Common Sense without a Common Language? 
Peirce and Reid on the Challenge of Linguistic Diversity

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

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“Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought.” (CP 5.314)
“Quintus Ennius tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece et Osce et Latine scire.” (“Quintus Ennius said of himself he had three hearts, because he knew how to speak Greek, Oscan, and Latin.”) (Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae 17.17.1)

Introduction

Charles Peirce, a thinker greatly interested in classification, presents a problem of classification himself. That is, the breadth of his philosophical interests, commitment to an ethics of terminology, deep engagement with the history of philosophy, and experimentalist temperament, can make it difficult to determine which positions he actually held, and at which times. Famously, he re-christened his pragmatism ‘pragmaticism’ to make it safe from kidnappers, but perhaps less generally known is his
characterization of his thought as a ‘Critical Common-sensism’ – an effort to mediate or moderate the Kantian and Reidian reactions to Hume. Peirce offers two overlapping sets of marks distinguishing his Critical Common-sensism, mostly directed against the Common Sense School. However, there is an element of Reid’s Philosophy of Common Sense that Peirce, and most other commentators, neglect: his appeals to universal grammatical features as evidence for common sense beliefs concerning cognition. In other contexts, though, Peirce is as critical of appeals to language as he is of appeals to psychology. Thus, Peirce’s rejection of what may be called linguisticism, as part of his rejection of psychologism, serves as an additional distinguishing mark of his Critical Common-sensism.

In what follows I will briefly discuss Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism, and then turn to Reid’s use of language as a key form of evidence for his account of Common Sense. Then, I will review Peirce’s consistent critique of the ‘Procrustean bed of Latin grammar’; in particular, how philosophers have limited their study to a small, and in Peirce’s assessment ‘peculiar,’ set of world languages. This Procrustean Bed has constrained how speakers of European languages have thought about logical topics, especially the nature of propositions, and the tendency to force other grammars to fit into Latin categories has hidden the diversity of language. Furthermore, Peirce often suggests some form of linguistic determinism or relativity; at minimum, that language conditions thought. Thus, while philosophy is independent of linguistics for Peirce, it is not independent of language, and the question remains what is left of common sense once we appreciate how different languages can be.

Peirce’s Characters of Critical Common-Sensism

Peirce’s 1905 “What Pragmatism Is” opens with both a restatement of how ‘pragmatism’ grew out of his own experiences as an experimental scientist and an appeal that philosophers adopt an ethics of terminology:

[...] the general feeling shall be that he who introduces a new conception into philosophy is under an obligation to invent acceptable terms to express it, and that when he has done so, the duty of his fellow-students is to accept those terms, and to resent any wresting of them from their original meanings, as not only a gross discourtesy to him to whom philosophy was indebted for each conception, but also as an injury to philosophy itself.

This general feeling, plus the suggestion to use -ci as an infix indicating a more specific form of a doctrine, gives birth to ‘pragmaticism’ as a doctrine related to, yet distinct from, those of William James and Ferdinand Schiller, and even more distinct from its abuse by the literary. What makes pragmaticism more specific? It both limits itself to a maxim for determining the meaning of a concept, which Peirce believes provides a better possibility of developing a critical proof, and connects to at least two other doctrines: Critical Common-sensism and Scholastic Realism.

In the next article of the series, “Issues of Pragmaticism,” Peirce asserts these two doctrines “[...] were defended by the writer about nine years before the formulation of pragmaticism [but] may be treated as consequences of the latter belief.” He then offers six distinguishing characters:

Character I: “Critical Common-sensism admits that there not only are indubitable propositions but also that there are indubitable inferences.”

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Character II: A list of indubitable propositions could be drawn up, with only slight changes from generation to generation.6

Character III: “[...] one thing the Scotch failed to recognize is that the original beliefs only remain indubitable in their application to affairs that resemble those of a primitive mode of life.”7

Character IV: Acritically indubitable beliefs are invariably vague.8

Character V: These indubitable beliefs must be subject to rigorous examination, and even after be regarded as fallible.

Character VI: “Critical Common-sensism may fairly lay claim to this title for two sorts of reasons; namely, that on the one hand it subjects four opinions to rigid criticism: its own; that of the Scotch school; that of those who would base logic or metaphysics on psychology or any other special science, the least tenable of all the philosophical opinions that have any vogue; and that of Kant; while on the other hand it has besides some claim to be called Critical from the fact that it is but a modification of Kantism.”9

6 Peirce must offer these modifications both to represent his own position and to allay the fears of critics convinced that these two doctrines, “[...] the two rival and opposed ways of answering Hume, are at internecine war, impacificable.”10 At this point, it may seem that Critical Common-sensism is more distinct from the Philosophy of Common Sense than Kant’s Critical Philosophy, but Peirce offers a potentially severe caveat: “The Kantist has only to abjure from the bottom of his heart the proposition that a thing-in-itself can, however indirectly, be conceived; and then correct the details of Kant’s doctrine accordingly, and he will find himself to have become a Critical Common-sensist.”11 That is, removing the ding-an-sich from Kant’s project might demand a complete overhaul rather than a tidying up of details.12

7 This focus on Reid is due, in part, to Peirce’s own shifting preferences.13 In 1864 he wrote that “I hold the Doctrine of Common Sense to be well fitted to Reid’s philosophical caliber and about as effective against any of the honored systems of philosophy as a potato-poppun’s contents might be against Gibraltar.”14 Five years later he added “Scotch school of philosophy [...] is too old a tree to bear good fruit.”15 However, by 1905 Peirce had revised his assessment and held Reid to be a “subtle but well-balanced intellect [...] in the matter of Common Sense.”16 While subtle and well-balanced, Reid lacked Peirce’s logical skill, especially concerning the logic of relatives and the logic of vagueness, and an appreciation for evolution. Our original beliefs, and acritical inferences, are of the nature of instincts; in particular, instincts developed in ‘primitive modes’ of life. This should not be taken to mean only the plains of Africa, as in simplistic forms of evolutionary psychology, as Peirce notes that some of our common sense beliefs “of such a character that they can hardly have entered the minds, say, of Neanderthal men”17 Peirce suggests these ‘primitive’ ways of life are simply our everyday embodied world of “moderate-sized specimens of dry goods.”18 However, “[m]odern science, with its microscopes and telescopes, [...] has put us into quite another world [...]” and this new world surpasses the adequacy of our common sense beliefs, at least without just criticism.19 Thus, we risk illegitimately importing the practical certainty of our common sense beliefs into domains where they are ill-suited. Furthermore, Reid perhaps overestimates the reliability of our common sense beliefs even within their proper domain, because of his commitment to a form of Providential Naturalism.20 After Darwin, though, we are on safer ground considering people adequately endowed by evolution, rather than well-endowed by our Creator.
In short, Peirce considered Reid’s Philosophy of Common Sense insufficiently fallibilist, in large part due to coming before intellectual and scientific developments with which Peirce was intimately familiar. However, there is another element of Reid’s characterization and defense of Common Sense of which Peirce could have been more critical: his appeals to language.

**Reid’s Common Sense as Grammatical Universals**

As suggested above, Peirce’s pragmaticism deserves the specifying infix in part because it is not a doctrine of metaphysics – “It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts.” Furthermore, Peirce advocates an ethics of terminology modeled on the taxonomic sciences because he sees this as one key to their successful advancement. Reid believes this as well: “There is no greater impediment to the advancement of knowledge than the ambiguity of words. To this chiefly it is owing that we find sects and parties in most branches of science, and disputes which are carried on from age to age, without being brought to an issue.”

Reid considers philosophers especially prone to this error, as they create ambiguity through using common sense words in uncommon senses:

But if [a philosopher] puts a different meaning upon a word, without observing it himself, or giving warning to others; he abuses language, and disgraces philosophy, without doing service to truth: as if a man should exchange the meaning of the words *daughter* and *cow*, and then endeavor to prove to his plain neighbor, that is *cow* is his daughter, and his daughter his *cow*.

This care for language is an important element of Reid’s critique of the “way of ideas” as a philosophy contrary to Common Sense. For example, “Perhaps it was unfortunate for Mr Locke that he used the word *idea* so very frequently as to make it very difficult to give the attention necessary to put it always to the same meaning.” In particular, while Locke does note that he includes *phantasm*, *notion*, and *species* under *idea*, on Reid’s view he fails to note that this equivocation collapses common sense distinctions between the activity of thought and its external objects under the philosophical conception of *idea* as an immediate or internal object. This Lockean legerdemain culminates in Hume’s contention that there is *nothing but ideas* (perceptions distinguished into impressions and ideas only by their own force and vivacity). Again, for Reid this violates the common sense belief that thinkers are distinct from the activity of thought, and both are distinct from the external objects of thought.

However, what interests us here is one of the forms of evidence to which Reid appeals – not only is this tripartite distinction an instinctive common sense belief, but also “It is impossible to trace the origin of this opinion in history: for all languages it interwoven in their original construction.” That is, we know this to be a universal judgment of humanity because it is represented in all languages. This claim is from Reid’s *Inquiry*, but he expands upon it in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*:

In all ages, and in all languages, ancient and modern, the various modes of thinking have been expressed by words of active signification, such as seeing, hearing, reasoning, willing, and the like. It seems, therefore, to be the natural judgment of mankind that the mind is active in its various ways of thinking; and for this reason they are called its *operations*, and are expressed by *active* verbs.

Furthermore:
Such operations are, in all languages, expressed by active transitive verbs; and we know that, in all languages, such verbs require a thing or person, which is the agent, and a noun following in an oblique case, which is the object. Whence it is evident that all mankind, both those who have contrived language, and those who use it with understanding, have distinguished these three things as different, – to wit, the operations of the mind, which are expressed by active verbs, the mind itself, which is the nominative to those verbs, and the object, which is, in the oblique case, governed by them.

Again, Reid finds definitive evidence against the ‘way of ideas’ not only in his version of phenomenology, or in instinctive beliefs, but in the grammar of “all languages.” Thus, Locke and other modern philosophers violate common sense both in their use of words in some philosophical meaning rather than their common sense one, with inevitable tacit sliding across these meanings, but also cause confusion by using these words within grammars that presuppose common sense distinctions among act, agent, and patient.

One more example: “There are philosophers who maintain [...] that a body is nothing but a collection of what we call sensible qualities; and that they neither have nor need any subject.” Here Reid’s directly targets Bishop Berkeley and Mr. Hume, and characteristically he rejects their belief “that there should be extension without any thing extended” as an absurdity contrary to a self-evident dictate of his nature. However, Reid is not arguing for a some subjective idealism here, as Berkeley would at least accept that these sensible qualities require a perceiving subject. Instead, the ‘subject’ needed is a grammatical one, corresponding to an external object:

And that it is the belief of all mankind appears in the structures of all languages; which we find adjective nouns used to express sensible qualities. It is well known that every adjective in language must belong to some substantive expressed or understood; that is, every quality must belong to some subject.

Furthermore, Reid contends that if ascribing sensible qualities to subjects were a prejudice, and not an innate principle of our nature, we should see not only individual variation in this belief, but also variations across ages and nations: “[...] but we find no such difference among men. What one man accounts a quality, all men do, and ever did.”

Perhaps Reid is overstating his case here, for Berkeley and Hume do deny this ‘self-evident’ principle. More generally, Reid acknowledges abnormal variations (‘lunacy’) in belief, but considers these disorders irrelevant to the overall reliability of our senses and common sense judgments. In the more polemical voice of his Inquiry, Reid even sides with the vulgar against those philosophers who deny an external world: “[...] too much learning is apt to make men mad; and that the man who seriously entertains this belief, though in other respects he may be a very good man, as a man may be who believes that he is made of glass; yet surely he hath a soft place in his understanding, and hath been hurt by much thinking.” Of course, we do not have to go so far, and even Reid notes approvingly that Hume backs away from from such skeptical conclusions. While Berkeley and Hume are not on par with a man who believes he is made of glass, they do misuse language.

Reid’s commitment to language is strong enough that he makes it one of his fundamental methodological principles. The chief source of knowledge about mind is introspective or phenomenological – “accurate” or “attentive” reflection, in Reid’s parlance. However, there are two subsidiary sources of knowledge: “attention to the structure of language” and “a due attention to the course of human actions and opinions.” Commentators on Reid typically focus on his distinction between acquired and natural language, the latter being
a universally comprehensible set of natural signs (facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tones), to the neglect of his appeals to universal grammatical features.\textsuperscript{38} Reid is clear that this is a fallible source of knowledge regarding the human mind, given the variations in languages, “[b]ut whatever we find common to all languages must have a common cause; must be owing to some common notion or sentiment of the human mind.”\textsuperscript{39} Finally, this principle returns in the essay on Judgment as part of the third means of determining what is a First Principle:

There are other opinions that appear to be universal, from what is common in the structure of all languages. Language is the express image and picture of human thoughts; and from the picture we may draw some certain conclusions concerning the original. We find in all languages the same parts of speech; we find nouns, substantive and adjective; verbs, active and passive, in their various tenses, numbers, and moods. Some rules of syntax are the same in all languages.\textsuperscript{40}

Unfortunately, Reid provides no particular examples of these cross-linguistic universals, in the sense of actual comparative linguistics. Furthermore, I have found no indication that Reid was familiar with languages beyond Scots, English, and the philosophical quartet of French, German, Greek, and Latin. This is unsurprising, as in Reid’s day linguistics was just developing as its own field, and philology remained largely devoted to Biblical and Classical texts. In contrast, Peirce was an accomplished, though amateur, linguist, who studied non-Indo-European languages ranging from Arabic to Tagalog.\textsuperscript{41} His linguistic pursuits led Peirce to a different conclusion regarding the value of linguistics for philosophy, as we shall now see.

**Peirce and Linguistics**

Articulating Peirce's conception of common sense, and thereby his Critical Common-sensism, requires understanding his rejection of psychologism, the notion that logic rests upon psychology. We may first distinguish between two forms of psychologism: the first concerns grounding logic (solely) upon psychological facts, and the second concerns grounding logic upon psychological results; i.e., psychology as a special science. Regarding the former, Peirce’s illustrative target is Christoph Sigwart, who “says that the question of what is good logic and what bad must be in the last resort come down to the question of how we feel: it is a matter of Gefühl, that is, a Quality of Feeling.”\textsuperscript{42} Peirce consistently lambasts the “German logicians,” again, of which Sigwart is a key example, for reducing logical necessity to a psychological compulsion. While this is not the place to examine Peirce’s arguments against this view, it is important to note his characterization of the forces with which he aligns himself:

In reasoning, however, your opinion [student of logic] is that we have the singular phenomenon of a physiological function which is open to approval and disapproval. In this you are supported by universal common sense, by the traditional logic, and by English logicians as a body. But you are in opposition to German logicians generally, who seldom notice fallacy, conceiving human reason to be an ultimate tribunal which cannot err.\textsuperscript{43}

There is no particular reason to think Peirce is appealing to Reid here, but in Reidian style he contends the German tendency to reduce logicality to feeling violates “universal common sense.”

The first form of psychologism thoroughly subjectivizes logic by reducing validity to feeling, while maintaining a veneer of objective necessity by allowing no tribunal other
than feeling. The second form of psychologism also threatens logic’s autonomy by basing it upon the scientific results of psychology, in violation of Peirce’s principles of classification. For Peirce, both German (e.g., Wolff) and English (e.g., Mill) logicians make the error of reducing logic to psychology, an error which confounds how we ought to reason with how we must reason, or at least with how an immature science thinks we must reason. These elements of Peirce’s anti-psychologism are well known. Less remarked upon, however, is his rejection of what may be called linguisticism, or the tendency to base logic upon linguistics. Again, this is a mistake made by Sigwart, “who holds that logical questions must ultimately be decided by immediate feeling, and that the usages of the German language are the best evidence of what that feeling is.” As Peirce notes, this appeal to language causes several problems, starting at the level of vocabulary: “The difficulty of the, at best, difficult problem of the essential nature of a Proposition has been increased, for the Germans, by their Urtheil, confounding, under one designation, the mental assertion with the assertible.” In other words, this term confounds the psychological act of judgment with the logical nature of a proposition, which may be asserted – judged to be true – or not. In Peirce’s estimation, English, though a “pirate-lingo” deficient in some areas compared to French and German, provides more accurate terminology because it maintains distinctions drawn from the Scholastics even in common speech. However, the particular strengths of English can be diluted by translations based upon similar spellings rather than similar meanings. Confusing the form of a word with its content can even happen within the same language, especially over time: “[...] modern readers forget that two or three centuries ago words still familiar suggested quite different ideas from those the same words now suggest.” Again, clarifying the meaning of words so as to ensure proper use is one of Peirce’s abiding concerns, as seen in his ethics of terminology and the pragmatic maxim itself. Indeed, since Peirce adopts a dialogic view of the self, attention to language is not only important for communication with others, but also for communicating with ourselves: “[...] so it is wrong to say that a good language is important to good thought, merely; for it is of the essence of it.”

21 Thus far, Peirce has much in common with Reid. That is, both criticize other philosophers for insufficient attention to terminology, thereby causing confusion in at least two ways: 1) Putting idiosyncratic meanings on common words, whether explicitly or not. 2) Neglecting changes or differences in meanings across languages or over time due to similar spellings, as when Locke blends the Platonic ἰδέα, Cartesian idée, and English idea.

22 These semantic confusions are compounded by the use of common expressions and metaphors, as when ideas are in our mind, though minds are supposedly nothing more than a bundle of perceptions. Likewise, how can ideas present themselves before us when they are passive copies of impressions? For Reid, the near-impossibility of discussing the mind without using subjects, actions, and objects, even by those committed to collapsing these distinctions, supports Common Sense over philosophy. Finally, Peirce was not immune to Reidian appeals to linguistic universals, such as the following: 1) All languages have (largely) replaced mimicry with conventional auditory signs. 2) All languages must have proper nouns and pronouns. 3) All languages use a metaphor of ‘inclusion’ to express logical entailment.
4) All languages make cardinals the fundamental numbers: “Any person whose head is not cracked by too much study of logic will say without hesitation that the cardinals are the original numbers. It is common-sense, and common-sense is the safest guide.” Nonetheless, even if common-sense is the safest guide, overall Peirce was as skeptical of appealing to language to sort out philosophical issues as he was of appealing to psychology:

Appeals to the usages of language are extremely common. They are made even by those who use algebraical notation in logic “in order to free the mind from the trammels of speech” (Schröder, Logik, i. p. iii). It is difficult to see what can be hoped for from such a proceeding, unless it be to establish a psychological proposition valid for all minds. But to do this, it would be necessary to look beyond the small and very peculiar class of Aryan languages, to which the linguistic knowledge of most of those writers is confined. The Semitic languages, with which some of them are acquainted, are too similar to the Aryan greatly to enlarge their horizon. Moreover, even if other languages are examined, the value of any logical inferences from them is much diminished by the custom of our grammarians of violently fitting them to the Procrustean bed of Aryan grammar. Accordingly, Peirce in principle agrees with Reid’s appeal to universal grammatical features, if there are any – but no one has made a truly universal survey of languages. Instead, a half dozen European languages, with perhaps Aramaic or Hebrew as outliers, have been taken as a sufficient basis for universal claims. I will say more about why these languages are peculiar, by Peirce’s estimation, below. Peirce, characteristically, sought to remedy in himself a flaw he saw in the reasoning of others, and did attempt to study languages outside of the Indo-European family, including Arabic, Basque, Burmese, Chinese, Nama, Ngarrindjeri, Tagalog, Thai, Tibetan, Sakha, and Xhosa. Nonetheless, Peirce was well aware of his limitations as a linguist – “I have not the learning requisite for the subject.” In addition to being only an amateur linguist, Peirce recognized that studying languages from grammar books is insufficient because of the ever-present Procrustean bed of Latin grammar. That is, even if one were to study a language such as Xhosa, our entry into that language is affected both by our native grammar and the tendency of European grammarians to cut or stretch other languages to fit within Latin categories. “For that reason, it will not suffice to get one’s idea of an uninflected language from any mere grammar. It is necessary to have some real, living acquaintance with it, in order to appreciate its modes of thought, especially since these will be most difficult for us to grasp.” Note again that Peirce suggests an intimate relation between language and modes of thought, a key point to which I will return in the final section.

I have claimed that Peirce goes beyond Reid’s concern with vocabulary to include grammatical structures, with the common ‘philosophical’ languages being ‘peculiar’ by Peirce’s account. Furthermore, these peculiarities delegitimate appeals to language in logic, and perhaps philosophy more broadly: “To treat [propositions] just as they are expressed in this or that language (as Hoppe and some others do) makes of logic a philological, not a philosophical, study. But the canonical forms chosen have been suggested by the usage of a narrow class of languages, and are calculated to lead philosophy astray.” Thus, what makes these languages peculiar? Peirce consistently highlights the prevalence of putting subjects in a nominative case. However, he also notes that exceptions to this are readily found even in European languages: “[...] although within that group they would find modes of thought that would somewhat embarrass them, such as the usage of the Gaelic and Old Irish of putting the subject of a sentence in the genitive.” He continues by asserting that determining “necessities of thought” from
this small group of European languages is “like judging of botanical possibilities by phanerogamous plants.” Ignorant of other modes of thought, those who would base logic or philosophy upon language make a necessity out of their own peculiar contingency. What are some consequences of having a strong nominative case? Peirce remarks upon at least three: first, the belief that a proposition has only one subject, and second, the belief that subjects must be nouns. Regarding the first, Peirce contends against the grammarians that a proposition has one predicate, but can have an indefinite number of subjects. Regarding the second, conceiving of subjects as common nouns or substantive adjectives hides both the essential role of indices in forming propositions, and the broader nature of indices: “Often, too, the index is not of the nature of a noun. It may be, as we have seen, a mere look or gesture.” Third, Peirce will even go so far as to point out superfluosness of the copula, as seen by its absence in many other languages.

These three considerations are fatal to the traditional conception that the essence of a proposition, and therefore the essence of thought by common supposition, is “S is P” and its various concatenations. Peirce asserts that a desire to find some support for this supposed universal motivates his interest in linguistics: “The author (though with no pretension to being a linguist), has fumbled the grammars of many languages in the search for a language constructed at all in the way in which the logicians go out of their way to teach that all men think.” The only candidate he can find is Basque, which has a minimal number of verbs, but this is only one language that almost meets ‘the logicians’ standard, out of dozens Peirce ‘fumbled,’ and thousands in the world; “[t]his seems to refute the logicians’ psychology.” In short, the grammatical predispositions of European languages delayed the development of both the logic of relatives and a broader conception of logic as semeiotic.

The peculiarity of European languages is not all negative for Peirce. Indeed, he claims that the development of common nouns and abstract nouns makes logical and mathematical thinking easier. Unfortunately, he also claims that speakers of language without common nouns are incapable of triadic thought: “With the exercise of a little ingenuity it is possible to express anything in these languages, provided no higher relations than dyadic ones enter. Only very simple propositions can be expressed involving higher relations; and those whose mental education is limited by the powers of these languages are unable to grasp the meaning of a complex triple relation.” This is a bizarre claim, but one Peirce takes seriously. For example, in his “The Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents,” he offers a speculative biography of Pythagoras as one of three applications of his method. The details need not concern us here, other than the novel claim that Pythagoras traveled near the borders of India. This exposure to Indian thought (and mathematics) influenced Pythagoras’ devotion to numbers, in part because of a misunderstanding caused by translation from a non-Aryan language into an Aryan one. Specifically, Peirce suggests the most abstract ideas in this non-Aryan language were numbers, but this idea became substantivized when put into Greek. “[The Pythagorean doctrine of numbers] is not mysticism, then, not devotion to chimeras, but an attempt to interpret an infantile philosophy of some non-Aryan, non-Shemitic thinker.” This may be improbable, and Peirce himself offers it as a mere hypothesis, an example of “abduction under difficulties.” Nonetheless, we do not have to agree with Peirce to work through his ideas, and it is consistent with claims about language and thought he makes elsewhere.
The “S is P” structure of categorical logic was made common sense by European grammars, which brings us to a provocative question: What if Aristotle had been a Mexican? Here is the context: “When Sayce says that ‘had Aristotle been a Mexican, his system of logic would have assumed a wholly different form,’ I am willing to admit that there is a good deal of truth in that. It is lucky that Aristotle’s only language was one that led him into as few errors as did the Greek.” Here Peirce considers linguists who claim that logic must rest upon linguistics; in particular, Heymann Steinthal (1823-99) and Reverend Archibald Henry Sayce (1845-1933). Peirce quotes volume 2 of Sayce’s 1880 An Introduction to the Science of Language, which includes gems such as “The philosophy of speech, in the hands of the Greeks, suffered from the introduction of logic into grammar, and revenge was taken by grounding logic upon the definitions of an imperfect grammar.” Sayce highlights some of the same imperfections as Peirce, such as “[t]he division of a sentence into two parts, the subject and the predicate, is a mere accident.” Not only would Aristotle’s logic been wholly different if he were a Mexican (in this context, Sayce probably means a Nahuan, an indigenous Mesoamerican), if he spoke a language from the Ural-Altaic family he would not have incorrectly analyzed negative propositions! However, Sayce goes too far when he implies that logic should rest upon even comparative philology. Instead, Peirce concludes that appeals to language are “inadequate and deceptive evidence” of human psychology, and even if we could determine human psychology by studying language the results would be “utterly useless for the investigation of logical questions.”

Conclusion

How does this bear upon common sense? As I showed above, Thomas Reid’s Philosophy of Common Sense rests, in part, on appeals to supposed linguistics universals. In contrast, Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism must be critical of any such claims. This is one reason why Peirce’s phenomenology, the first division of philosophy, “[...] contents itself with so much of experience as pours in upon every man during every hour of his waking life.” Furthermore, it offers another reason for re-christening his phenomenology as phaneroscopy. Hegel’s conception of phenomenology, to which the ethics of terminology suggests we should defer, runs the risk of articulating the development of Geist along the logic of German prepositions. In contrast, Peirce’s phaneroscopy is a more humble affair, concerning no more – but also no less – than the cenopythagorean categories. Philosophy, especially a philosophy of Critical Common Sense, is a cenoscopic science that rests upon observing daily normal experience, and so while it may “[glance] now and then” at idioscopic sciences like psychology and linguistics, it cannot be justified by those sciences.

Perhaps Reid intended his appeals to universal linguistic features as merely indications of common sense beliefs, rather than a justification for particular common sense beliefs. However, this is in clear tension with his making it one of the primary sources of knowledge regarding the human mind. In addition, it is unclear whether there are any linguistic universals. Even Peirce’s own example of a vague common sense belief – “fire burns” – utilizes the very subject-predicate structure he sees as holding back the development of logic. That is, this simple proposition presupposes an ontology in which fire is a thing distinct from the action of burning. This grammatically-supported intuition led to phlogiston, “[t]he most unhappy of physical theories.” Fire is not a thing, but
rather a process. Furthermore, it is doubtful this ‘common sense’ belief could be directly translated into every other language, for either semantic or syntactic reasons. We are on sturdier ground with the set of experiences denoted by this proposition, but if our ‘modes of thought’ are conditioned by our language, as Peirce consistently claims, then ‘our’ interpretation of this set of experiences may not be the same as those conditioned by different grammars.\(^{29}\) Again, “fire burns” is vague enough to be indubitable, and yet still determined by English grammar to mislead as to the nature of propositions.

Peirce is clear that logic, and philosophy in general, cannot rely upon linguistics. However, philosophy must inevitably rely upon language. This paper opens with Peirce’s claim that “my language is the sum total of myself” and throughout I have emphasized other claims committing Peirce to some form of linguistic determinism (e.g., the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”).\(^{85}\) Here is one more: “A person who has learned to think in beta graphs has ideas of the utmost clearness and precision which it is practically impossible to communicate to the mind of a person who has not that advantage.”\(^{87}\) Regardless of how we answer the question of Peirce’s linguistic determinism, we must reckon with how his Critical Common-sensism differs from Reid’s Philosophy of Common Sense in not only coming after Darwin, but also in coming after Humboldt. While we should not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our linguistic hearts, it is unclear how much common sense is left when we recognize how diverse languages, and therefore thinkers, are. Of course, this is a call for further inquiry, as diagnosing a problem is only one step in possibly solving it. I think it also shows that a truly Critical Common-sensism requires a call for further inquirers, especially from cultures and languages underrepresented, if not simply ignored, in philosophy. Our charitable interest in an indefinite community of inquiry should not fail to include people past and present while hoping for those to come.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

2. “For two centuries we have been affixing -ist and -ism to words, in order to note sects which exalt the importance of those elements which the stemwords signify” (CP 7.565). The earliest use of “linguisticism” I have found is by R. G. Pote in 1857, but there it refers to phonetic dating. The earliest use in roughly the sense meant here seems to be (Shurman et al., 1943): “These are the sophisms of our day: psychologism, sociologism, historicism, linguisticism — pseudo-philosophies claiming the support of science, itself the acme of human wisdom” (208). Colin Koopman uses ‘linguisticism’ to mark Rorty’s neopragmatism as distinct from the focus on experience by the ‘primapragmatists’; e.g.: “A number of pragmatists have as a result come dangerously near to foundationalism in relying on a metaphysics of experience to guard themselves against Rorty’s linguisticism” (Koopman 2007: 699; see also Koopman 2011). Alexander and Koopman use “lingualism,” following Brandom, in a European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy symposium on “Language or Experience” in American pragmatism (see Hildebrand 2014). This is an important set of essays concerning some of the questions I raise here, though I cover much different ground.
3. CP 5.413 [1905]. For more on Peirce’s ethics of terminology, see Haack 2009.
4. CP 5.439 [1905]. Accepting “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878) as the first explicit formulation of the pragmatic maxim leads us to expect to find Critical Common-sensism (though not by that name) and Scholastic Realism in the 1868-9 Journal of Speculative Philosophy series. However, if Peirce here refers to his 1871 Berkeley review, or meetings of the Metaphysical Club around that time, Critical Common-sensism could be found in the early 1860s. Indeed, some elements appear in manuscripts such as “A Treatise on Metaphysics” (W1:57-84, 1861-2) and “On the Doctrine of Immediate Perception” (W1:153-5, 1864). Despite this, on Peirce’s own account he defended Scholastic Realism in “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (1869) and the 1871 Berkeley Review “[…] before he had formulated, even in his own mind, the principle of pragmaticism […]” (CP 5.453 [1905]), so these earlier manuscripts are likely excluded.
5. CP 5.440 [1905].
6. CP 5.444 [1905].
7. CP 5.445 [1905].
8. CP 5.446 [1905].
9. CP 5.452 [1905].
10. CP 5.505 [c. 1905]. Peirce’s imaginary interlocutor, Doctor Y., later adds: “[…] one cannot help seeing that Criticism and Common-sense are so immiscible that to plunge into either is to lose all touch with the other” (ibid.). Karl Ameriks has also rejected this supposed immiscibility, though without reference to Peirce: “[…] the overall strategy of the Critical philosophy involves an effective apologist methodology remarkably similar to what is best in Reid’s commonsense approach” (Ameriks 2005: 19).
11. CP 5.452 [1905]. In an alternate draft, Peirce makes this point with the claim “Kant (whom I more than admire) is nothing but a somewhat confused Pragmatist” (CP 5.525 [c. 1905]).
12. I would like to thank Vincent Colapietro for pushing this insight.
13. Kant’s own relation to linguistics and philosophy of language is a complicated affair; see Forster 2012 for one survey.
15. W2:278, [1869].
16. CP 5.444 [1905]. See Sackson 2014 for an excellent summary of views on Reid’s relation to pragmatism, as well as new arguments for considering Reid as part of the pragmatist tradition.
17. CP 5.512 [c. 1905].
18. Austin (1964: 8).
19. CP 5.513 [c. 1905].
20. See Lundestad 2006. Rysiew 2002 is more critical of the role Providential Naturalism plays in Reid’s epistemology.
21. “But fallibilism cannot be appreciated in anything like its true signifiency until evolution has been considered” (CP 1.17). However, see Alston 1985 for a defense of fallibilism as one of Reid’s distinctive contributions to epistemology.
22. CP 5.464
23. EIP II.1, p. 1.
24. IHM VIII.II.
26. IHM II.7, p. 38.
27. Most commentators on Reid focus on his defense of common sense via an account of sensation, perception, and belief, even when looking beyond his Inquiry; for example, Magnus 2008. Jacquette 2003 does remark upon Reid’s distinction between artificial signs (language) and natural signs, but focuses on the latter.
29. EIP II.1.4, p. 8.
30. EIP II.9, p. 169.
31. EIP II.9, p. 169.
32. EIP II.9, p. 169.
33. EIP II.9, p. 170.
34. EIP II.XII.II, p. 209-10.
35. IHM V.7, p. 82.
36. THN 1.4.2: “I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours’ amusement, I wou’d return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.”
38. EIP VI.III.III.7, p. 391-5.
39. EIP II.IV.1.1, p. 24. Here Reid makes a concession similar to Peirce’s third character of Critical Common-sensism: “We can only expect, in the structure of all languages, those distinctions which all mankind in the common business of life have occasion to make.” Reid includes “business” in one of his definitions of “common sense”: “this is called common sense because it is common to all men whom we can transact business with, or call to account for their conduct” (EIP VI.II, p. 352). However, he also suggests our “natural language” of facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tones suffices for transacting business in the absence of shared acquired language.
41. See Nöth 2000 for a summary of Peirce’s contributions to linguistics.
42. CP 5.85. See also CP 2.19-20; 2.209; 2.389; 3.432; 5.85-87; 7.175.
43. CP 2.152. Fleshing out Peirce’s opposition to the ‘German logicians’ on this point requires the details of his general argument against hedonism, as well as the Jamesian equivocation of the true and the satisfactory. See CP 5.555-5.64, and Ziemkowski 2008.
44. “Psychology must depend in its beginnings upon logic, in order to be psychology and to avoid being largely logical analysis. If then logic is to depend upon psychology in its turn, the two sciences, left without any support whatever, are liable to roll in on slough of error and
confusion” (CP 2.51). Beverly Kent (1987) remains essential for understanding Peirce’s classification(s) of the sciences, but also see Ambrosio 2016 for a more historically-grounded account.

45. CP 2.39-50.

46. See Brockhaus 1991 and Pelletier et al. 2008 for historical surveys of psychologism; unfortunately, both neglect to include Peirce. See Kasser 1999, Colapietro 2003, and Bellucci 2016 for works specifically on Peirce and psychologism. Colapietro also acknowledges that Peirce’s anti-psychologism applies to other sciences: “In sum, Peirce was committed to maintaining a sharp distinction between the de jure questions characteristic of logical investigation and the de facto ones definitive of such experimental investigations as psychology, anthropology, and linguistics. The grammars reconstructed by linguistics are one thing, the grammar of thought at the fountainhead of logic quite another.” (2003: 163).

47. The influence of Peirce’s logic, conceived as semeiotic, upon subsequent linguistics and philosophy of language is a separate issue. See Atkin 2008, Pietarinen 2004, and Rollstabb 2008, among others.

48. CP 2.389. See also CP 8.189: “Those whom we may roughly call the German school of logicians [...] make truth, which is a matter of fact, to be a matter of a way of thinking or even of linguistic expression.”

49. CP 5.424 Fn P1. One more vocabulary example: Anna Wierzbicka argues against the ‘cultural anglocentrism’ of most English interpretations of Kant: “Further, the essay shows how the German word Pflicht, central to Kant’s ethics, does not correspond in meaning to the English word duty, whose cultural roots lie in English Puritanism” (2015: 141).

50. CP 7.494; see 6.287 for 'pirate-lingo.'

51. E.g., “As a philosophical term [presupposition] translates the German Voraussetzung, and is presumably preferred to ‘postulate’ by Germans and others imperfectly acquainted with the English language, because they suppose that postulate in English has the same meaning as Postulat in German, which is not true; for the English retains the old meaning, while the German has generally adopted the conception of Wolff” (CP 3.635).

52. CP 5.611.

53. CP 2.220.

54. “[...] if it is meant that True and Satisfactory are synonyms, it strikes me that it not so much a doctrine of philosophy as it is a new contribution to English lexicography” (CP 5.555).

55. EIP II.V.VII, p. 1oo. Again, compare CP 7.494.

56. CP 2.280. This neglects signed languages, though Peirce acknowledges their existence at least once: “This seventh Genus [linguistics] is stupendous, embracing not only Speech, but all modes of communication, such as Sign Language, and under speech studying all dialects, not merely in their grammar and vocabulary, but also in their styles of composition” (MS 472 slide 881 [1902]).

57. CP 3.459.

58. CP 4.435.

59. CP 4.658.

60. CP 2.211. Peirce quotes Volume 1 of Vorlesungen über die Algebra der Logik (1890) by his friend the logician Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Ernst Schröder (1841-1902).

61. I derived this list from MS 427 [c. 1902], though I have updated Peirce’s terminology. Here are his original terms, in the order above: Arabic, Basque, Burmese, Chinese, Hottentot, “Adelaide language,” Tagala, Siamese, Thibetan, Yakut, and Kaffir. My identification of Peirce’s “Adelaide language” rests upon geography, but also the publication of a Ngarrindjeri Bible by Reverend George Taplin (1831-79) in 1864. Earlier in this manuscript Peirce claims his knowledge of ‘Kaffir’ came from studying a translated Bible (slide 891), which suggests a similar source for his exposure to Ngarrindjeri. I must note that the names ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Kaffir,’ though largely neutral anthropological terms in Peirce’s day, were imposed by colonizers, and became even
more intense racial slurs under Apartheid. Indeed, both are considered hate speech in post-Apartheid South Africa. This portion of manuscript, while one of the most detailed sources of evidence for Peirce’s study of comparative linguistics, is unpublished in the *Collected Papers*. This is so perhaps because it begins with the question of whether the White race originated independently or was “a mongrel composed of black and yellow” (slide 883). Here is the editorial note: “We omit a long section on linguistics and anthropology” (CP 7.385 Fn 22).

62. MS 427 slide 909.

63. CP 2.69. In a footnote to CP 4.48 Peirce notes the time he spent with Edward Henry Palmer (1840-82), an English explorer fluent in Arabic – fluent enough to resist the siren call of Latin grammar: “It gave me great pleasure after [Palmer’s] death to find a super-learned Regius Professor find fault with Palmer’s Arabic grammar because it followed the system which seemed right to those whose vernacular Arabic was, instead of ‘following the Greek and Latin methods’.” Peirce offers at least one more specification of what having a “real, living acquaintance” with a language requires: “But one has not mastered a language as long as one has to think about it in another language. One must learn to think in it about facts.” (CP 4.475).

64. CP 2.338. This appears to be Janus Hoppe (unknown dates), who published *Die Gesammte Logik* (in two parts) in 1868, and *Die Kleine Logik* in 1869. It is not clear which of these Peirce read, as he only cites “Hoppe, Logik §§256, 257” (CP 6.627). However, *Die Kleine Logik* ends with §254. See CP 2.400 Fn P2 for Peirce’s other brief mention of Hoppe.

65. CP 2.68. See also CP 2.338, 4.438 Fn P1, and 8.242. Old Irish did have a nominative case, though this might be a case of the Procrustean Bed. However, Modern Irish does not have a nominative, with a ‘common case’ taking the role of both nominative and accusative.

66. CP 2.68; ‘phaneragamous’ is an old name for spermatophytes, or seed plants. Under current classifications, seed plants compose some 90% of the 300,000 species in Kingdom Plantae, but in Peirce’s time ‘plant’ include algae (tens of thousands of species) and fungi (millions of species). At CP 4.48 he makes a similar claim, and also compares the Indo-European languages to languages in general as “the vertebrates to all animals” With current numbers, that would mean limiting what “animal” meant to 66,000 species while ignoring over a million invertebrate species. Specific numbers aside, Peirce’s point is clear.

67. “But from a logical point of view the terminology of the older grammarians was better, who spoke of the subject nominative and the subject accusative. I do not know that they spoke of the subject dative; but in the proposition, ‘Anthony gave a ring to Cleopatra,’ Cleopatra is as much a subject of what is meant and expressed as is the ring or Anthony. A proposition, then, has one predicate and any number of subjects.” (CP 5.542). In other words, grammar inclines us to conceive the subject as both an agent (what “does the verb”), and primary (typically comes first, and also the “most important”). In contrast, logically the predicate is primary, and ascribes a relationship to subjects. It is probably no accident that Peirce uses the verb ‘give’ here, as it is his consistent example of a genuine triadic relation: “The word gives refers to the same sort of fact [as donation], but its meaning is such that that meaning is felt to be incomplete unless those items are, at least formally, specified; as they are in ‘Somebody gives something to some person (real or artificial).’” (CP 4.543; see also CP 1.345, 1.371, 1.474, 1.520, 2.86, 3.424, 3.464, 4.438 Fn P1, 5.89, 5.469, 6.323, 8.331). “Anthony gives” is grammatically fine, but is logically incomplete, at best, without the “what” given and the “whom” receiving.

68. CP 2.338.

69. “In the Old Egyptian language, which seems to come within earshot of the origin of speech, the most explicit expression of the copula is by means of a word, really the relative pronoun, which. Now to one who regards a sentence from the Indo-European point of view, it is a puzzle how ‘which’ can possibly serve the purpose in place of ‘is.’ Yet nothing is more natural.” (CP 4.49; original emphasis). See also CP 2.319, 2.328, 2.354, 4.41. See Kammerzell et al. 2016 for a thorough review and critique of Peirce’s study of Ancient Egypt in light of current science.
70. CP 2.328.
71. CP 2.328.
72. CP 7.385 Fn 22.
73. MS 690: 160-1.
74. Though perhaps not so common, as seen in the need to explicitly teach undergraduates how to translate ordinary language into categorical forms.
75. CP 2.69.
76. ISL 327.
77. ISL 328-9. Sayce identifies Hegel as one who also made this criticism: “Hegel long ago pointed out that the analysis [of the proposition] was an empirical one dependent upon the observation of the individual thinker, and the criticism of Hegel is supplemented by the teaching of comparative philology” (328).
78. ISL 329-30. This is because languages in the Ural-Altaic family have negative conjugations.
79. CP 2.70.
80. CP 5.13 Fn P1. Peirce does not doubt the universality of this experience: “If you ask present when, and to whose mind, I reply that I leave these questions unanswered, never having entertained a doubt that those features of the phaneron that I have found in my mind are present at all times and to all minds” (CP 1.284). We critical common-sensists might be critical of this claim, but neurodiversity is a topic for another paper.
81. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-82) coined the term Phänomenologie, but Hegel’s use is the most prominent before Husserl adopted the term. Peirce’s relationship with Hegel is characteristically complex: “I reject his philosophy in toto” (CP 1.368), but also “Hegel, in some respects the greatest philosopher that ever lived [...]” (CP 1.524). See also Rockmore 1999, Stern 2005, Stern 2007.
82. “If philosophy glances now and then at the results of special sciences, it is only as a sort of condiment to excite its own proper observation” (CP 1.241).
83. Joseph Greenberg (1915-2001) offers a list of 45 universals, but nearly all of these are implicative (if a language has feature X, then it has feature Y), with the most clearly absolute being “All languages have pronominal categories involving at least three persons and two numbers” (Greenberg 1963: 108). However, this list comes from comparing only 30 languages. Tullio Viola explores Peirce’s early interest in the English personal pronouns I, It, and Thou. In particular, Viola’s study complements my own by bringing Peirce into dialogue with a tradition originating with Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). “I would like to argue here that Peirce’s affinities with Humboldt, as well as the possible direct links with his work, can be taken as the starting point for inquiry into the broader relationship between Peirce and that tradition of studies on personal pronouns as universals of language” (Viola 2011: 398).
84. CP 2.150.
85. As a consequence, Peirce’s speculative grammar must be truly speculative: “This will amount to what Duns Scotus called speculative grammar. For it must analyse an assertion into its essential elements, independently of the structure of the language in which it may happen to be expressed.” (CP 3.430). See also CP 4.438 Fn P1.
86. CP 5.314. See also CP 2.220, 2.69, CP 7.385 Fn 22, MS 690: 160-161. “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” is a misnomer, as Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) never co-authored. Again, for understanding Peirce the most salient proponent of linguistic determinism, or linguistic relativity, is Humboldt. For more specifically on “man” as a language or sign, see Burks 1980, Colapietro 1988, and Fairbanks 1976.
87. CP 4.150.
88. CP 2.655.
ABSTRACTS

A variety of commentators have explored the similarities between pragmatism and Thomas Reid’s Philosophy of Common Sense. Peirce himself claims his version of pragmatism either (loosely) is, or entails, a Critical Common-sensism, a blend of what is best in Kant and Reid. In this paper I argue for a neglected aspect of the relation between Peirce and Reid, and of each to common sense: linguistics. First, I summarize Peirce’s account of what distinguishes his common-sensism from Reid’s. Second, I argue for the importance of appeals to linguistic universals by Reid as both a source for identifying common sense beliefs, and a basis for justifying them. While Peirce is occasionally tempted by such appeals, overall he is critical of appeals to language, especially as most Western philosophers have been familiar with a small set of (Indo-)European languages; say, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, and Latin. This leads to the third section, which concerns Peirce’s familiarity with major nineteenth century linguists, and his contention that the ‘peculiarity’ of Western European languages has impeded the development of logic and philosophy. In particular, I look at unpublished manuscripts where Peirce summarizes his own study of non-European languages, ranging from Arabic, to Ngarrindjeri, to Xhosa. Peirce was only an amateur linguist, and also aware of the challenges of doing cross-cultural linguistics through comparative grammar; e.g., the temptation to force unfamiliar languages onto the “Procrustean Bed of Aryan grammar” (CP 2.211). Nonetheless, this study left him suspicious of any claims of linguistic universals, and supported his anti-psychologism. That is, not only should logic and philosophy not be based upon psychology (at least as a special science), they should also be independent of linguistics. However, Peirce also advances something like the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that language determines, or at least conditions, thought. The question now becomes what is the nature of a philosophy of common sense, even a critical one, without a common language, or possibly no commonalities across languages?

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