

The Language of Contemporary Philosophy

Filippo Contesi

This is a pre-print.

Please cite from the published version: Josep Soler & Kathrin Kaufhold (eds.), *Language and the Knowledge Economy in the European Context: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, Routledge

ABSTRACT: Philosophy's place, at the intersection of the scientific and humanities disciplines, makes it an interesting test case for the role of English and other languages and cultures in our contemporary knowledge economy. The humanities' attention to the richness of the world's languages and cultures is in tension with the science's essentially cosmopolitan project. This tension is perhaps especially evident in 'analytic' or 'Anglo-American' philosophy. Despite complementarity in earlier stages of the discipline, the humanities and scientific tendencies are now clashing with undesirable results. This is in an important part due to analytic philosophy's underexamined focus on a single vehicular language. One symptom of this malaise is that the voices of non-native-speaking philosophers are significantly less heard than those of native speakers. Especially problematic is, I argue, the current emphasis given to aesthetic considerations, and in particular linguistic form or style, as a sign of scientific rigour in the analysis of philosophical problems. I discuss this emphasis critically, arguing that it is not justifiable, in part because it deprives contemporary analytic philosophy of a wider variety of philosophical perspectives arising from different languages and cultures. I conclude by briefly presenting a recent attempt to make contemporary philosophy more linguistically inclusive.

The Language of Contemporary Philosophy

Filippo Contesi

1. Pros and Cons of a Lingua franca

The common vehicular language of much if not most current scholarly research is English, especially when it comes to publications and conferences. This trend made its way first in scientific or STEM disciplines, before spreading further to many social sciences and humanities disciplines. Indeed, the linguistic situation in academia is part of a much wider context, in which English serves as the common vehicular language of much international communication, from commerce to industry, to diplomacy and beyond.¹ This situation is, in turn, the product of complex historical and geopolitical forces. In large part, it reflects the current economic and cultural hegemony of a group of nations in which English is the majority native language.² Among these nations, the United States of America and the United Kingdom have special prominence.

To be sure, English is not the first ever common vehicular language of commerce, diplomacy or scholarship: other languages have served similar roles, in different ways and at different points in history, from German to French and Latin. The current situation must be seen as a historical contingency, which has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of a common vehicular language are substantial. In the case of scholarly exchange, it has the *prima facie* advantage of increasing the efficacy of researching solutions to common problems. International collaboration seems indeed likely to produce greater achievements in research than more local efforts might do. Indeed, scholarship and research very often had universal aspirations, if not a cosmopolitan ethos, well before the advent of English as a *lingua franca*.

Insofar as it increases the number and diversity of contributing talent, international collaboration seems likely to increase the quality of the results produced, as well as the speed at which they are achieved. A common language, the reasoning goes, allows people working in different linguistic contexts to get together to achieve common goals. However, a number of conditions need to be satisfied before a *lingua franca* can have the desired results. To start with, it is essential that the nature of the enterprise be such that progress can be made by using a single common language. Moreover, the costs that prospective contributors must pay to master the common language sufficiently well have to be lower than the costs of the translation services required to achieve equivalent communication levels.

¹ See e.g. Van Parijs (2011).

² Saraceni (2023).

Neither of the two conditions just stated can be said to hold without some further discussion. As to the first of the two, it does look as though strong versions of linguistic relativity are not supported by the evidence currently available. In other words, it does not seem to be the case that one's speaking a particular language *determines* the kinds of things that one can think.³ As a consequence, using a single language should not make it impossible to explore, and hence make progress on, any direction of enquiry.

Nonetheless, the evidence currently available in linguistics also suggests that speaking a particular language is likely to *influence* a speaker's cognition. That means that, given a particular language, it makes some directions of enquiry more difficult to follow and others easier to follow. This might suggest multiplying the languages used, as a means of increasing the directions of enquiry that are easier to follow, and hence the possibility of making progress. (I am assuming here randomness in the distribution of which directions progress can be achieved in. I am also assuming an ideal situation in which there are no time limits as to when progress must be achieved.) However, that would make communication between researchers more difficult than if they all spoke the same language. At least for the purposes of sufficiently highly sophisticated communication, the costs of having a large number of people learn English are likely lower than those associated with training and employing enough translators.⁴

Fortunately, the same high number of directions open to enquiry would seem to be maintained on a single-language model, provided that the linguistic background of researchers be sufficiently diverse and the required mastery of the common language sufficiently low. However, as I will argue in what follows, making sure that those conditions are met is currently a substantial challenge in a field such as philosophy.

2. Analytic Philosophy

The focus of this essay will be on the tradition of philosophy that is often called 'analytic philosophy'. For the purposes of this essay, I will assume a view that identifies the analytic philosophy tradition as the current and closest form to the ideal of philosophy. Indeed, analytic philosophy is arguably the mainstream philosophical tradition in the world today.⁵

As I understand it, analytic philosophy ultimately finds its roots in the Ancient Socratic tradition. Such a tradition has typically been cosmopolitan, at least in spirit, and was modified along the way by a rich influx of different traditions of thought originating in numerous parts

³ See Glock (2018).

⁴ This is plausible at least given the current state of machine translation technologies. Whether such translation technologies will undergo sufficient levels of improvement in the foreseeable future is difficult to predict, though there are reasons to be moderately skeptical (see Johnson 2022).

⁵ Burge (2010).

of the world.⁶ In one of the most celebrated early texts of this tradition, Plato's *Apology*, Socrates makes an (indirect) reference to the cosmopolitanism of (his view of) philosophy when he introduces the defence speech he gives in his trial before the Athenians:

I am more than seventy years of age, and this is the first time that I have ever appeared in a court of law, and I am quite a stranger to the ways of the place; and therefore I would have you regard me as if I were really a stranger, whom you would excuse if he spoke in his native tongue, and after the fashion of his country; - that I think is not an unfair request. Never mind the manner, which may or may not be good; but think only of the justice of my cause, and give heed to that: let the judge decide justly and the speaker speak truly.⁷

Here Socrates urges his fellow Athenians to disregard the “manner” of his speaking and focus instead on whether what he says is true or not. Socrates's plea comes at the end of a paragraph in which he has condemned the eloquence of his accusers as a mere rhetorical trick. Socrates's condemnation here is reminiscent of the way in which, in so many other Socratic dialogues, Plato would have Socrates criticize the Sophists for their putting mere eloquence and rhetorical polish in the service of whatever cause, regardless of its truthfulness.

Indeed, the contest between Socrates and the Sophists is but an early model of a problem that has repeatedly represented itself in philosophy ever since. At many points in the history of philosophy, charges have been raised against some philosopher or school of philosophy for their use of philosophical expertise as a mere ‘lawyerly’ trick to support any cause regardless of its merits. Indeed, that has sometimes coincided with revolutions and changes of mainstreams in philosophical thought.

Around the beginning of the 20th century, one such revolution led to the rise of analytic philosophy. This new philosophical approach was perceived by many as a welcome break from the meaningless discussions of ethical and metaphysical matters that were deemed to be characteristic of, for instance, neo-idealist philosophical approaches that were in vogue at the time across Europe. Such approaches, many of the new analytic philosophers complained, did not yield serious philosophical results for they could neither be verified logically nor empirically. By contrast, analytic philosophy promised a more meaningful philosophy grounded in common sense, focused on the analysis of language and aligned to logical and scientific thinking.

Over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st, analytic philosophy grew to become the dominant approach to philosophy worldwide. Along the way, it lost some of its original features and gained others. Among the features it lost was its rejection of several domains of

⁶ See e.g. Leiter (2014).

⁷ Plato (2009).

inquiry including ethics, metaphysics, idealism, philosophy of religion etc., which became an accepted part of the institutional framework of analytic philosophy. Other features remained constant, at least nominally, whilst at the same time changing their nature considerably. Common sense, for instance, continues to be a feature of contemporary (mainstream) philosophy⁸ in the sense that extraordinary claims tend to be presented in a way that appears matter-of-fact and down to earth. At the same time, however, contemporary philosophers advance all sorts of views that are far from common-sensical, including idealism, panpsychism, radical social constructionism etc. Likewise, argumentation that appears to follow logical and scientific rigour continues to be still very much prized in philosophy. Nonetheless, in many of its prominent sub-disciplines such as metaphysics, actual scientific results are typically not discussed or treated as especially relevant to the philosophical enterprise.

The emphasis on language deserves a greater attention for present purposes. Analytic philosophy is historically tied to the so-called ‘linguistic turn’, i.e. an increased attention given to language as the central key to understanding the world philosophically. Among contemporary philosophers, however, philosophy of language no longer has the centrality that it used to have. Nonetheless, linguistic considerations continue to be very important in their practice. One way in which this importance manifests itself is in the attention that contemporary philosophers give to the way in which they write. Consider for instance the following recent assessments of the style of contemporary philosophy:

In a recent address to the American Philosophical Association, Kantian scholar Christine Korsgaard writes:

Many philosophers try to write in what you might call perfectly true sentences. A perfectly true sentence already contains all the qualifications it would need to make it perfectly true. It is unassailable (Korsgaard 2022, 24–25).

Explicitly echoing Korsgaard, Regina Rini adds:

philosophers are people who write under extreme stylistic constraints, meant [...] to satisfy journals [sic] referees’ vague and empowered sense of what *looks like* a work of philosophy (Rini 2022).

Finally, philosopher Costică Brădăţan observes that:

⁸ Unless I specify otherwise, throughout the chapter I will treat the expression ‘contemporary philosophy’ as equivalent to ‘contemporary analytic’ or ‘mainstream’ philosophy.

As journal editors receive fresh submissions, the first thing they do is scan them for external markers of conformity to the group's internal rules and orthodoxy: specific terminology, references to the group's authorities, favourite themes and topics, and even certain turns of phrase and rhetorical tropes (Brădăţan 2022).⁹

Such an attention to stylistic considerations is not unique to contemporary philosophy. Philosophy in other periods and traditions has also displayed a special emphasis on language and linguistic presentation. Indeed, academia more generally, perhaps especially in the humanities, typically gives an important role to language as a central means of knowledge production and dissemination. At the same time, however, the kind of style that is prized in contemporary philosophy is influenced by the particular features that are associated with the analytic revolution, and in particular with its emulation of mathematical or scientific reasoning. Such an emulation is sometimes referred to as an emphasis on the properties of *clarity*, *precision* and *rigour*.¹⁰

Such an emphasis on clarity, precision and rigour has indeed very often been touted as a central good-making feature of the analytic approach. Indeed, it can be argued that such an emphasis is an important cause of the success of the approach and of its current dominance.¹¹ Nonetheless, as some critics from within the analytic tradition have argued, the emulation of scientific reasoning practiced by contemporary philosophers does not really conform to actual scientific practices and does not actually lead to achieving the intended virtues of clarity, precision and rigour. Indeed, the emulation of the sciences as it is practiced by many contemporary philosophers too often appears to “parrot” the language and methods of the sciences.¹² More generally, the pursuit of virtues such as scientific rigour by analytic philosophers has over time become more and more the pursuit of the *appearance* of those virtues.¹³

Whatever one thinks of its appropriateness, I would like to present reasons for thinking that the emphasis placed by much contemporary philosophy on linguistic appearances is contributing to hindering a large section of philosophers from having a voice in the philosophical debate. These philosophers are those who have a greater difficulty in recognizing and conforming to the norms of linguistic presentation that are prized within the most prominent philosophical

⁹ See also Stewart (2013) and Vintiadis (2021) for converging complaints about the undue influence that stylistic constraints have on contemporary philosophy.

¹⁰ See Cassam (forthcoming), Glock (2008), Leiter et al. (2022) and Preston (2007).

¹¹ To be sure, this is consistent with the contribution that several other factors have made to the success of the analytic approach, including cultural, historical (see e.g. Akehurst 2010), linguistic (for more on which below) as well as more narrowly sociological (see e.g. Katzav & Vaesen 2017 and Katzav 2018).

¹² See Rota (1990) & (1991). For the exclusionary potential of the “‘mathematical’ virtues” of clarity, precision and rigour in philosophy, see also Cassam (forthcoming).

¹³ I owe a debt of gratitude to Giovanni Boniolo for alerting me early on to “appearances of rigour” phenomenon in contemporary philosophy; see also Roffé 2021.

circles. Given the current sociological and institutional setup of the discipline, the affected philosophers will be, in large part, non-native speakers of English.

3. Non-native Anglophones

Even though only 6% of the world’s population lives in a majority Anglophone country, the most prominent circles within contemporary philosophy are almost exclusively centred around philosophers, journals and university departments that are native speakers of English and based in Anglophone countries. For instance, the most influential ranking of graduate programmes in philosophy, the “Philosophical Gourmet Report” (PGR), only ranks institutions based in majority Anglophone countries. The PGR ranking is based on reputational surveys of philosophers overwhelmingly employed in Anglophone countries.¹⁴ Similarly, the very influential “Leiter Reports” rankings of journals and publishing houses in philosophy tend almost exclusively to list publication venues that are based in Anglophone countries.¹⁵

Moreover, only 7% of the 200 most-cited contemporary (i.e. born in or after 1900) authors in the most prestigious encyclopaedia of philosophy (i.e. the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) are (or were) (non-native) Anglophones.¹⁶ In addition, non-native English speakers authored only about 5% of the 500 papers and books that were most cited by articles published between 1993 and 2013 in the four most prestigious Anglophone analytic philosophy journals.¹⁷ According to a survey of recent journal issues, moreover, only 3% of the sources cited by twelve elite analytic philosophy journals were originally written in a language other than English. This is in sharp contrast to philosophical literature published in prestigious non-Anglophone journals, which features a much more linguistically diverse range of citations (20–51% of sources were originally written in the same language of publication, 30–44% originally written in English, and the remaining in another language).¹⁸

I move now to the composition of the editorial boards of elite philosophy journals. According to Schwitzgebel et al.’s (2018) data, 96% of editorial board members of fifteen top philosophy journals are primarily affiliated with an institution based in an Anglophone country.¹⁹ Since Schwitzgebel et al. did not provide finer-grained analyses of that data—especially in terms of

¹⁴ Leiter et al. (2022).

¹⁵ See e.g. Leiter (2013) & Leiter (2022).

¹⁶ Schwitzgebel (2010).

¹⁷ See Contessa (2014) and Healy (2013). The journals considered are four of the top 5 journals in the “Leiter Reports” most recent ranking of generalist philosophy journals (Leiter 2022).

¹⁸ Schwitzgebel et al. (2018). The journals considered include all top 10 journals in the “Leiter Reports” most recent ranking of generalist philosophy journals (Leiter 2022), in addition to two specialist journals in, respectively, ethics and political philosophy.

¹⁹ Schwitzgebel et al.’s data here report on the top 15 journals in Leiter’s (2013) ranking of “Top Philosophy Journals, Without Regard to Area”, <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2013/07/top-philosophy-journals-without-regard-to-area.html> (last accessed on 2/10/2022).

non-native speakers—I conducted additional analyses on their datasets.²⁰ My results show that non-native English speakers make up less than 11% of the editorial board members of those 15 journals.

Notably, however, this percentage includes data about *Synthese*, which was at the time ranked 15th among top philosophy journals. On Schwitzgebel et al.’s datasets, *Synthese* had by far the biggest percentage of non-native Anglophone editorial board members (61%) and the lowest percentage of Anglophone country-affiliated members (58%). On that top-15 list, indeed, *Synthese* was the only journal to be mostly edited outside of an Anglophone country. If one excludes *Synthese*, however, the percentage of non-native Anglophone editorial board members drops to 8%. Correspondingly, the percentage of Anglophone country-affiliated board members goes up to 98%. Finally, restricting the analysis to the top 10 journals on that same ranking, the percentage of editorial board members working primarily in Anglophone countries stays at 98%, while the percentage of non-native Anglophones further diminishes to 7%.

In addition to citation and editorial board data, publishing data also confirms the overwhelming prevalence of native Anglophone philosophers at the top of the discipline. According to a recent survey of eighteen prestigious philosophy journals between 2013 and 2017, native Anglophone scholars made up about 69% of all published authors. Anglophone-country affiliation tracked native Anglophone status closely, with 73% of authors being affiliated with at least one Anglophone-country institution.²¹

Those percentages become even more striking if one considers that the selection of journals to include in the survey was not based only on prestige, but also in order to cover different geographical regions (different Anglophone countries and the Netherlands), as well as philosophical sub-disciplines (generalist, logic and ethics). In large part, the list of the eighteen selected journals was intentionally based on Leiter’s (2015) journal rankings. However, there were significant exceptions. For instance, six of the ten generalist journals included in the survey were among Leiter’s (2015) top-10 journals. Among the remaining four generalist journals selected, however, there were also the only two non-Anglophone-country-based top-20 journals included in that edition of Leiter’s journal rankings (*Synthese* and *Erkenntnis*), as well as another Leiter Reports top-20 journal with an explicitly declared interest in linguistic diversity (*European Journal of Philosophy*).²² *Synthese* and *Erkenntnis* had the lowest

²⁰ I am very grateful to Eric Schwitzgebel for providing me with the datasets and to Ravi Thakral for helping me track non-native speaker status of some of the editorial board members.

²¹ Yen & Hung (2018). Yen & Hung’s data also signal that many of the problems affecting non-native speakers in philosophy will be greater or lesser in degree also depending on the degree of difficulty that native speakers of different languages (e.g. Romance languages such as Italian vs Germanic languages such as German vs non-Indo-European languages such as Chinese etc.) will typically have in learning the reference language (in this case, English).

²² Although currently edited in the UK, the *European Journal of Philosophy* is unusually culturally diverse in its stated aims among current high-profile philosophy journals. Its webpage states that the journal was created as “a

percentage of native Anglophone authors among all the ten generalist journals included in the survey, immediately followed by the *European Journal of Philosophy*.

Moreover, the list of eighteen selected journals also contained four logic journals. Logic is a discipline that borders with mathematics and relies on (natural) language much less than more typical philosophical disciplines. Indeed, the logic journals included in the survey showed a much lower percentage of native Anglophone authors: 42%. Moreover, this percentage resulted from the average between the higher percentage of native Anglophone authors who published in the two logic journals based in an Anglophone country (62% and 44%) and the lower percentage of those who published in the two logic journals based in the Netherlands (38% and 24%).

In addition to confirming the dominance of native Anglophone scholars in contemporary philosophy, these data suggest two additional points. The first is that the combination of the data presented about the journals *Synthese* and *Erkenntnis* for, respectively, editorial board composition and publication data shows a positive correlation between the percentages of non-native Anglophone scholars on those journals' editorial boards and the percentages of non-native Anglophone scholars who publish in those journals. In other words, native language appears to track publication decisions. Perhaps this is not a surprising result but it is worth noting nevertheless, for it again suggests the importance, in contemporary philosophy, of linguistic considerations of the kind I have outlined in Section 2.

4. Philosophy's Place in Academia

Another element that emerges from the analysis of the journal publication data presented above is the much greater inclusion of non-native Anglophone scholars in scientific journals than in more typical philosophy journals. This suggests that the exclusion of non-native Anglophone scholars is a much greater problem in philosophy than in the sciences. A stark difference between the sciences and philosophy is also suggested by other data, such as for instance Mizrahi (2013)'s preliminary analysis showing that non-native speakers of English appear to constitute between 3% and 11% of full-time faculty members at three prestigious US philosophy departments (viz. New York University, Rutgers and City University of New York Graduate Center). By contrast, non-native speakers of English make up 33% to 42% of biology and biochemistry departments at those same institutions.²³

forum to which all philosophers, both inside and outside Europe, can turn to rediscover the variety of philosophical traditions in Europe", <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14680378/homepage/productinformation.html> (last accessed on 2/10/2022). Although it publishes exclusively in English, for instance, the journal also accepts manuscript submissions in French, German, Italian and Spanish.

²³ This should not, however, be taken to suggest that the sciences do not have a problem of linguistic exclusion: see e.g. Politzer-Ahles et al. (2020). See also Pronskikh (2018) for a study of linguistic policies at physics journals.

This disparity between philosophy and the sciences may be explained in several ways. Firstly, the greater role played in the sciences by mathematics and other formal languages, as well as by extra-textual work (e.g. experiments), likely decrease the emphasis on the natural language in which researchers present their ideas. But a second important set of causes may be identified in the greater continuity and reduced fragmentation of traditions that many scientific disciplines have enjoyed relative to philosophy. Although a philosophical mainstream can be identified, the philosophical world still appears more fractured than many scientific disciplines are. Indeed, as we have seen, contemporary mainstream philosophy is continuous with the analytic tradition, which was born, and for several decades continued to identify itself in large part as the main (Western) alternative to so-called ‘Continental’ approaches to philosophy. In turn, these latter approaches were named and identified (especially by the analytics) as originating on the *European continent*. Such a geographic identification was often made with reference to cultural and linguistic differences between the Anglophone and the non-Anglophone worlds.

In this respect, Akehurst (2010) best highlights the cultural, political and linguistic causes of the analytic-Continental divide in philosophy. On his picture, there are, on the one hand, Englishness, liberalism, empiricism and common sense; on the other, there are the Continentals, especially the German and French, with their authoritarianism, idealism and sympathy for the extremes. Such a division realizes itself in its fullest form with World War II and its aftermath. Although analytic philosophy had had in large part its origins in German-speaking thinkers working on the European continent (e.g. in the Vienna Circle), its great success institutionally occurred first in Britain, and in the US shortly afterwards. This was in good part due to the circumstances surrounding World War II, especially to the depotentialization of Austria and Germany as both economic and intellectual powers that resulted from it and the migration towards Anglophone countries of many German-speaking founders of analytic philosophy. As a consequence, analytic philosophy established itself as an Anglophone tradition. This was then further compounded by the spread of English as a lingua franca (which was itself greatly aided, among other things, by the Anglo-American victory in World War II).

At the same time as it is less inclusive of non-native Anglophone scholars than many of the scientific disciplines, however, contemporary philosophy also appears to be less inclusive than many other humanities disciplines.²⁴ I have in mind here disciplines such as history, history of art, languages, literature, film studies etc., in which being fluent in the language(s) directly relevant to the topic of research is considered extremely important. It is, in other words, important that a historian of, say, the Russian revolution know the Russian culture intimately and be able to speak Russian to a very good degree. Only in that way will the historian be able to, for instance, understand first-hand archival material, its significance in the historical and cultural context etc. All that will often be easier to achieve if one is a native Russian speaker. At least anecdotally, this results in a much greater percentage of native speakers of different

²⁴ See e.g. Schwitzgebel et al. (2021) for data showing how, at present, Anglophone philosophy is less inclusive of several demographic groups than any other academic discipline in the humanities.

languages being employed and recognized as experts of the history, art and other cultural expressions of their native countries and languages.

Because of its cosmopolitan aspirations, by contrast, philosophy should not in general be divisible into different cultural traditions in the same way such disciplines as history and literature are. This is true at least to the extent that philosophy is different from its history. Although both philosophers and historians of philosophy are typically trained and employed within the same university departments, their aims are in principle as different as those of artists and historians of art. Indeed, this view was especially endorsed by the founders of analytic philosophy. The distinction between the two endeavours has eroded somewhat more recently but it still remains a central feature of analytic philosophy as it is practiced today.

To be sure, there are, and have been, philosophers and philosophical approaches that understand philosophy as an intrinsically historically and culturally relative endeavour. Some Continental approaches to philosophy are an example of this, and no doubt there also are some contemporary analytic philosophers who are sympathetic to such a metaphilosophical view. Indeed, there are signs that suggest that this may be an increasingly popular view among analytic philosophers. One of these is the increasing number of entries on culturally specific approaches being added to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. These include entries such as “Latin American Philosophy”, “Philosophy of Science in Latin America”, “Korean Philosophy” etc.²⁵ The same encyclopaedia even has distinct Subject Editors for: “Arabic and Islamic Philosophy”, “Chinese Philosophy”, “Indian and Tibetan Philosophy”, “Japanese Philosophy”, “Korean Philosophy” and “Latin American Philosophy”.²⁶

Nevertheless, cultural relativism does not yet appear to be the dominant view in contemporary metaphilosophy, or at least it is not seen as a view that holds consistently across cultures. Notice, for instance, how the *Stanford Encyclopedia* has no separate entries for ‘Western’ or ‘Anglophone’ philosophy. However, such an asymmetry is less than ideal in a metaphilosophical view. Moreover, cultural relativism of the kind in question is in tension with the philosophy’s Socratic cosmopolitanism.²⁷

So, philosophy remains an odd case among contemporary academic disciplines with respect to its relationship with native language and the way it understands the contribution that can be made to it by non-native English speakers. Indeed, perhaps the discipline that is closest to contemporary philosophy is law. Consider for instance Rorty’s (1982) very suggestive remarks:

²⁵ <https://plato.stanford.edu> (last accessed on 9/4/2023). See also Guerrero (2022).

²⁶ <https://plato.stanford.edu/board.html> (last accessed on 9/4/2023).

²⁷ See Leiter (2014) for an early high-profile warning of such a looming tension within analytic philosophy.

In the course of the transition to post-positivistic analytic philosophy, the image of the scientist has been replaced by another, though it is not quite clear what. Perhaps the most appropriate model for the analytic philosopher is now the lawyer, rather than either the scholar or the scientist. The ability to construct a good brief, or conduct a devastating cross-examination, or find relevant precedents, is pretty much the ability which analytic philosophers think of as ‘distinctively philosophical.’²⁸

Indeed, the law is a discipline in which a native grasp of the language of litigation seems to be very useful. A very good lawyer is often someone who can persuade judges or jurors in court, and so an effortless and masterful grasp of the language and culture of their audience is an almost necessary skill for them.

If the contemporary philosopher is best characterized as a lawyer, however, the tension with the Socratic ideal becomes very stark indeed. For, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Socrates is portrayed by Plato as mainly concerned with the substance of his speech as opposed to its form. Indeed, Socrates’s main antagonists are presented as the Sophists, who would trade their oratorical skills for use in the courts of law and in politics. Contemporary philosophy cannot abandon itself to the opposite of the Socratic ideal without radically altering its nature.

5. A Plea for Linguistic Diversity

A solution to the current linguistically exclusive situation in philosophy is to increase the linguistic (and, accordingly, cultural and geographic) diversity of contemporary philosophy substantially, by (at least in part) reducing the emphasis on form of presentation and other appearances of quality. Such a solution has the advantage of keeping in place a common vehicular language for philosophy. As I have argued in Section 1, using English as a common vehicular language is preferable to having different languages of research (especially in light of philosophy’s cosmopolitan aspirations). However, that is true only if there is enough diversity in philosophers’ linguistic backgrounds and the level of English required is sufficiently low.

As a first step towards implementing such a solution, I formulated the “Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy” (BP), which ask of philosophers and philosophical institutions the following:

- (1) To evaluate, as a rule, publications, presentations, proposals and submissions without giving undue weight to their authors’ linguistic style, fluency or accent;

²⁸ Rorty (1982), 221. I am most grateful to Enrico Terrone for first suggesting the law analogy to me; see also Contesi & Terrone (2018).

- (2) To collect, to the extent that it is feasible, statistics about non-native speakers' submissions (to journals, presses and conferences), and/or to implement self-identification of non-native speaker status;
- (3) To include, to the extent that it is feasible, non-native speakers within journal editorial boards, book series editorships, scientific committees etc.;
- (4) To invite, to the extent that it is feasible, non-native speakers to contribute to journal special issues, edited collections, conferences etc.;
- (5) To provide, to the extent that it is feasible, educational and hiring opportunities to non-native speakers (Contesi 2021 & Contesi et al. 2021).

Looking at the rationales behind the particular principles, (1) states a principle of linguistic tolerance, which asks philosophers to exclude unjustified expectations about linguistic appearances in philosophical presentation from the evaluation of their philosophical contents. Principle (2) aims to raise awareness about, and increase the study of, levels of inclusion of non-native speakers in philosophy. (2) also suggests a possible means of implementing data collection of submissions by non-native speakers, i.e. by self-identification at the moment of submission. Such self-identification would be in line with current self-identification requests (e.g. of authors' title, institutional address, gender) that are already in place in various academic contexts.²⁹ The remaining three principles (3)–(5) directly ask for more opportunities for non-native speakers in educational institutions, journal editorial boards, academic conferences and related contexts. Such opportunities would increase linguistic diversity where it is lacking. Indeed, it is reasonable to believe that some such opportunities would also themselves foster greater linguistic diversity. For instance, the earlier mentioned data concerning the journal *Synthese* suggest that greater linguistic diversity among editorial board members increases linguistic diversity among journal publication authors.

As an additional elucidation to the BP as they are stated above, it is perhaps also worth noting that none of the five principles makes explicit reference to a particular language. Although the most immediate target of the BP is the English language and its role as a lingua franca of contemporary philosophy, similar problems arise in more local contexts and the BP seem to be in a position to address those as well. Here I have, for instance, in mind the structural advantage that speakers of local languages often have with respect to many academic job openings in non-Anglophone countries. In Spain, it is for instance mandatory to demonstrate C1 proficiency of Spanish in order to apply for standard tenure-track or tenured academic jobs in philosophy. Such requirements may appear reasonable, insofar as these academic positions typically involve teaching. To a closer examination, however, they are not justifiable, since such academic positions only require a moderate amount of teaching. Such language requirements in advance of job applications unjustifiably narrow down the pool of potential applicants to only those who either already know the language for independent reasons or have invested a substantial amount of time learning it for the specific purpose of securing a job in Spanish

²⁹ See also Contesi & Terrone (2018), 6–7.

academia. This restricts the attraction of the best talent worldwide. It would be more reasonable to select candidates on the basis of strict academic merit, and only then require of them that they learn the local language of instruction within a specified time limit. After all, the positions in question are (or lead to) permanent jobs.³⁰

The BP were initially launched as a manifesto for individual scholars to sign, and were subsequently open to institutional endorsers. They have so far been signed by about 750 individual philosophers and 25 philosophical institutions (i.e. journals, research centres and scholarly societies). Whilst the success of the individual manifesto is heartening, the institutional scheme has had much less success than the original manifesto. Indeed, a substantial majority of the institutions that were asked to endorse the BP even failed to acknowledge those requests. What can this be attributed to?

One possibility is that the costs or demandingness of institutional support are higher than those associated with individual support. For one thing, for instance, institutional support typically commits the institution much more stringently than an individual signature on a petition (e.g. because of the more public nature of the former). Another possibility is that institutions, especially those that have a substantial history and heritage, are harder (or slower) to change than individuals. A third possibility is that the individual scholars who have endorsed the BP are typically much less involved in running the philosophical institutions that were asked to support the BP. It is worth remarking, in fact, that the BP individual and institutional schemes differed, in that the former attracted signatures from anyone interested through advertising and word of mouth, whilst the latter mainly attracted endorsements through targeted requests for endorsement on the part of the organizers. In turn, these requests were made in large part to institutions of some prestige, because they had the greatest potential to effect significant change. But, as is to be expected given what has been said in this chapter, prestigious institutions in contemporary philosophy tend to be overwhelmingly based in Anglophone countries and run by native English speakers. By contrast, a significant majority of individual endorsers of the BP were non-native Anglophone philosophers.

Whichever the motivation(s) of the lesser success of the BP institutional scheme, there is both reason to worry, as well as to be hopeful about the future of contemporary philosophy in terms of its linguistic and cultural inclusivity. The awareness of the problems I have discussed in this chapter is still only nascent. So, it seems likely that their solution will take time and effort, but may not be impossible. If, however, contemporary analytic philosophy does not prove itself to be capable of being more globally inclusive, then history would suggest that the discipline will experience a new change of philosophical mainstream.

³⁰ In addition, there are problems of exclusion due to an excessive emphasis on linguistic appearances that affect a number of other demographics, including the hearing-impaired and visually impaired communities, those with speech or writing impediments, as well as native speakers who use language varieties that are less prized within the relevant academic communities. The BP can address only some of them and only partially.

References

- Thomas Akehurst (2010). *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe*. Continuum.
- Costică Brădăţan (2022). What's Behind a Successful Academic Hoax? *The New Statesman*, <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/agora/2022/08/whats-behind-successful-academic-hoax> (last accessed on 2/10/2022).
- Tyler Burge (2010). *Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford University Press.
- Quassim Cassam (forthcoming). Philosophical Virtues. *Metaphilosophy*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12624>.
- Filippo Contesi (2021). Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy. <https://contesi.wordpress.com/bp/> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Filippo Contesi & Enrico Terrone (2018). Introduction to “Linguistic Justice and Analytic Philosophy”. *Philosophical Papers* 47:1–20.
- Filippo Contesi et al. (2021). Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy. <https://www.ub.edu/biap/bp/> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Gabriele Contessa (2014). Analytic Philosophy and the English Language: Some Data and Some Preliminary Thoughts. *Yet Another Philosopher's Blog!?*, <http://yetanother-philosophersblog.blogspot.com/2014/09/analytic-philosophy-and-english.html> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Hans-Johann Glock (2008). *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Cambridge University Press.
- Hans-Johann Glock (2018). The Awful English Language. In F. Contesi & E. Terrone (eds), “Linguistic Justice and Analytic Philosophy”. *Philosophical Papers* 47:123–154.
- Alexander Guerrero (2022). To Be a Department of Philosophy, <https://dailynous.com/2022/05/31/to-be-a-department-of-philosophy-guest-post/> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Kieran Healy (2013). Lewis and the Women, <https://kieranhealy.org/blog/archives/2013/06/19/lewis-and-the-women/> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Johnson (2022). The translator of the future is a human-machine hybrid. *The Economist*, 3/12/2022, <https://www.economist.com/culture/2022/11/30/the-translator-of-the-future-is-a-human-machine-hybrid?ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&gclid=ds&gclid=ds> (last accessed on 20/3/2023).
- Joel Katzav (2018). Analytic Philosophy, 1925–1969: Emergence, Management and Nature. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26: 1197–1221.

- Joel Katzav & Krist Vaesen (2017). On the Emergence of American Analytic Philosophy. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25: 772–798.
- Christine Korsgaard (2022). Thinking in Good Company. The John Dewey Lecture at the 118th Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.harvard.edu/dist/e/97/files/2022/07/Korsgaard-Dewey-Lecture.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0u5CCE4bwCrvG_IIQm63m4HZl_26xbkVD6R2VmR4STmSiWuWCSNGduxow (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Brian Leiter (2013). Best Philosophy Publishers in English. *Leiter Reports*, <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2013/02/best-philosophy-publishers-in-english.html> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Brian Leiter (2014). Ignorance of Philosophy, Identity Politics, and the Cosmopolitan Ideal, <https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/ignorance-of-philosophy-identity-politics-and-the-cosmopolitan-ideal/> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Brian Leiter (2022). Best “General” Philosophy Journals, 2022. *Leiter Reports*, <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2022/07/best-general-philosophy-journals-2022.html> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Brian Leiter (2015). The Top 20 “General” Philosophy Journals, 2015. *Leiter Reports*. <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2015/09/the-top-20-general-philosophy-journals-2015.html/> (last accessed on 13/4/2023).
- Brian Leiter et al. (2022). What the Rankings Mean. In *The Philosophical Gourmet Report*, <https://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/what-the-rankings-mean/> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Rosina Lippi-Green (2012). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.
- Moti Mizrahi (2013). Non-Native English Speakers in Philosophy. *The Philosophers’ Cocoon*, <https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2013/01/non-native-english-speakers-in-philosophy.html>, (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Plato (2009). *Apology*. The Internet Classics Archive, transl. by B. Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Stephen Politzer-Ahles et al. (2020). Preliminary evidence of linguistic bias in academic reviewing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 47:1–12.
- Aaron Preston (2007). *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion*. Continuum.
- Vitaly Pronskikh (2018). Linguistic Privilege and Justice: What Can We Learn from STEM? In F. Contesi & E. Terrone (eds), “Linguistic Justice and Analytic Philosophy”. *Philosophical Papers* 47:71–92.
- Regina Rini (2022). The Philosophy Guild. *Daily Nous*, <https://dailynous.com/2022/08/16/the-philosophy-guild-guest-post/> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).

- Ariel Roffé (2021). Interview with Filippo Contesi. *Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice Newsletter*, <https://sway.office.com/1u4jKaj5cDcvDtsp> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Richard Rorty (1982). Philosophy in America Today. In *Consequences of Pragmatism. Essays 1972–1980*. University of Minnesota Press
- Gian-Carlo Rota (1990). Mathematics and Philosophy: The Story of a Misunderstanding. *Review of Metaphysics* 44: 259–271.
- Gian-Carlo Rota (1991). The Pernicious Influence of Mathematics upon Philosophy. *Synthese* 88:165–178.
- Mario Saraceni (2023). The Problem With English. *Aeon*, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-do-you-decolonise-the-english-language> (last accessed on 12/4/2023).
- Eric Schwitzgebel (2010). The 200 Most-Cited Contemporary Authors in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. *The Splintered Mind: Underblog*, <http://schwitzsplintersunderblog.blogspot.com/2010/05/200-most-cited-contemporary-authors-in.html> (last accessed on 3/10/2022).
- Eric Schwitzgebel et al. (2018). The Insularity of Anglophone Philosophy: Quantitative Analyses. In F. Contesi & E. Terrone (eds), “Linguistic Justice and Analytic Philosophy”. *Philosophical Papers* 47:21–48.
- Eric Schwitzgebel et al. (2021). The Diversity of Philosophy Students and Faculty. *The Philosophers’ Magazine* 93:71–90.
- Jon Stewart (2013). *The Unity of Content and Form in Philosophical Writing: The Perils of Conformity*. Bloomsbury.
- Philippe Van Parijs (2011). *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Elly Vintiadis (2021). The Force of Presentation: Policing Modes of Expression and Gatekeeping the Status Quo. *Human Affairs* 31:479–487.