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## The Word as a Sword: Linguistic Resistance in *Gulliver's Travels*

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*Gulliver's Travels* has been established as an important work of resistance by many critics. However, particular attention should be paid to the linguistic resistance in the novel to better understand Swift's genius at that early stage in the history of English novel. This linguistic resistance is revealed in two strategies, the utilization of hybridity to attack the purity of the English language, and the application of *heteroglossia* to achieve a parodic discourse of the discourse of the English colonialist.

In order to get a closer look at how Swift craftily achieves hybridity one must recount a few points about his views about the purity of English language. These passionate views are particularly revealed in his "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue" and "The Tatler, Number CCXXX, to Isaac Bickerstaff". These letters reveal that he is against these reforms of the English language. In fact, he refers to the trends of the coinage of new words and reducing words into consonant sounds as "evils" in "The Tatler, Number CCXXX"(55). Swift describes the newly coined words as "Words invented by some *pretty Fellows*...some of which are now struggling for the Vogue, and others are in Possession of it"(54). He stresses the possibility of the failure of these expressions to find their way into everyday language. He does so to discourage this new trend. Swift commends the "Purity" of the Latin tongue. The concept of linguistic purity is essential to him (Proposal for Correcting English). He declares that English's "daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions"(Proposal for Correcting English). Also, Swift declares words consisting of mainly consonants as a sign of "degenerated" language. These utterances are even worse when they are "Consonants of most obdurate Sound...without one softening Vowel to intervene"(The Tatler, CCXXX 53). All these statements prove that he is against foreign elements which he considers a corruption of language.

Swift's passion in his letters in defense of the English language stands as a stark contrast to his later work in *Gulliver's* language. His political views have changed due to a shift in Swift's affiliations. Ann Cline Kelly in her "After Eden: *Gulliver's* Linguistic Travels" describes Swift's "explorations of Language's abuses". She describes how he saw language as a means of reform by the "association of Language and governance"(33). This view is weakened by the fact that Swift lost his hope in reform by the time he wrote *Gulliver's Travels* which was published in 1726. By the time of the writing of *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift is no longer a supporter of the English government. A new tradition of resistance to the English authority is born in his literature. Swift's linguistic resistance is an attack on the English language and all that it represents. It was not an invitation for reform as it was an act of vengeance on those who betrayed him. His attitude towards the Whigs is described as "resentment". This feeling is provoked by the act of marginalizing him as the Dean of Saint Patrick from 1713 until his death. This destroyed any hope for his political ambitions. The other reason for his resentment is the Whigs' "unfair treatment of Ireland"(Drabble 952-3). Moreover, *reform* does not describe the radical change of his views about

language. He was strongly against the coinage of new words and words that consist mainly of consonants. Applying exactly what he thought as "evil" impurities prove his deliberate attack on the English language that he used to revere the most.

For instance, Swift resists the English authority when he implies the weakness and inexpressiveness of the English language. This is achieved by creating a hybrid text that defies the purity of English. He applies two strategies to achieve this. First, he uses many coined words to infiltrate the purity of the English of the book. Gulliver interweaves these words in his discourse like "the said *Quinbus Flestin*" and "about the bigness of a *splacknuck*" (*Gulliver's Travels* 60-88). Homi Bhabha discusses such infiltration in "Signs Taken for Wonders" as "threatening differences" and "denied" knowledges [that] enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (114-20). It is a form of what Bhabha refers to as the "hybridity...[that] is the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination"(112). This process of the production of a hybrid language of English and other languages in *Gulliver's Travels* displaces the authority and shifts the power from the dominant English authority to the dominated entity. It shakes the bases of its strength which is its purity as an English language. Ironically, the Houyhnhnm word "Yahoo" has actually become part of the English language. It is listed in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* as "a boorish, crass, or stupid person". Swift's fantasy about a hybrid language that challenges the authority of the English language turned into reality because of the popularity of his novel.

Moreover, the coined words that he merged with the English of the novel is an infiltration when one considers their phonetic form. Words like *splacknuck* consist of mostly consonants. Some of which are difficult to produce in one word. Although the consonant blend of the sounds /spl/ is familiar in English, the word contains a more difficult blend. The sound /kn/ is preceded and followed by short vowels to form what Swift preaches against, a word with short vowels and an abundance of consonants. This proves that he intended to tarnish the purity of English with the worst possible elements. They are the *worst* because he declares that when he states:

"This perpetual Disposition to shorten our Words, by retrenching the Vowels, is nothing else but a tendency to lapse into the Barbarity of those Northern Nations ...our Syllables resemble theirs in the Roughness and Frequency of Consonants...if the Choice had been left to me, I would rather have trusted the Refinement of our Language, as far as it relates to Sound, to the Judgment of the Women, ... it is plain that Women in their manner of corrupting Words, do naturally discard the Consonants, as we do the Vowels...more than once, where some of both Sexes were in Company, I have persuaded two or three of each, to take a Pen, and write down a number of Letters joyned together, just as it came into their Heads, and upon reading this Gibberish we have found that which the Men had writ, by the frequent encountering of rough Consonants, to sound like High Dutch; and the other by the Women, like Italian, abounding in Vowels and Liquids. Now, though I would by no means give Ladies the Trouble of advising us in the Reformation of our Language; yet I cannot help thinking, that since they have been left out of all Meetings,...our Conversation hath very much degenerated"(Proposal for Correcting).

This reflects that resistance in *Gulliver's Travels* is more of a deliberate attempt to infiltrate the purity of English more than it is an attempt for reformation.

The second strategy that threatens the authority of the English language in the novel is by rendering it as less expressive in the process of translation. Christina Schäffner and Beverly Adab in their article "Translation as intercultural communication – Contact as Conflict" define a hybrid text as

"a text that results from a translation process. It shows features that somehow seem out of place/'strange'/'unusual' for the receiving culture, i.e. the target culture. These features, however, are not the result of a lack of translational competence or examples of translationese', but they are evidence of conscious and deliberate decisions by the translator. Although the text is not yet fully established in the target culture (because it does not conform to established norms and conventions), a hybrid text is accepted in its target culture because it fulfils its intended purpose in the communicative situation"(qtd. in Ginter 28).

This definition of a hybrid text applies to Gulliver's translation of different expressions into English. It creates hybrid English texts that represent the superiority of another culture over the English culture. For instance, Gulliver says: "that minister was *Galbet*, or Admiral of the realm"(Gulliver's Travels 32). Swift implies that one word in Lilliputian language actually takes four words to translate it into English. English is represented as less efficient. Another example of the inexpressiveness of the English language, suggested in the novel, is the word "*shnuwnh*". Gulliver tries to translate it as to "retire to his first mother". He states that it cannot be "easily rendered into English" (Gulliver's Travels 276). The word literally means death in English. This implies that the expression for death in Houyhnhnm language has a stronger and more profound meaning than the English language. Such signifier is incapable of reflecting the same signified in English. In the act of translation it will be rendered "out of place/'strange'/'unusual'". Moreover, Schäffner and Adab's remark about the translator supports the hypothesis about Swift's resistance to the English culture through the hybrid text. His translation as a result is a "deliberate" attempt to resist and suggest an impurity that causes the inexpressiveness of the English language.

Hybridity plays a crucial role in this linguistic resistance. A sense of finality is revealed when Swift relates the decline of a language with a tyrant government. For instance, he states that "the Change of [Roman] Government into a Tyranny...ruined the Study of Eloquence"(Proposal for Correcting English). So, the Romans' tyranny caused a linguistic decline that he wants to associate with the Whig government in *Gulliver's Travels*. He utilizes hybridity in *Gulliver's Travels* to declare the Whig government, alas, a tyrant government that destroys language amongst everything.

The other linguistic aspect in Gulliver's travels that reflects Swift's genius lies in his handling of discourse throughout the novel. Swift uses Gulliver's discourse as an English colonialist to indirectly criticize the English colonialist attitude. Every nation has its own culture and worldview. This worldview is often portrayed in people's language. Other cultures are represented as different entities in a person's language. Bakhtin states in "Discourse in the Novel" that the "content" of a European's discourse is conditioned by the "destinies of ideological discourse, and by

those particular historical tasks that ideological discourse has fulfilled in specific social spheres and at specific stages in its own historical development" (270). The discourse of any nation is influenced by its particular history and ideology. They form a person's worldview that reflects in his language. Swift's craft is revealed when the

"speaking person in the novel is always ... an *ideologue*, and his words are always *ideologemes*. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world...It is precisely as ideologemes that discourse becomes the object of representation in the novel"(Bakhtin 333).

Bakhtin relates characterization to ideology again when he describes the process of "objectification" when an author "struggles" with certain "images" and decides to "liberate himself from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification" (348). The objectification in *Gulliver's Travels* is clearly revealed in the object of the English colonialist's ideology. The author will separate himself from a certain ideology by giving it an independent entity that contains its unique ideology. Swift, undoubtedly, objected to colonization. He, in *Gulliver's Travels*, reflects his views about the corruption of colonialism. Gulliver directly states in the novel that he does not want to:

"enlarge his Majesty's dominions by my discoveries...I had conceived a few scruples with relation to the distributive justice of princes upon this occasion. For instance, a crew of pirates are driven by a storm...at length a boy discovers land from the topmast, they go onshore to rob and plunder, they see an harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name, they take formal possession of it for their King...they set up a rotten plank or stone for a memorial, they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more by force for a sample, return home, and get their pardon" ( *Gulliver's Travels* 296).

This is the discourse and intention of Swift rather than Gulliver the discoverer. Swift has always resisted the English authority. This novel is another way of directly criticizing that authority as he describes the corruption of colonialism in the previous quotation.

However, a novelist may represent other views in his novel. "The image of another's language and outlook on the world, simultaneously represented and representing, is extremely typical of the novel". The novel may reflect "two world views". The other discourse will not reflect the novelist's intentions. It will reflect the opposite. Bakhtin names this approach to style in the novel as "double-voiced discourse... It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author" (45-324-5). Since the character's discourse is not the novelist's own discourse, then, it is a parody of another's discourse. The novelist will highlight the other's discourse and expose it to the reader through the discourse of his characters. This sort of discourse is called the *Parodic discourse*.

On the level of characterization in the novel this is achieved in the "heteroglossia" of the word. Bakhtin sums up the role of the multiple levels of the given word in creating a dialogue that could be parodic of a certain ideology. He states that



"the utterance not only answers to requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well...[It] was not merely heteroglossia vis-à-vis the accepted literary language...that is, vis-à-vis the linguistic center of the verbal ideological life of the nation, but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic. It was heteroglossia that had been dialogized" (272-3).

Bakhtin's theory of Parodic Discourse applies to Gulliver's discourse in *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift parodies the discourse of an English colonialist. Swift asserts the nationality of Gulliver to emphasize his background. For instance, Gulliver refers to Britain as "my own dear native country". He refers to it again when he describes it as "the dear place of my nativity" (*Gulliver's Travels* 121-252). Readers expect Gulliver's discourse to reflect the worldview of an Englishman because he repeatedly states that he is one. Naturally, it will not reflect the views of Swift the author who resisted the English authority in several of his writings like *The Drapier's Letters* and "A Modest Proposal". This parody of an Englishman's discourse makes Gulliver's discourse an object of representation. It represents the pride and prejudice that are notoriously attributed to English people of the colonialist era.

Gulliver's discourse highlights the pride of an English colonialist. Gulliver "has proved himself exceedingly proud. Swift uses Gulliver to express his feelings about the sinfulness of pride, yet Gulliver can't live up to Swift's exhortation" about pride (Feitlowitz 88). He is proud to be English. When the king of Brobdingnag ridicules the English by calling them "diminutive insects", Gulliver is saddened that his "noble county, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honour and truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated" (*Gulliver's Travels* 101). Gulliver's pride makes him try to purge his country of such a demeaning comparison to insects. Thus, he tries to give his country such glorious titles in order to negate the king of Brobdingnag's description of it.

The proud Gulliver views the English as morally superior. In Brobdingnag, he declares that "we" as Englishmen "are wholly exempted from prejudices and narrowness of mind" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 129). George Orwell in his "Politics vs. Literature- An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*" describes how Gulliver's pride and "boasting" turns him into an "imbecile" because "he manages to betray every available scandalous fact" about England (166). Orwell agrees with how Swift's characterization of Gulliver produces a refracted effect of the image of the proud colonialist. This proud character of the English colonialist loses its credibility by the inconsistencies within its discourse.

Also, Gulliver's proud discourse entails the English colonialist's intellectual superiority to others. For instance, he only recently learned the Laputan language. However, he claims that they are wrong in the etymology of the word Laputa. He, as an intelligent Englishman, offers what he perceives as a logical analysis of the etymology of the word "Laputa". He brags that:

"in a few days, by the help of a a very faithful memory, I got some insight into their language. The word which I interpret *Flying* or *Floating Island*, is in the original *Laputa*...*Lap* in the old obsolete language signifieth

*high, and untuh, a governor, from which they say by corruption was derived Laputa, from Lapuntuh. But, I do not approve of this derivation, which seems to be a little strained. I ventured to offer to the learned among them a conjecture of my own that Laputa was quasi lap outed, lap signifying properly the dancing of the sunbeams in the sea, and outed, a wing." (Gulliver's Travels 158).*

Another example that indicates the English colonialists who view themselves as mentally superior to others in Gulliver's discourse is when Gulliver is abandoned by his shipmates. He assumes that he will meet "savages" who are mentally inferior to him. Combee and Plax in their "Rousseau's Noble Savage and European Self-Consciousness" assert that "Europeans [took] for granted the superiority of European civilization and for whom, one presumes, "savage" was a pejorative term"(173). Others are often portrayed as savages in the discourse of a typical European who perceives himself as mentally superior. They are not perceived as noble savages. They are portrayed as inferior to himself. Gulliver is convinced of their mental inferiority. He prepares "bracelets, glass rings and other toys" because he, as an English colonialist, assumes that whomever he will meet will be as mentally inferior as little children (*Gulliver's Travels* 220). Only savages will be fooled by simple shiny objects. These "preparations" for exile reflect his "faith in the colonial stereotype" (Rees). The English Gulliver adheres to the colonial stereotype of the simple savages who crave shiny objects because they are too stupid to estimate their value. He proudly thinks he is smarter due to his race and nationality.

Gulliver's discourse points out the prejudice in an Englishman. This prejudice is held against others who are different in appearance and religion. For instance, Gulliver's prejudiced discourse indicates that the English consider physically different people as weaker. For instance, Laputans are "a race of mortals so singular in their shapes...Their heads were all reclined either to the right or to the left: one of their eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the zenith". Gulliver emphasizes their physical difference in his discourse and describes it as being singular. He ignores that this feeling of singularity is mutual between him and the Laputans. Gulliver proceeds to describe the Laputans as "clumsy, awkward and unhandy people" because they are physically different (*Gulliver's Travels* 154-9). Mastery of the body equals power (*Power/Knowledge* 56). Gulliver assumes that they cannot master their bodies as well as Englishmen because they are physically different. As a consequence, they are powerless. Zeenat quotes Claude Rawson as saying that Swift's work "castigates the vulgar cruelties of racism...[and]contempt for ethnic resentment and the inhumanities that flow from it"(100).

Another example of the English contempt for those who are physically different is when Gulliver initially failed to describe the Yahoos. Initially, he describes them as "animals...their shapes were very singular and deformed" (*Gulliver's Travels* 221). He describes the physical differences between himself and the Yahoos as "deformities" (Rees). This reflects the colonialist's failure to understand the other. The difference between Gulliver and the others is always portrayed in his discourse as a deformity. Gulliver is never willing to accept the physical characteristics of other races like the Yahoos or the Laputnas. He will not perceive them as being as normal as he is. Ironically, The Houyhnhnms do not accept Gulliver and view him as inferior as the Yahoos. This emphasizes that the perception of the deformity of the Yahoos is merely a part of Gulliver's discourse and not

Swift's. Gulliver and the Yahoos belong to the same kind in spite of Gulliver's disapproval.

Another example of prejudice in the novel is based on the physical aspect of color. Throughout the novel, Gulliver stresses the importance of fairness of skin. He praises the "fair skins of our English ladies". Skins that are less fair are considered "ill coloured" and "nauseous" to the English Gulliver (*Gulliver's Travels* 84).

In addition, Gulliver's discourse emphasizes the English prejudice on the basis of religion. For instance, Gulliver emphasizes the importance of being "Christians and Protestants". He insists that all Protestants should cooperate in a strict alliance. Although he acknowledges the Japanese Captain as a merciful man, he calls him a "heathen". However, he calls the Dutchman who tried to kill him "Brother Christian". This reflects the English colonialist's prejudice against those who are not Protestants. He discriminates against the Japanese captain because he is not Christian. Thus, he is not worthy of his brotherhood. However, the Protestant Dutchman who swore to throw him into the sea is his "Brother Christian". Ironically, the kindness of the Japanese man disappoints Gulliver. He is "sorry to find more mercy in a heathen, than in a brother Christian" (*Gulliver's Travels* 150). For Gulliver, all Christians are merciful and others are not. This image of the Japanese captain and the Dutchman shatters Gulliver's stereotypical perception of Christians and others.

Liz Bellany insists that through Gulliver's "imperialistic prejudices", Swift "ridicules the whole idea of colonial voyages of discovery" (qtd in Rees). Swift employs Gulliver's prejudiced discourse to expose the English colonialists' mentality as a whole. Bakhtin asserts that

"this process [of experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons] becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, where someone is striving to liberate himself from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitations of both image and discourse" (348).

Swift exaggerates the flaws in Gulliver's discourse in order to expose it. He reveals the pride and prejudice in his language in order to resist its authority. He also exposes the limitations and flaws of both Gulliver the discoverer and his discourse as an Englishman. His language alone reflects the pride and prejudice of an English colonialist.

Swift's work in *Gulliver's Travels* produced a masterpiece at an early stage of post-colonial writing. He harnessed language to create a fighting tool by which he resists a menacing oppressive authority. His use of hybrid text and parodic discourse are a model for all resistance writing following his work.

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