach so thorough and so plausible that the beneficence of the doubt goes entirely to him for the length of the reading and you emerge fairly convinced of his hypothesis. Not that the voyage took place : most historical facts bear that, but of their long-term impact on societies far from China.

Regardless of the way one views the full ramifications Menzies attributes to this voyage and whether the course it took and its existence was known to Columbus makes rather little difference to one simple fact: the book is extremely well written, concise and convincing. If only for the debate of its plausibility, it is definitely worth the careful reading of every word.

**BOOK REVIEW : DIAMOND, JARED, COLLAPSE: HOW
SOCIETY CHOOSE TO FAIL OR SUCCEED, NEW YORK,
VIKING, 2005, 575P.**

BY DIANA CARTRIGHT

Jared Diamond knows how to write on compelling subject of contemporary interest. His Pulitzer-winning book *Guns, Germs and Steel* attest to his skills as an author, and his wit and insight as made him a much favoured author throughout the world.

His latest book now turns toward the question of the environment and how societies' choices in adapting to their environment and protecting it – or not – brings them much closer to either success or failure as societies. In that, he writes a compelling book and clearly establish why and how societies do so through some selected historical cases ranging from one of his favourite (Easter Island) to one of much mystery (the Mayas) with intervals of the Amerindian societies and the Vikings.

He compare this with a benchmark of contemporary Montana. And in his comparison he truly demonstrates a direct and very cruel link between lack of understanding, respect and adaptation to the environment and the collapse of societies. He contrasts this with successful strategies of other societies, such as that of Iceland, but the point is indeed made that these sound choices are usually done after the situation has reach such an abominable level that the whole of society is collapsing already.

Once more, Diamond's deductive approach is at the same time eccentric and scientific. His reasoning is once more amazing. The whole of his approach is indubitably convincing. And yet...

Somehow, the book feels somewhat too repetitive by places and this is truly damaging. A lesser known author might see the book abandoned as it become tediously arduous.

The case is made again and again of the same argument and one cannot help but feel a desire to get to the more enlightening parts. And this may very well be the problem with the whole ecological argument : keeping the balance between the interest of the population and the facts to support the case.

Jared Diamond does an extraordinary work in proving his point and in supporting an environmentally sound approach without demonising corporations – and indeed praising those that do deserve a full praise of their conservationist efforts. In this, one cannot reproach him a bias or an attempt to get an environmental message across without antagonizing the reader. The environment lobbies should take good note of his approach.

In all, a hundred pages less of repetition would have made the book perhaps even more readable and the point driven more explicitly.

Still, there is no denying the genius of approach, comparison and synthesis that is used in this book and if one can support the tedious, he will find gems in this book in the same tradition as in his previous one.