Last week, we saw that 17th Century France produced a revolution in language pedagogy.

The 17th Century was generally characterised by optimism about man’s technological ability to master and improve the world, including the social world.

Therefore, the idea became quite popular that it would be possible to create an improved language.
Real Character and Philosophical Language
Essay

- An enormous work, over 600 folio pages
- A first version got destroyed in the Great Fire of London (1666), second version appeared in 1668
- Almost half of the book gives a systematic description of 4000 English words
- From this a ‘real character’ (way of writing all languages) and a ‘philosophical language’ (for logical communication) are derived
- Wilkins also published on cryptography, theology, astronomy and mechanics
Real Character and Philosophical Language

(Bishop) John Wilkins (1641-1672) was one of the most well-known scholars who tried to devise a ‘real character’, a writing system which would represent reality in an improved way and a ‘philosophical language’.

The main improvement over real languages of the former was that it would be universally understandable, and of the latter that the relation form - meaning would be more 1-to-1.

“As men do generally agree in the same Principles of Reason, so do they likewise agree in the same Internal Notion or Apprehension of things. The External Expression of these Mental notions, whereby men communicate their thoughts to one another, is either to the Ear or to the Eye [...] The Names given to these in several Languages, are such arbitrary sounds or words, as Nations of men have agreed upon, either casually or designedly, to express their Mental notion of them.”

Note that the idea that thought is universal is the same as in PR.
Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of — affections of the soul — are the same for all; and what these affections are likeness of — actual things — are also the same.
Francis Bacon

In China and the provinces of the further East, there are in use at this day certain real characters, not nominal; characters, I mean, which represent neither letters nor words, but things and notions.

A number of nations whose languages are altogether different, but who agree in the use of such characters (which are more widely received among them), communicate with each other in writing; to such an extent indeed that any book written in characters of this kind can be read off by each nation in their own language.

(De Augmenti Scientiarum)
So that if men should generally consent upon the same way or manner of Expression, as they do agree in the same Notion, we should then be freed from that Curse in the Confusion of Tongues, with all the unhappy consequences of it. Now this can onely be done, either by enjoyning some one Language and Character to be universally learnt and practised (which is not to be expected till some person attain to the Universal Monarchy, and perhaps would not be done then:) or else by proposing some such ways as, by its facility and usefulness, (without the imposition of Authority) might invite and ingage men to the learning of it; which is the thing here attempted.
If any English man should now write or speak as our forefathers did about six or seven hundred years past, we should as little understand him as if he were a foreigner. [...] The variety of Letters is an appendix to the Curse of Babel. And therefore, for any man to go about to add to their number, will be like the inventing of a Disease. [...] The men of China, who do now, and have for many Ages used such a general Character, by which the Inhabitants of that large Kingdom, many of them of different Tongues, do communicate with one another, every one understanding this common Character, and reading it in his own Language.
The deterioration of language

Though the varieties of Phrases in Language may seem to contribute to the elegance and ornament of Speech; yet, like other affected ornaments, they prejudice the native simplicity of it, and contribute to the disguising of it with false appearances. Besides that, like other things of fashion, they are very changeable, every generation producing new ones; witness the present Age, especially the late times, wherein this grand imposture of Phrases hath almost eaten out solid Knowledge in all professions; such men generally being of most esteem who are skilled in these Canting forms of speech, though in nothing else.
The use of an international language

The reducing of all things and all notions, to such kind of Tables, as are here proposed (were it as compleatly done as it might be) would prove the shortest and plainest way for the attainment of real Knowledge, that hath yet been offered to the World.

if there were such an Universal Character to express Things and Notions, as might be legible to all People and Countries, so that Men of several Nations might with the same ease both write and read it.
More use of an international language

[A universal character would contribute to] the spreading and promoting of all Arts and Sciences: Because that great part of our Time which is now required to the Learning of Words, might then be employed in the Study of Things. […]

Wilkins expects that a real character will enhance:
- international commerce
- improvement of ‘Natural knowledge’
- ‘spreading the knowledge of Religion’ and ‘contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in Religion’
Principles

“As men do generally agree in the same Principles of Reason, so do they likewise agree in the same Internal Notion or Apprehension of things. The External Expression of these Mental notions, whereby men communicate their thoughts to one another, is either to the Ear or to the Eye. To the Ear by Sounds, and more particularly by Articulate Voice and Words. To the Eye by anything that is visible, Motion, Light, Colour, Figures and more particularly by Writing. That conceit which men have in their minds concerning a Horse or Tree, is the Notion or mental image of that Beast, or natural thing, of such a nature, shape and use. The Names given to these in several Languages, are such arbitrary sounds or words, as Nations of men have agreed upon, either casually or designedly, to express their Mental notions of them. The Written words is the figure or picture of that Sound. So that if men should generally consent upon the same way or manner
I find that one could add to this an invention, both for composing the primitive words of this language and for their characters, such that it could be taught in a very short time, and this by means of order, that is, establishing an order among all the thoughts that can enter the human mind, just as there is one naturally established among numbers; and just as one can learn in one day to enumerate all the numbers until infinity, and to write them in an unknown language, which are nonetheless infinitely many words, so could one do the same with all the other words necessary for the expression of all the other things that enter the mind of man.
Defects of existing languages

- *first Elements or Alphabets*: e.g. it is not always clear how a graphic representation connects to a sound in a ‘letter’
- *words*:
  - *equivocals* (i.e. homonymy)
  - ‘Synonymous words, which make Language tedious, and are generally Superfluities’
  - ‘Anomalisms and Irregularities in Grammatical construction’ [i.e. mostly irregular inflections]
  - The difference ‘betwixt the writing and pronouncing’ of words
Principles

But now if these Marks or Notes could be so contrived, as to have such dependance upon, and relation to, one another, as might be surable to the nature of the things and notions which they represented; and so likewise, if, the Names of things could be so ordered, as to contain such a kind of affinity or opposition in their letters and sounds, as might be someway answerable to the nature of the things which they signified. This would yet be a farther advantage superadded: by which, besides the best way of helping the Memory by natural Method, the Understanding likewise would be highly improved; and we should, by learning the Character and Names of things, be instructed likewise in their Natures, the knowledge of both which ought to be conjoined.
Nouns and adjectives

As Noun Substantives are the names which are given to things, considered simply, ad subsisting by themselves: so Noun Adjectives are the names which are given to the Adjunct natures of things.
Chap. I. The General Scheme.

All kinds of things and notions, to which names are to be assigned, may be distributed into such as are either more

- **General:** namely those universal notions, whether belonging more properly to
  - General I
  - RELATION MIXED, II
  - RELATION OF ACTION, III
- **Words:** DISCOURSE, IV
- **Special:** denoting either

- **Creator:** V

Creature's namely such things as were either created or created by God, not excluding several of those notions, which are framed by the minds of men, considered either

- **collectively:** WORLD, VI

Distributively according to the several kinds of beings, whether such as do

- **Suffuse:**
  - ELEMENT, VII
  - ANIMATE, VIII
  - according to their several
  - SPECIES, whether
  - Vegetative
    - Imperfect, as Minerals, VIII
    - METAL, IX
    - HERBS, according to their
      - FLOWER, XI
      - HERB, XII
      - TREE, XIV
    - EXANGUINEOUS, XV
  - Vertebrate
    - FISH, XVI
    - CONSUMMATE: BIRD, XVII
  - Parts:
    - SPECULAR, XIX
    - BEAST, XIX
    - GENERAL, XX

- **Accident:**
  - MAGNITUDE, XXI
  - SPACED, XXII
  - MEASURE, XXIII
    - NATURAL POWER, XXIV
  - HABIT, XXV
  - MANNERS, XXVI
  - SENSEABLE QUALITY, XXVII
    - SICKNESS, XXVIII
  - SPIRITUAL, XXIX
  - ANIMATE:
    - MOTION, XXX
    - OPERATION, XXXI
  - Relation, whether more
    - private:
      - ECONOMICAL, XXXII
      - POSSESSIONS, XXXIII
      - PROVISIONS, XXXIV
      - CIVIL, XXXV
      - MILITARY, XXXVI
    - public:
      - NAVAL, XXXVII
      - ECCLESIASTICAL, XL

Table 4.4
Of Beasts.

q. v. BEASTS, may be distinguished by their several shapes, properties, uses, food, their tameness or wildness, &c. into such as are either

Viviparous; producing living young.

WHOLE FOOTED; the soles of whose feet are undivided, being used chiefly for Carriage. I.

CLOVEN FOOTED. II.

Clawed, or multifidus; the end of whose feet is branched out into toes; whether

NOT RAPACIOUS. III.

RAPACIOUS; living upon the prey of other Animals; having generally six short pointed incisors, or cutting teeth, and two long fangs to hold their prey; whether the

CAT-KIND; having a roundish head. IV.

DOG-KIND; whose heads are more oblong. V.

OVIPAROUS; breeding Eggs. VI.
I. WHOLE FOOTED BEASTS. may be distinguished into such as
Solid hard hoofs; considerable for
Swiftness and comeliness, being used for riding.

1. HORSE, Mare, Gelding, Nag, Palfrey, Steed, Courser, Gennet,
Stallion, Colt, Fole, Filly, Neigh, Groom, Offler.

Slowness and strength in bearing burdens: having long ears; either
the more simple kind: or that mungrel generation begotten on a
SASSE, Bray.

2. MULE
Softer feet; having some resemblance to the
Cloven footed-kind; by reason of the upper part of the hoof being
divided, being ruminant, having a long slender neck, with one or
two bunches on the back.

3. CAMEL, Dromedary.
Multifidous kind; having little prominences at the end of the feet,
representing toes, being of the greatest magnitude amongst all other
beasts, used for the carriage and draught of great weights, and more
particularly esteemed for the tasks.

Elephas.

4. ELEPHANT, Ivory.

II. CLOVEN
That which at present seems most convenient to me, is this;

| || General | Bα | Exanguious | Zα | Spiritual |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rαl. mixed | Bα | Exanguious | Zα | Corporeal |
| Rαl. of Aεtion | Bε | Bird | Zε | Motion |
| Disourse | Bι | Beast | Zι | Operation |
| G@d | Dα | Peculiar | Pα | Ce |
| Wοrld | Dα | General | Pε | Co |
| Elεment | Dε | Magnitude | Pο | Poli@cy |
| Sτone | Dι | Space | Po | Provis. |
| Meτal | Do | Measure | Ta | Civil |
| Herb | Ga | Power Nat. | Ta | Judicial |
| consid. accord. to the Leaf | Ge | Habit | Ta | Military |
| Seed-vehicle | Gi | Manners | Te | Naval |
| Shrub | Go | Quality sensible | Ti | Eccles. |
| Tree | Go | Disease | To | SY |