LANGUAGE AND CONQUEST IN EARLY MODERN IRELAND

English Renaissance literature and Elizabethan imperial expansion

PATRICIA PALMER

To my parents, William and Catherine Palmer, *le grá.*

Contents

Conquest, colonial ideologies and the consequences for language

Les discours sont, eux aussi, des événements.

Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les Autres*, p. 14

The sixteenth century in Ireland was action-packed and dynamic. The transformations that occurred were so sweeping that the century, which opened with Gerald FitzGerald, the future ninth earl of Kildare and Lord Deputy, travelling to Court to marry Elizabeth Zouche, seems to close, on the eve of Kinsale, on a different world. In that time, Ireland had moved from being an almost forgotten 'distant border province' (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 86), left to its own devices and those of its Old English and Gaelic magnates, to a colony in revolt at the centre of Elizabethan attention. In the interim, the country was the stage for a bewildering variety of policy changes; the cast was swelled by an influx of bureaucrats, aristocrats, adventurers, soldiers, settlers and proselytisers; and the nature of the military engagement shifted from marcher skirmishes to full-scale war with an international dimension. Caught up in all of this was language: as medium of negotiation, as subject of interdictions, as badge of identity, as index of civility, as symbol of otherness, as bearer of ideology, as words in the mouth of a preacher, as battlecry, as lines tumbling off the newly established printing presses, as – when O'Donnell, on a hosting in Sligo, slaughtered all males unable to speak Irish (O'Sullivan, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, p. 82) – death-warrant. The history of the period is, in part, the history of a shift in the balance of power between the island's two languages. When the Englishwoman Elizabeth Zouche married into the greatest of the Old English dynasties, in 1503, she immediately set about learning Irish: using the direct method which Baron Delvin later adapted to produce an Irish primer for Queen Elizabeth, 'in shorte tyme she learned to reade, write, and perfectlye speake the tongue' (Gilbert,

Facsimiles, IV.I, p. xxxv). A hundred years later, when Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone and overlord of the Nine Years War (1595–1603), submitted after Kinsale, he did so in English.

My purpose is to explore how the century's vertiginous political changes mapped on to the engagement between Irish and English. Historians of early modern Ireland bring us part of the way. They chart the political and military developments that transformed the island's polity and the relations between its two communities – 'mere' Irish, Old English – and the Crown; and they reconstruct the ideologies that underpinned England's growing colonial entanglement in Ireland. But they leave the question of language hanging. Yet ideologies of conquest had implications for language – as the Spanish *empresa* in the New World demonstrated. This chapter, therefore, moves from reconstructing the political and ideological context of sixteenth-century Ireland to opening up a comparison between English linguistic colonisation in Ireland and its Spanish equivalent in the New World. Because language was so central to Spanish discourses of colonisation and because academic research into the *conquista* correspondingly highlights language issues, the Spanish-American model provides a template for exploring the connection between colonial ideologies and language policy and helps to point up the particularity of English linguistic colonisation.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sixteenth-century Irish historiography is a domain almost as contested as the territory it surveys. Yet while individual historians may disagree – hotly – about when the drift towards conquest and colonisation set in, and clash over which ideologies shaped those policies, the agreed *grandes lignes* of sixteenth-century history are not in dispute. Though officially an English colony since the Norman invasion in 1169, Ireland had gradually slipped from English attention and settled into a de facto partition between the Gaelic lordships and the Pale. English rule, as far as it ran, was delegated to the principal Old English families, the FitzGeralds of Kildare and the Butlers of Ormond. In the early 1530s, however, Old English reformers persuaded the Crown to involve itself in regenerating the residual colony. The ambitions of the reformers soon extended to the whole island, ushering in a phase of 'unitary sovereignty'. This phase ran from 1540, with the arrival of Lord Deputy St Leger, until

conciliation and reform were abandoned and the drift towards conquest and colonisation began.

Offering such a neatly delineated chronology is not without its dangers. While the schema is useful, we should not be seduced into accepting its periodisation as absolute, much less into taking it over uncritically to force a matching language scheme into the same mould. Brady and Gillespie warn against a simplified view of Ireland as moving from a kingdom, with a constitution similar to England's, to a colony ripe for exploitation. The distinctiveness of sixteenth-century Ireland, they insist, is that it was 'a constitutional anomaly, neither the "kingdom" of England nor a "colony" in North America' (*Natives and Newcomers*, p. 17). England's Irish policy was never monolithic or clear-cut but characterised by 'periodic oscillations and simultaneous inconsistencies' (Brady, 'Court', p. 23).

Our focus is the interaction between Irish and English under the press of increased English engagement in Ireland after 1541. The period immediately preceding the Crown's renewed involvement in Ireland provides a point of reference and comparison. Politically, the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were characterised by duality: the incompleteness of the Anglo-Norman conquest meant that, from the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366) until the reign of Henry VIII, London had little option but to accept the status quo and to interfere only minimally (Quinn and Nicholls, 'Ireland in 1534', p. 39). The duality was reflected in the colonists' continuing sense of their Englishness and in their more developed political consciousness which contrasted with the 'particularist and dynastic' mentality of the Gaelic lords (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 94). But, while in the political domain 'duality' betokened boundaries and the existence of parallel political and administrative worlds, culturally, it signalled permeability. The Old English moved comfortably between both worlds: there was a 'widespread predilection for the Irish language and Gaelic cultural forms at all levels in the Pale' (Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 41).

The initial expansion of the English state into Ireland combined limited military action under Lord Leonard Grey with bureaucratic reform. Bradshaw stresses the distinctiveness of this initial reform period, characterised as it was by collaboration between Old English reformers and Tudor administrators. Reform got under way in 1534 with Thomas Cromwell's *Ordinances for Ireland*. Its ambitions, limited to 'particular reform' of the Pale, were at first modest. But, while

necessary, consolidation of the English colony alone, prey as it was to Gaelic incursions, would not be enough. Moreover, the Old English reformers' commitment to the humanist ideal of the commonwealth brought the whole island within their purview, nudging them towards a 'general reform' which embraced the Gaelic lordships: the movement towards unitary sovereignty was on. It received an urgent push in 1539 with the rising of the Geraldine League which assembled an unusually united aggregation of Gaelic parties. This threat from outside the newly reformed Pale 'proved the inadequacy of Cromwell's programme in failing to come to grips with the constitutional problem of the Irishry' (Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 127, 184).

In the early 1540s, therefore, the Crown finally adopted a policy of general reform. Henry VIII's assumption of the title 'King of Ireland', proclaimed by the Irish parliament in June 1541, marked a new stage in relations between the two islands, de jure to begin with, but increasingly de facto. 'The change of title signified a commitment to effective and total rule' (Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 3). It inaugurated a policy of 'unification by assimilation' (Brady, 'Court', p. 27). English law now encompassed the whole island, ending its effective partition into Gaelic and English jurisdictions (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 140). Significantly, the proposal to extend the king's title to Ireland came from the Irish reformers, not the Crown; they were also behind the policy of 'surrender and regrant' adopted by St Leger (Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 91). The policy sought 'to incorporate the Gaelic lordship by consent into a new fully anglicised kingdom of Ireland' (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 137). But the new constitutional status remained paradoxical: 'neither a colony nor yet an independent sovereign entity, Ireland was a curious hybrid, a kingdom whose own sovereign denied its autonomy' (Brady, 'Court', p. 29). Ironically, unitary sovereignty sidelined the Irish administration and its Old English officials. As power became centralised, it became centralised in London (Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 141). With this shift, the influence of the Old English reformers waned. At the same time, Edward VI's accession in 1547 introduced a far less conciliatory brand of Protestantism under Protector Somerset.

The period after Henry VIII's death in 1547 saw a breakdown in the reforming impulse and a slide towards militarisation, religious polarisation and colonisation. While warning against any facile pinpointing of the precise moment of 'the radical shift from

conciliation to coercion', Brady and Gillespie have no hesitation in pronouncing Tudor policy in Ireland a failure precisely in terms of that slippage: 'they had aimed to fashion a kingdom and had laid instead the foundations of a colony' (Brady and Gillespie, *Natives and Newcomers*, p. 14; Brady, 'Court', p. 49). 'Three novel elements' were creeping into Irish affairs: cultural conflict, religious cleavage and a palpable hardening of English administrative policy (Bottigheimer, 'Kingdom and Colony', p. 52). Edward VI's short reign (1547–53) marks a turning point: impatient with the pace of reform, Somerset greatly reinforced the army and an increased reliance on the 'military solution' entailed a corresponding scaling-down of the policy of incorporation by consent (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 176). Sir Edward Bellingham, appointed Deputy in 1548, approached Ireland as a soldier rather than as an administrator. Almost immediately, he garrisoned and colonised Leix, thereby setting in motion a radical new policy (Bradshaw, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 261).

While Henry VIII's reforms had been accepted with relative equanimity, the more militantly Protestant Edwardian reforms were not. Religious policy now exacerbated tensions: the Gaels identified it with military conquest and plantation as part of a general anglicising policy; the Old English regarded it as a reform too far. The growing alienation of the bicultural Old English is a key development of the period. The centralisation implicit in unitary sovereignty saw Dublin being increasingly by-passed for London. The Dublin Parliament was called less often and was packed with placemen. As Ireland became a 'significant prize in court faction-fighting', the English administrators – now less dependent on the Old English – enjoyed a new freedom of manœuvre (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, p. 245). Moreover, English attention switched from the Pale to Gaelic Ireland. From 1547 onwards, therefore, Tudor policy was increasingly conducted independently of the Old English, leading to what Ellis identifies as 'a breakdown in consensus between crown and community'. As the influence of the Old English waned, so their restraining counsel fell on deaf ears. The way was left open for military conquest and colonisation on a scale otherwise impossible (pp. 179, 177). Moreover, the 'removal of the Old English as a buffer had the effect of exacerbating the clash of cultures' (Bottigheimer, 'Kingdom and Colony', p. 51).

By mid-century, the Tudor state had become increasingly embroiled in Ireland. The claims and ambitions of royal government

had been greatly extended; the agenda had broadened to include thoroughgoing religious reform and, ineluctably, military conquest. The Gaelic lords who had been wooed by 'surrender and regrant' were embittered by the abandonment of conciliation. Their alienation and that of the Old English was beginning to coalesce into 'an articulate opposition movement which cut across traditional factional politics'. Administratively and militarily, the colonial state was over-stretched. By the time Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, coercion and the alienation it provoked made a return to consensus politics almost impossible. Reform on contemporary English lines was no longer an option. Instead, the government found itself resorting to the radical solution of 'Anglicization . . . by force' (Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, pp. 228, 180). Canny documents the increasing ferocity of the military campaigns and shows that commanders like the first Earl of Essex, campaigning in Ulster in 1575, were establishing the principle that military conquest would be a necessary prelude to establishing a colony (*Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 90): the movement towards colonisation was becoming inexorable.

IDEOLOGIES OF CONQUEST

Bound up in the drift towards colonisation traced by the historians was language; but the historians leave that story untold. They exhibit little curiosity about language and take its transparency largely for granted, cheerfully recording parleys between Englishmen and Gaels without pausing to explore how, precisely, such attempted communications were managed. McCarthy Morrogh, exceptionally, wonders 'whether they could speak the same language' and recognises a blindspot: 'The question is of obvious importance when dealing with relations between different societies, yet nothing specific has been written on this topic' ('English Presence', p. 189). Speech, passing so quickly into silence and leaving no apparent trace, presents a particular challenge to the historical method. Language is rarely the historians' focus. They rarely conceive of it as being directly involved in the process or as being in any way constitutive of it. Conquest proceeds by its own rules; language adjustments may follow in its wake. The linguistic landscape, they imply, can be surveyed after the gunsmoke clears.

There has been no systematic attempt to analyse how the policy shift to 'Anglicization . . . by force' affected the relationship between

the Irish and English languages. Commentators shy away from
making the connection between colonisation and linguistic anglicisa-
tion. Ó Cuív portrays language shift as the half-unexpected fall-out
of conquest. He implies that it was self-wrought for utilitarian
reasons and locates the turning-point in the early seventeenth
century, arguing that it was the plantations and 'the upheaval among
the landholders rather than any official measures against the Irish
language that gained for English a foothold in the Irish countryside'
('Irish Language', p. 529). Meanwhile, sociolinguists bridle at the
notion that the triumph of English owes anything to crude historical
processes rather than to intrinsic linguistic virtue. R. W. Bailey
contends that it would be a 'mistake' to attribute the advance of
English in Ireland to any 'consistent imperial impulse' ('Conquests',
p. 16). Wardhaugh tries to remove language from the realm of
history to that of forensic medicine, arguing that 'the language was
not killed but committed suicide' ('Languages in Competition',
p. 91). Durkacz, too, discounts colonial causation. He rejects Hech-
ter's 'internal colonialism' theory – which relies on an implicitly neo-
imperialistic annexation of Ireland as an 'internal', albeit 'fringe',
region in a British polity – but then, by insisting on seeing Scotland,
Wales and Ireland as 'peripheral', goes on to replay it. He argues
that 'the persistent trend has been the westward march of English
into ever more peripheral areas. Wherever the languages clashed,
English invariably predominated – a reflection of the economic
vigour and cultural buoyancy of the English-speaking peoples'
(*Decline*, p. 214). His formula attempts to abstract language from
politics and the operation of power, imagining instead the prodigious
marching metonym, 'English', ousting rivals less fitted for survival in
a species of linguistic Darwinism. But language does not inhabit so
autonomous a realm. In the sixteenth century, English was not so
much the 'reflection' of 'economic vigour and cultural buoyancy' as
the shadow that fell in the shade of the sword.

Anglicisation was neither incidental to the conduct of conquest
nor a mere spin-off from it. Language was intimately bound up with
the ideologies that legitimised colonisation and shaped its unfolding.
The colonists' estimation of their own language and their attitudes
towards that of the enemy are as much constitutive of such ideologies
as they are consequences of them. We need to review the ideologies
which shaped the Elizabethans' drift from reform to conquest in
order to identify the role of language in their construction and

operation. While it could, crudely, be argued that the late Tudors could move on the unfinished business of conquest because theirs was the drier gunpowder, such superiority, of itself, cannot launch – or continue to justify – a colonial enterprise. Starting with the Spanish and Portuguese, sixteenth-century colonialism was notably articulate in legitimating its operations. The Irish adventure marks the moment when England joins that discourse.

Some historians have competed to reconstruct a single ideology to explain all. Most partisan have been Nicholas Canny and Brendan Bradshaw, the former promoting 'Renaissance anthropology' (the discourse that pitted colonial civility against native barbarism), the latter advancing Protestant Reformation pessimism. Brady and Gillespie, sceptically reviewing their colleagues' penchant for empha-sising 'ideological factors as determinants of the course of early modern Irish history' deplore their 'highly schematised approaches', insisting rather that sixteenth-century Ireland escapes rigid categor-isation: policy was 'so problematic and its results so multifarious and uncertain' that it 'no longer seems possible to regard any single factor as dominant in shaping English conduct in Ireland' (*Natives and Newcomers*, pp. 16, 18). Foster, as though taking Brady and Gillespie's warning against exclusivity to heart, gives a suitably rounded synopsis: 'The strength of the English reaction against Ireland's lack of 'civility' stemmed partly from Protestantism, partly from English nationalism and partly from . . . the repulsion roused by what John Derricke called their ''wild shamrock manners'' ' – manners which 'coincided with contemporary anthropological ideas of savagery' (*Modern Ireland*, p. 32). Foster's summary is valuable: it suggests that there may be more common ground between the ideologies than their historian-sponsors, who advance them with such exclusive partisanship, allow. And that common ground may well lie in what Foster calls 'English nationalism'.

Indeed, if we examine the claims made for each ideology, we quickly discover that they offer not so much competing explanations for Tudor behaviour in Ireland as complementary ones. Nicholas Canny attributes the changed tempo and ferocity of Englishmen's engagement in Ireland from the 1560s onwards to their assimilation of 'Renaissance anthropology', the discourse of difference which emerged from Europe's – and especially Spain's – encounter with the inhabitants of the New World (*Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 133). With its facile characterisation of 'civil' and 'barbarian', the new

anthropology marked a shift in social thinking, away from an older humanist confidence in the potential for civility of even savage-seeming peoples. It introduced more rigid hierarchies of societies, graduated from savage to highly civilised, and implied a 'more cautious notion of man's capacity for self-improvement' (Canny, 'Formation', p. 18). Canny contends that once the English 'had been persuaded that the Irish were barbarians they were able to produce a moral and civil justification for their conquest'. Whereas the Old English regarded the Gaelic masses as contingently barbarous – the benighted but reformable creatures of barbarous rulers – the emerging taxonomy saw them as 'anthropologically inferior', congenital barbarians (*Elizabethan Conquest*, pp. 128, 131).

But the repercussions of Renaissance anthropology went beyond simply licensing the replacement of reform by a new militarism. Its discourse of difference operated by alienating native practices – dress, agriculture, warfare, sexual mores – from their cultural matrix and interpreting them instead as loathsome residues of older – Scythian, Gaulish, Pictish – barbarisms. It is worth pausing here to qualify Canny's uncompromisingly 'Atlanticist' position by noting that however central the New World was to the emergence of a belief in graduated social evolution, Englishmen's recourse to classical models of barbarism and their reliance on Giraldus Cambrensis, pioneer of the discourse of Irish difference, confirms that Elizabethan-style 'new anthropology' was more a reworking of twelfth-century humanists' justifications of the original conquest than an entirely new departure (Gillingham, 'Images of Ireland'; Morgan, 'Giraldus Cambrensis'). This anthropology, more composite than Canny might be willing to grant, worked by denying native culture its own meanings. By subjecting it instead to deprecatory comparisons, it would not leave language untouched by its operations.

Whereas Canny 'relates the harsh attitudes of the conquerors to the Irish to an intellectual shift brought about by the impact of European colonial expansion', Bradshaw, in a counter-bid for exclusive explanation, holds that 'the shift in perspective was brought about by the Reformation' ('Sword', p. 498, fn. 85). His insistence that the radical new policies taking shape from mid-century find their ideological grounding not in 'Renaissance sociology . . . but Protestant theology' stubbornly adheres to the 'single factor' explanation so distrusted by Brady and Gillespie. He argues that the Reformation provided 'the intellectual climate which allowed . . .

inhumanity to be perpetrated with a sense of moral righteousness' ('Elizabethans and Irish', p. 47), because Protestantism, especially in its more extreme formulations, drew on a 'radically pessimistic' anthropology ('Sword', p. 497). That pessimism was shaped by Calvinists' conviction that the intellect was blinded and the will enslaved as a consequence of the Fall. Undisciplined, uncivil man exemplified the mark of the Fall to a disturbing degree. Evangelising, far from being able, of itself, to civilise required conditions of civility and obedience before it could operate ('Elizabethans and Irish', p. 48). A position so pessimistic about the possibility of evangelising – of *persuading* – had clear implications for language practices: if the intellect was indeed so darkened, then persuasive language alone was hardly going to lighten it.

But, as Bradshaw acknowledges, the hardline policy did not have the ideological field all to itself: the existence of Protestant humanists on the other side of the argument, who held that the will *was* amenable to enlightenment through education ('Elizabethans and Irish', p. 45), places internal strains on his thesis. This countervailing strain of civic humanism, he argues, influenced by a more optimistic anthropology, remained confident of man's essential rationality. Man, even uncivil man, was the victim of ignorance rather than of wilful or categorical badness and was thus amenable to education and persuasion ('Sword', p. 491). Whereas for radical Protestants civility was a precondition of evangelising, for the humanists it was an outcome: the savage could be led to civility through the word. From these opposed positions, Bradshaw argues, emerged two contrasting strategies: the strategy of the word and the strategy of the sword ('Elizabethans and Irish', pp. 46, 49).

The implications of both these strategies for language in the context of evangelisation is suggestive and will be explored later. What is less compelling about Bradshaw's argument is its bid for exclusivity. For one thing, to attempt to attribute 'harsh attitudes' exclusively to Protestantism and to refuse to countenance the possible influence of the new anthropology is a daring but unconvincing manœuvre: responsibility for the far harsher conduct of the Spanish in America can scarcely be pinned on their Protestantism. Indeed, Bradshaw himself reluctantly acknowledges that 'a certain kind of Counter-Reformation theology' was conducive to a 'rigour' similar to that exercised by the Elizabethans in Ireland ('Elizabethans and Irish', p. 49). If this concession forces us to seek an

explanation for 'rigorous' behaviour outside of Protestantism – and it does – then we are already on the way to undoing the binary opposition that he sets up between Protestantism and sixteenth-century colonial anthropology.

Those staking out exclusive claims for Renaissance sociology or Reformation pessimism seem reluctant to countenance that the two perspectives could be complementary. Yet, clearly, the anthropological and theological points of view could be internally coherent. Canny shows that religion was one of the items picked over by the discourse of difference (*Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 125). Under the prevailing anthropological classification, it was regarded as almost axiomatic that Christians were civilised and pagans barbarian (Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, p. 214). The choice for Protestant colonists in Ireland was self-evident: to acknowledge that the natives were Christian was to concede that they were civil; should they be found to be 'pagan', however, they could be declared barbarous at a stroke (Canny, *Elizabethan Conquest*, p. 125; 'Ideology', p. 586). The religion which the Elizabethans found in Ireland, with its pagan Celtic vestiges, was abhorrent to radical Protestants. The relationship between 'pagan' and 'barbarian' was reflexive and easily made. If we can accept that extreme Protestantism's 'deeply pessimistic anthropology' (Bradshaw, 'Elizabethans and Irish', p. 46) in ways complements rather than overthrows Canny's useful discussion of Renaissance anthropology, we can move on to examine how both have significance for the role of language in the Elizabethan conquest. Far from being binary opposites, the discourses of difference and of Protestant pessimism intersect within the discourse that subsumed them both – English nationalism.

Foster's addition of 'English nationalism' to the reckoning points the way to integrating positions seen by their advocates to be mutually exclusive. Nationalism is a composite ideology rather than a single category; it is constituted by, among other things, a conviction of cultural superiority and religious election. 'Nationalism' is often taken to be an essentially post-Enlightenment phenomenon. Sixteenth-century England, however, represents a precocious anomaly. From as early as the 1530s, England was embarking on a self-conscious project of imagining, representing and, ultimately, vaunting the nation (Hadfield, *Literature, Politics*; Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*; McEachern, *Poetics*). Liah Greenfeld shows how a complex of factors – profound social transformation and a new social

mobility; Protestantism and its associated literacy; a patriotically motivated literature – worked together to force the emergence of a 'modern, full-fledged, mature nationalism' by the end of Elizabeth's reign (*Nationalism*, p. 70). 'Englishness' was partly defined oppositionally, through counterdistinction with uncivil others (Hadfield and McVeagh, *Strangers*, p. 1); it was confirmed by a sense of religious election (Collinson, *Birthpangs*, p. 5). The ideologies of difference and of militant Protestantism, therefore, should be seen not as competitor ideologies but as complementary strands within the master discourse of Elizabethan nationalism. Foster's synopsis, moreover, recognises that cultural evaluation is central to all three ideologies. All draw on notions of civility and, for the Renaissance, civility was indissociable from language.

Our interest in these ideologies lies not with the archaeology of sixteenth-century justifications – with picking over the bones of old propaganda exercises – but with understanding how the cultural nationalism which they encouraged translated into language policy. Though none of the historians reconstructing these ideologies explores their implications for language, language bubbles close to the surface in all of them. 'Renaissance anthropology', dedicated to parsing the differences between the 'civil' and the 'barbarous', was quickly drawn into making judgements about civil and barbarous tongues. Protestantism, whether in its 'puritan' or 'humanist' incarnation, was committed to the vernacular, either its own or the natives': 'the strategy of the word' implied engagement with the indigenous language, while a Reformation which reified its own vernacular correspondingly sidelined others. Early modern nationalism both housed and was sustained by linguistic chauvinism. Brady argues that the newcomers' 'unearned and wholly unquestioned claims to cultural superiority' not only underwrote their administrative and military incursions but convinced them that military conquest would have to be followed by 'a vigorous campaign of cultural conquest' (*Chief Governors*, pp. xv, xi). And 'cultural conquest' – cultural nationalism – had clear implications for language policy.

THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE IN IDEOLOGIES OF CONQUEST: THE SPANISH MODEL

'Toute colonisation porte en germe la glottophagie' (Calvet, *Linguistique*, p. 84): Calvet's bold assertion invites us to test how ideologies of

conquest influence the attendant language encounter: how power takes shape in language, and how language exercises its will-to-power. That exploration is already well under way for other episodes of linguistic colonisation – most notably, into the encounter between Spanish and the languages of the New World which paralleled events in Ireland temporally and massively overshadowed them in scope. The scholarship investigating that encounter is particularly enabling for our purposes because it moves on from where the Irish historians' examination of the ideologies of conquest leaves off: it explores the mechanisms of linguistic colonisation specific to the anthropological discourse of difference, early modern nationalism and militant Protestantism's mirror opposite, Counter-Reformation Catholicism.

To couple the Irish and American situations is not at all to insist on a total correspondence between the two. (Re)conquest of a near neighbour – whose existence was certainly never in doubt – is quite unlike the conquest of a 'new world'. The first altogether lacks the element of the marvellous, the exotic, the utterly unexpected. Moreover, the twelfth-century conquest had left behind a linguistic bridgehead in Ireland – the bilingual Old English. So to invoke comparison is not to suggest that English actions or attitudes mimicked Spanish ones. (Indeed, much of the value of comparison lies precisely in exploring divergences between the two.) But, it is useful, as W. D. Mignolo argues in criticising the tendency of postcolonial studies to focus exclusively on 'the legacies of the British Empire', to 'decolonize scholarship and to decentre epistemological loci of enunciation' (*Darker Side*, p. ix). The challenge implicit in Pagden's observation that 'theorists of empire and its historians have remained curiously indifferent to the possibilities offered by comparison' (*Lords*, p. 3) is worth taking up. The comparison not only allows us to explore the dynamic interaction between conquest, ideology and language but also helps us to escape the obsessive Anglo-Irish focus that sometimes narrows Irish literary and historical scholarship.

While the usefulness of the model does not require any a priori demonstration of strict parallels between the two sites, significant connections between them exist. Stated most minimally, both were situations of conquest; both involved a cross-cultural encounter where languages met headlong. But the parallels are not, in fact, so minimal. Spain and England shared the intellectual and philosophical background of Renaissance humanism which influenced both groups' assumptions about language, eloquence and civility. Both

were centres of linguistic excitement. Moreover, Quinn, Canny and others have shown that Elizabethan theorists and makers of Irish policy such as Sir Thomas Smith and Sir Henry Sidney – Queen Mary's emissary to Spain from 1553 to 1556 – were familiar with and influenced by the Spanish model of colonisation (Quinn, 'Renaissance Influences'; Canny, *Elizabethan Conquest*, pp. 66, 85). Those lacking direct contact were familiar with the Spanish model through the abundant translations of Spanish travel and promotional literature (Pennington, 'Promotional Literature', p. 179; Steele, *English Interpreters*).[1] Ellis emphasises how emulation of Spain encouraged the development of English colonial policy, awakening 'latent colonialist attitudes' there. In consequence, the older idea of Ireland as a borderland gave way to the idea of it as an 'old colony . . . ripe for plantation in accordance with recent colonial theory', with adventurers like Humphrey Gilbert increasingly coming to see Ireland 'as a New World ripe for colonisation on the Spanish model' (*Tudor Ireland*, pp. 249, 255). Moreover, Englishmen consciously drew parallels between the Irish and native Americans (Muldoon, 'Indian as Irishman'). When Shane O'Neill entered the court of Elizabeth with galloglasses attired in saffron shirts and 'rough hairy Clokes', the courtiers 'admired no lesse, than they should at this day to see those of China, or America' (Camden, *Annales*, p. 90). The author of 'The Newe Metamorphosis' opined that 'like brutish Indians, these wylde Irish live / . . . cruell and bloody, barbarous and rude' (Lyon, p. 76); Fynes Moryson imagined Ireland as an 'Island in the Virginian Sea' (*Itinerary*, pt 3, p. 156); Richard Boyle, newly arrived in Cork, marvelled at being 'dropped here into a New World' (Canny, *Upstart Earl*, p. 11). The shared intellectual background of English and Spanish colonial planners ensured that, for all the dissimilarities between Munster and Michoacán, there were notable coincidences – as well as interesting variations – in both powers' attitudes to language and its management in a colonial context.

Moreover, by the century's end, men who had cut their teeth in the Munster plantation graduated from colonial apprenticeship there to direct competition with the Spanish in the New World, thereby opening a decisive chapter in European linguistic expansion. The Argentinian Mignolo's anxiety to inscribe Spain's contribution to 'the darker side of the Renaissance' into the mainstream of postcolonial discourse prompted him to write his book of that title in English. To write in Spanish, he avers, 'means, at this time, to

remain at the margin of contemporary theoretical discussions' (p. viii). The implication is that the great colonising language of the sixteenth century enters the twenty-first intellectually marginalised by the language which, four centuries earlier, was, almost unnoticed, rehearsing in its small-scale Irish venture the manœuvres of linguistic expansion that it would soon extend to America and beyond.

Christopher Colombus made landfall, on 12 October 1492, on a small island which he immediately christened San Salvador. The linguistic – and, of course, territorial – conquest of the New World begins with naming. Calvet identifies this *droit de nommer* as an unfailing gesture of all imperialisms (*Linguistique*, p. 57). The expedition's interpreter, Luís de Torres, recruited for his command of Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, came face to face with the limits of the Old World's languages when he tried to parley with the Arawak-speaking Tainos. America, especially South America, is remarkably diverse linguistically: 170 major language families subdivide into an estimated 2,000 distinct tongues (Martinell Gifre, *Aspectos*, p. 108).

From the outset, language difference was bound up in the discourse of difference which guided Europeans' interpretations of the New World. The 'brave new world' that the Spanish had discovered was, in almost every way, an altogether strange and unfamiliar one. In Mexico and Peru, they confronted dazzling empires at the height of their powers. But the Spanish had not come to learn from, much less admire, the unexpected continent which their mariners had chanced upon: they came to build 'Nueva España', 'Nueva Granada'. To justify the overthrow of the existing civilisations and their replacement by Spain's brand of Christianity and capitalism, strangeness and difference could not be surveyed neutrally. What was different had to be adjudged imperfect, inferior and savage. Then it could be transformed – or destroyed.

The colonial discourse of difference – the discursive reflex of 'renaissance anthropology' – is possible only when the boundaries that separate self and other, and recognise the integrity of that separation, are transgressed. The colonist, no longer content to acknowledge the autonomy of the other's discourse, extends the bounds of his discursive space and presumes to include – and evaluate – the other and his cultural attributes according to the

values of the metropolitan culture. That annexation sets in train a whole sequence of evaluations – including the evaluation of language. Affergan traces the process that draws the other away from autonomous individuality, from evaluation on his own terms, into the colonist's system of classification and meaning. The radically distinct other is ontologically resistant to any attempted reductive appropriation and stands apart, 'irrepérable, ni adversaire, ni colonisé, ni dominant, ni dominé, ni assimilable, ni modèle' (*Exotisme*, p. 85). But the colonial impulse is to classify such an entity according to a scale of likeness and difference, in what Affergan calls '[la] réduction forcée de l'altérité en différences' (p. 78). The discourse of difference operates by simultaneously devaluing the other and – in an impulse that joins cause with nationalism – validating the self. The distinctness and opacity of the other is denied; it is translated into a system of differences that domesticates him and, in calibrating his points of resemblance or deviation, prepares for his assimilation or conquest. The discourse builds up a pattern of paired contrasts, pitting the perfections of the self and his civilisation (taken, in a manner guaranteed to fix the results, as the standard) against the – thereby inevitable – imperfections of the other.

Once set on a European-graduated scales, the Indian could be measured – and found wanting. Judgement was delivered as a label – 'barbarian', 'cannibal', 'savage' – which undid the selfhood of the other. The labelling, the (mis-)naming involved in this reductive classification, was an eminently linguistic act: behind the name stood a colonial language strategy, not an individual. And a key term in the colonial classification was language: the barbarian's tongue. Judgements about language were central to the discourse of difference. To meet the impenetrability of a foreign language is to face otherness in one of its most intractable manifestations. Until race emerged, in the seventeenth century, as the standard measurement of difference, religion and language were its markers: differences in them 'touched the Renaissance European to the quick' (Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 418, 214). Caught up in the discourse of difference, indigenous speech was subjected to a kind of colonially skewed comparative linguistics. It was evaluated not on its own terms but as an index of otherness – and of deficiency.

By the time the Spanish came to judge the Amerindian languages, they could draw on a tradition of thinking about language that represented the merging and continuing elaboration of Greek and

Judeo-Christian theories of language. Europe had long practice in attaching the epithet 'barbarous' to 'tongue' and, through that pairing, making language a key term in defining 'barbarism'. Far from being just another item in the classification, language was central to bringing the discourse of difference into being. Barbarism itself, etymologically rooted in *barbaros*, the babbling outsider unable to speak Greek, is 'a concept grounded in linguistic difference' (Pagden, *Fall*, p. 179; cf. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*). Without the barbarous tongue, there was no barbarian. The Judeo-Christian tradition, brooding on the legacy of Babel, brought a more systematically pessimistic conception of language. Babel begot not just linguistic confusion but linguistic degeneracy. Classical and biblical views of language had merged by the late Middle Ages (Jones, 'Image', p. 389). In providing the founding myths of Renaissance linguistics, they placed strong associations between language and notions of degeneracy and barbarism at the heart of European thinking about language.

The concept of the 'barbarous tongue' presupposes, at a stroke, a hierarchy of both languages and societies. There are, it suggests, civil societies with civil tongues and barbarian societies with barbarous tongues. The connection is seen as causal. The belief that civil tongues begot civil societies was widely accepted from antiquity onwards. Cicero argued that eloquence led men from native savagery to civility (Greenblatt, 'Learning to Curse', p. 565). For Aquinas, only *communicatio*, civil and persuasive exchange, could build a civil society. Barbarians, by definition defective in such conversation – Aquinas held that they did not speak a systematic language – were correspondingly cut off from sophisticated social organisation (Pagden, *Fall*, pp. 23, 127; Borst, *Medieval Worlds*, p. 9). Once the equation is made between the level of communication practised by a society and that society's stage of development, it becomes possible to use communication itself as a yardstick for ranking societies: the first becomes an index of the second. Although, ostensibly, Aquinas' theory credits language with bringing civil society into being, the attribution – especially as it was later exploited by colonial apologists – is somewhat disingenuous. The real cynosure is not civil language but civil society. The flattering of its language works by back formation. What is being vaunted is reality, a European reality. Mignolo points out that sixteenth-century Spain enjoyed 'the economic and political power that made possible the

universalization of regional values' (*Darker Side*, p. 19). Language at its fullest development will be commensurate with that – purely regional – reality and will express it adequately.[2] Conversely, a language will be found defective if it fails to correspond with that reality. This equation was grounded in the theory – or theories – of language which governed Renaissance Europe's understanding of the connection between language and 'reality'.

That connection was, according to Foucault's sweeping character-isation of the sixteenth-century episteme, one which indentured language to the world through analogical correspondences (*Order of Things*, p. 35). Only in the seventeenth century, runs the necessary companion-piece to this argument, is language 'discovered' as a maker of meanings (Cohen, *Sensible Words*, p. 25). Such dichotomous thinking, however, obscures the dynamism with which language was being re-imagined by both theorists and practitioners well before 1600. True, sixteenth-century Europe's inherited paradigm of how language worked was referential. Meaning was transcendent; language was nomenclature: words simply named pre-existent mean-ings. Nonetheless, the age of lexical exuberance and prolific inven-tiveness that runs from Rabelais to Cervantes anxiously fretted that words were spinning free of extra-linguistic correlatives. A loss of confidence in the power of words to connect with a priori meanings meant that 'words, words, words' – and not just Hamlet's – were haunted by a sense of 'vacuité sémantique' (Dubois, *Mythe*, pp. 40–1). Intellectuals like Richard Hooker were coming to recog-nise that, far from inhering in language, meaning was conventional and cultural (Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, pp. 30–7). A gap was being prised open between *res* and *verba*.

In *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, Richard Waswo shows how humanist philology set in motion a process which destabilised the relationship between word and thing to produce 'a generally altered consciousness of language' (p. 113). By uncovering the flux of Latin in time, Lorenzo Valla had effectively demonstrated that language was the socio-historical construct of a speech community. Valla's realisation that language was 'cognitive, contingent, and semantically constitutive' (p. 102) sparked off what Waswo calls the 'Renaissance semantic shift' (p. 60). Comparative linguistics, too, was pointing up the agency of individual tongues in making culturally specific meanings. In demonstrating that seeming synonyms like '*homo*' and '*anthropos*' signified subtly different things, Juan Luis Vives

was implicitly showing that different languages functioned differently (p. 124). But the shift from referential to relational semantics – from seeing language as representing 'Reality' to seeing it creating *a* reality – was faltering and produced only what Waswo calls an 'abortive intellectual revolution': the historical constructedness of language was accepted empirically by comparative philologists and translators when working with real languages but it remained irreconcilable, as a theory, with the prevailing ontological metaphysics (p. 132). This produced an often creative 'tension between language *treated* as creating meaning and *conceived* as but containing it' (p. 125).

Both the dominant and the emerging conception of how language worked gave considerable latitude for judgemental comparisons between languages – but they fixed the limits of those evaluations very differently. Du Bellay's unquestioning assumption that words simply named a reality that anteceded them places him firmly among the referentialists. Nonetheless, his espousal of the essential equality of all languages did not stop him recognising the untranslatable 'je ne scay quoy' of each or acknowledging that some languages had, with time and cultivation, become 'richer' than others (*Deffence*, pp. 36, 13). Comparison could be competitive. Lascari, one of the participants in Speroni's 'Dialogo delle lingue', held that 'Diuerse lingue sono atte à significare diuersi concetti' (different tongues are fitted to express different concepts), some learned, some not (*I Dialogi*, fo. 125v). Criteria for adjudication were to hand. Godfrey Goodman, James's I's chaplain, had clear 'heads' – pronunciation, lexical adequacy, cognitive patterns – for judging 'base and barbarous' tongues:

some of them [are] very harsh in pronunciation, that a man must wrong his owne visage, and disfigure himselfe to speake them: others without grauitie or wisdome in their first imposition, consisting only of many bare, and simple tearmes, not reduced to any certaine fountaines, or heads, which best resembleth nature: Many of them hindring mans thoughts, and wanting a sufficie[n]t plentie of words, cannot significantly expresse the quicknes of inuention, or liuelily expresse an action: some giuing way to fallacies and sophistrie, through Tautologies, ambiguous words, darke sentences; others inclining to ribaldrie, and luxurious speech. (*Fall of Man*, pp. 293–4)

Goodman's subscription to the traditional semantics, however, meant that while he acknowledged 'fallen' languages' imperfections

and inequalities, he remained convinced of their common origin and perfectibility. Referential semantics with its faith in the existence of universal meanings and a common Adamic origin set limits on the differences conceivable between languages. No such limits were set by relational semantics. If a language mapped not the divine order of things but the mental and cultural world of its speakers, its scope for singularity and divergence was considerable. To encounter an unknown language was to journey into an alien world. Evaluation conducted under the sign of relational semantics opened up the possibility of finding not a deep-down similitude guaranteed by transcendent meanings but an unsettlingly different universe of meanings. Waswo confines his exploration of the shift from representational to relational semantics to the major European languages. But, if historical and comparative philology within Europe challenged confidence in the existence of a unified meaning beyond – but accessible through – language, the 'langages pellegrins' far to the west could only undermine it further. As we shall see in Ireland, too, the encounter with language difference and the evaluations it provoked would challenge and re-shape colonial intellectuals' understanding of how language worked.

Our immediate concern lies with how Europeans' contradictory ideas about the way language *meant* influenced their evaluation of New World languages. On the one hand, a correspondence theory oriented evaluators towards measuring the adequacy of native languages to express meanings understood to be universal; its focus was on *copia* and precision. On the other hand, an inchoate recognition that language itself created meaning placed evaluators in the position of judging not just the adequacy of a language to articulate 'reality' but also the potential of such languages anarchically to make their own heterodox meanings. In Europe, as Waswo shows, the line between whether language represented meaning or constituted it was never clearly drawn: a discursive practice that recognised the instrumentality of words in generating meaning remained hitched to a theory that saw meaning as transcendent (*Language and Meaning*, p. 153). In evaluating the languages of others, too, I suggest, the two positions criss-crossed. Europeans' almost unquestioned theoretical subscription to an isomorphic view of language, allied to their robust conviction that their language was in perfect alignment with reality, left space only at the margins for indigenous languages. Lacunae in native languages' correspondence to European meanings were