



GENEALOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Genealogies of Knowledge I
Translating Political and Scientific Thought across Time and Space
7-9 December 2017

Call for Panel Papers

Lingua Francas of Knowledge

Convenor: Karen Bennett
Universidade Nova, Lisbon

English is today the unrivalled vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, the language in which most scholarship is published, conferences are held, reading is done and lessons taught. However, its rise to prominence is a relatively recent development in the broad sweep of human history. From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th, English, French and German enjoyed a roughly equal status as languages of scientific publication, with others, such as Russian and Japanese, occupying niches in particular geographic areas. In the Medieval and Early Modern period, Latin was of course the lingua franca (LF) of learning, once so indispensable that it had to be mastered before any formal education could take place; and before that the prime position was held by Greek, the *koiné* of the Hellenistic world. Meanwhile, in the East, Arabic, Sanskrit and Chinese were also playing formidable roles in channelling learning through the centuries.

There have also been projects to develop artificial languages to serve as neutral universal vehicles of knowledge. The 17th century *a priori* philosophical languages of John Wilkins, George Dalgarno and Gottfried Leibniz failed to gain much traction, due to intrinsic weaknesses; but the *a posteriori* auxiliary languages of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Volapük, Esperanto and Ido, fared better, acquiring considerable numbers of followers in their heyday.

This panel seeks to stimulate reflection about the role played by different vehicular languages in the transmission of knowledge over the centuries, and the philosophical, political and commercial implications of a lingua franca culture (as opposed to a translation culture). Proposals are welcome from scholars working in fields such as linguistics, translation studies, history of science/philosophy, cultural history and epistemology, as well as specialists in particular languages and cultures.

Possible themes:

- The rise and fall of any of the historical LFs of knowledge and their relationship with the vernaculars
- Artificial languages: *a priori* philosophical languages; *a posteriori* auxiliary languages;
- Mathematical and computer languages
- The construction of scientific registers in natural languages: grammatical/lexical requirements; the role of translation; patrons and institutions
- Issues of power and equity: struggles for dominance between rival LFs; the role of institutions and individuals in promoting and consolidating a LF; the influence of the political and economic context
- Education in LF cultures: language policies in schools and universities; dissemination to the broader public
- Language and epistemology: the 'suitability' of certain languages to particular kinds of knowledge; the universality/translatability of knowledge
- Strategies used by non-native speakers to produce knowledge in a lingua franca culture
- The future of English as academic lingua franca: hegemony, fragmentation, the rise of a rival LF or a return to a (computer-mediated) translation culture?

Selected References:

- Gordin, M.D (2015) *Scientific Babel: How Science was done before and after Global English*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Harrison, K.D. (2007) *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ostler, N. (2005) *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*. New York and London: HarperCollins.
- Ostler, N. (2011). *The Last Lingua Franca: The Rise and Fall of World Languages*. London and New York: Penguin.

Submission of Paper Proposals

Abstracts of 300-500 words should be sent by **31 May 2017** to:

Dr Karen Bennett, karen.bennett@netcabo.pt

Notification of acceptance will be given by **15 June 2017**.

Useful Links

[Genealogies of Knowledge Project Website](#)

[1st General Call for Papers](#) for Genealogies of Knowledge I Conference