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National Language and the Construction of Nationalism: Eric Hobsbawm's Constructivist Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: *Since the modern era, nationalism, as a political ideology, has profoundly shaped the trajectory and development of world history. As a representative scholar of constructivist theories of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm has provided critical theoretical insights into understanding the formation and evolution of nationalism by elaborating on its constructed nature. Central to Hobsbawm's analysis is the role of national languages in constructing nationalism. Drawing from a political science perspective and employing textual analysis, this paper focuses on the constructed nature of Hobsbawm's theory of nationalism, examines his views on national languages, analyzes the processes of constructing and promoting national languages, and identifies key pathways through which constructed national languages contribute to nationalism. This study represents an innovative approach to both the research perspective and content of Hobsbawm's theories on nationalism.*

Key words*: Constructedness, Eric hobsbawm, National language, Nationalism.*

1. Introduction

Eric Hobsbawm is a renowned British Marxist historian and a key figure in modern nationalism research. His works, such as "Nations and Nationalism since 1780", "The Invention of Tradition", and his "Age" series, have made significant contributions to the field. Unlike other modern nationalist thinkers, Hobsbawm focuses on the modernity of nationalism and adopts a constructivist perspective. He analyzes the political and cultural factors influencing nationalism through various real-world cases. With his deep historical knowledge, keen social insight, and interdisciplinary research methods, Hobsbawm places nationalism within a broad historical context and complex social structure, providing valuable theoretical resources for understanding nationalism.

Hobsbawm argues that nationalism is constructed. In analyzing the factors that construct nationalism, he emphasizes the key role of national languages. He views national languages as artificial constructs developed from local dialects. Since the 19th century, with the growth of nationalism, national languages have become dominant in nation - building, helping states shape citizens' national consciousness and collective identity. However, Hobsbawm warns that while national languages can unite a nation, they can also divide it, with the middle class often driving such division. Looking ahead, he predicts that globalization and large - scale migration will lead to new language groups, challenging the official status of existing national languages and making non - competitive multilingual policies inevitable for states.

2. Concept Delimitation

2.1. Hobsbawm's Definition of National Language

What is a national language? According to Hobsbawm, the true essence of a national language does not align with the claims made by nationalist myths. He emphasizes that national languages are not the foundation of national consciousness but, as Hogan states, are the "cultural artifacts" of national consciousness. [1] Local dialects are crucial for the emergence and establishment of national languages. Hobsbawm states that a

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national language is essentially a standardized form of communication refined from various vernacular languages, which are then demoted to dialects. [2] Thus, in constructing national languages, local dialects play a key role, and choosing which dialect to base the national language on is vital for its construction and determination. Local dialects, being composites of different dialects, generally lack written forms. Their usage range and communication ease depend on geographical distance and barriers, giving them an important distinguishing function from the start. Take Wales as an example; due to mountainous terrain, people in northern and southern Wales use distinct local dialects, preventing effective communication and making the dialects the decisive factor in distinguishing between the two.

2.2. Hobsbawm's Constructive Features of Nationalism

Eric Hobsbawm is widely regarded as one of the representative scholars of modernist theories of nationalism. The modernist theory of nationalism exerted a significant influence on the formation and study of his nationalist thought. Emerging in the 1960s, modernist nationalism theory has become one of the dominant paradigms in contemporary Western nationalism studies, playing a crucial role in advancing theoretical developments and deepening research on nationalism. The designation "modernist" primarily stems from the consensus among its scholars that nations and nationalism possess modernity, being products of modern society rather than primordial entities. Due to divergent research perspectives, the modernist theory of nationalism has developed multiple theoretical schools. Based on their distinct analytical lenses, these can be classified into five typological approaches: the ideological perspective, socio-economic perspective, political perspective, socio-cultural perspective, and constructivist perspective. The constructivist perspective emphasizes the constructed nature of nationalism, positing that nationalism is an artificially constructed phenomenon. Benedict Anderson stands as a principal representative scholar within this constructivist framework. Anderson contends that nations and nationalism are products of imagination, conceptualized as "imagined communities," with language serving as a critical catalyst in facilitating the construction of such "imagined communities." [3]

Anderson’s concept of "imagined communities" provided crucial theoretical inspiration for Hobsbawm’s constructivist research. In his analysis of the cultural factors influencing the construction of nationalism, Hobsbawm draws upon Anderson’s emphasis on cultural dimensions to conduct an in-depth examination of culturally embedded elements, particularly examining the constitutive role of national language in nationalist projects. Hobsbawm posits that national language serves as the cultural cornerstone for the construction of nationalism, functioning as a critical driver in facilitating ethnic identification, nation-state identity formation, and the broader process of nationalist construction.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Research Status

Western academia has generated a prolific body of scholarship on Eric Hobsbawm's theorization of nationalism, reflecting sustained intellectual engagement with his conceptual framework. Through a comprehensive synthesis and critical analysis of Eric Hobsbawm’s biographical trajectory and scholarly oeuvre, John Breuilly systematically examines Hobsbawm’s perspectives on nationalism and social revolutions. Breuilly acknowledges the positivist methodology employed by Hobsbawm in interrogating the interplay between nationalism and social revolution, particularly his insistence on contextualizing national consciousness within historical processes of transformation. By elucidating the dialectical relationship between nationalism and social revolution, Hobsbawm’s work establishes a robust conceptual framework that continues to inform subsequent scholarly inquiry in these fields. [4] Ronald Beiner elaborated on Tom Nairn and Eric Hobsbawm's divergent views. Hobsbawm contended that the current nationalism in Eastern Europe represents a pathological development. The intense nationalism has resulted in the disintegration of multinational states and the emergence of micro - nations. He advocated for curbing this fervor to lessen control over national consciousness. However, Nairn held a different view. He believed that contemporary nationalism isn't pathological. Instead, it has driven the birth and evolution of nation - states. Nairn also emphasized that the suppression of national identity by multinational entities is the real pathological phenomenon. [5] Through a critical examination of Eric Hobsbawm’s seminal work Nations and Nationalism, Weber, E. synthesizes Hobsbawm’s theory of nationalism, which posits that nations and nation-states are fundamentally modern constructs. Hobsbawm underscores the pivotal role of cultural and political elites in the

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formation of nation-states, framing nationalism as a product of socio-political engineering. However, Weber critiques Hobsbawm for neglecting the capacity of nationalism to transcend mere national patriotism and manifest as chauvinism, xenophobia, and ideological paranoia. Furthermore, Weber argues that Hobsbawm adopts an overly optimistic stance toward ethnic conflicts in multilingual societies, insufficiently addressing the destabilizing potential of nationalist rhetoric in such contexts. [6]

In Chinese academia, scholarly inquiries into Eric Hobsbawm's theory of nationalism have predominantly focused on three key dimensions, the first being the systematic synthesis and critical elucidation of the core tenets within Hobsbawm's nationalist framework. In his analysis of the future of nationalism, Cheng Yawen engages critically with Eric Hobsbawm's seminal work *Nations and Nationalism*. Cheng first systematically examines Hobsbawm's periodization of nationalism's historical developmental stages. He then synthesizes Hobsbawm's typological classification of nationalism's evolving forms over the past two centuries, notably delineating the paradigms of *integrationism and separatism*. Finally, Cheng interrogates Hobsbawm's prognostications on nationalism's contemporary trajectory, contextualizing his argument that nationalism—under the influence of globalization and other modern forces—is experiencing gradual decline. Hobsbawm posits that nationalism's ultimate endpoints will manifest as *supra-nationalism* (transcending traditional nation-state frameworks) and *sub-nationalism* (fragmenting into localized or sub-state identities), marking a dialectical shift in its historical evolution. [7] Yan Ying and He Aiguo have summarized the domestic and international academic debates and evaluations regarding Hobsbawm's historiography of nationalism. They argue that academic circles have neglected or underestimated the study of Hobsbawm's "nationalism" historiography. Through systematic analysis of Hobsbawm's theoretical framework on nationalism, they have clarified its core content and theoretical contributions to the field of ethnic and nationalist studies. Hobsbawm's historiography of nationalism focuses on three key dimensions: the formation and development of nation-states, the historical evolution of nationalism, and the mechanisms of national identity construction. Adopting a modernist perspective, his research particularly emphasizes the modernity and political nature of nationalism. He conducts in-depth analyses of linguistic nationalism and the role of cultural "traditions" in modern state-building. Within the context of globalization, Hobsbawm offers profound reflections on the future of nation-states and nationalism, advocating for a cautiously proactive yet pessimistic approach to confront humanity's future challenges. [8] Feng Xiao and Han Pugeng have conducted critical examinations and theoretical reflections on Hobsbawm's national theory. Distinct from other thinkers, Hobsbawm notably identified Marx and Engels' concerns regarding ethnic and nationalist issues. While inheriting their materialist historical approach to ethnic analysis, he developed innovative perspectives by conceptualizing nation as a modern construct requiring class-based analysis, and establishing intrinsic connections between national questions and global proletarian revolution. Furthermore, Hobsbawm contended that nationalism's specific manifestations evolve alongside capitalist development. His seminal investigations into nationalism's modernity, instrumental utility in political practice, and popular dimensions retain significant theoretical relevance. However, it should be noted that Hobsbawm's theoretical framework, primarily derived from Western case studies, cannot be directly transplanted to the analysis of Chinese contexts without critical adaptation. [9]

The second objective focuses on delineating the distinctive characteristics of Hobsbawm's studies on nationalism. Xu Duojiao and Wang Wenqi summarize the contributions of Hobsbawm's nationalism studies from three key perspectives. Firstly, Hobsbawm integrates historical perspectives to situate the concepts of nation and nationalism within historical transformations. By examining political, economic, and social developments, he analyzes the causes of shifting national principles and the diverse manifestations of nationalism across different historical periods. Secondly, as a Marxist historian, Hobsbawm emphasizes social stratification in his analysis of nationalism. He particularly focuses on nationalism's mobilizing effects on subaltern and lower-class populations, positing that while national consciousness varies across social strata, shared historical memory, customs, and cultural artifacts construct a common national identity that mitigates these differences. Thirdly, through case studies of Western European nations, Hobsbawm investigates the constructed nature of nationalist narratives through the invention of "traditions" and linguistic communities, thereby highlighting the artificial character of nation-building processes. [10] Yan Ying's analysis of Hobsbawm's nationalism studies proceeds from their distinctive characteristics and theoretical value, positing three principal contributions. First, she contends that Hobsbawm's nationalist thought centers on the dual dimensions of modernity and globalization, constituting distinctive theoretical features in his nationalism

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studies. His framework posits modernity as the essential characteristic of nations, nation-states, and nationalism while simultaneously revealing the paradoxical nature of nationalism's relationship with modernity. Second, Yan examines the methodological particularities of Hobsbawm's approach. She notes his application of global history theories to investigate nationalism's historical trajectories, albeit constrained by residual Eurocentric limitations. Concurrently, his adoption of new social history methodologies employs a dualistic paradigm to analyze nationalism, emphasizing subaltern perspectives while remaining circumscribed by insufficient archival engagement. Yan argues that this methodology embodies profound humanistic concern for historical human destinies—an orientation inextricably linked to Hobsbawm's personal experiences, political identity, and scholarly ethos. Finally, Yan underscores the theoretical significance of Hobsbawm's work in synthesizing historical lessons from nation-state construction. His prospective analysis of nation-states within globalization frameworks provides critical insights for formulating national stability strategies, thereby endowing his scholarship with enduring relevance for contemporary statecraft. [11]

The third aspect involves an exploration of Hobsbawm's theoretical framework regarding the conception of the nation-state. Li Zhongwei has systematically synthesized Eric Hobsbawm's critical engagement with Marxist state theory and its theoretical extensions. Hobsbawm's analytical framework simultaneously affirms Marx's foundational linkage between state apparatus and revolutionary praxis while identifying critical theoretical lacunae in classical Marxist state conceptualizations. His critique specifically targets Galvano Della Volpe's philosophical interpretations and Leninist political doctrine, concomitantly acknowledging capitalism's progressive functionality in state formation and the normative necessity of governmental order-maintenance mechanisms, thereby achieving an epistemological augmentation of Marxist state theory. Central to Hobsbawm's theoretical architecture is the conceptualization of nation-states as epistemic constructs of modernity, wherein both nationhood and nationalism emerge as historically contingent and phased phenomena dialectically contingent upon state apparatuses for their sociopolitical actualization. His teleological historiography postulates the progressive dissolution of these tripartite constructs within accelerating globalization processes, anticipating their ultimate obsolescence through absorption into emergent world-system frameworks. [12] Han Shuifa's comparative analysis positions the nation-state as a central epistemic object, conducting a critical juxtaposition of Eric Hobsbawm's socio-historical constructivism with Benedict Anderson's paradigm of imagined communities. While Hobsbawm's theoretical apparatus demonstrates intellectual indebtedness to Andersonian conceptualizations in acknowledging the imaginary dimension of national consciousness as nationalism's "proto-form", his framework fundamentally diverges in historicizing this cognitive mechanism as distinct from modern nation-formation processes. This theoretical divergence manifests most saliently in their differential analytical emphases: whereas Anderson's model prioritizes the material-cultural determinants of print capitalism and administrative infrastructure in national consolidation, Hobsbawm's dialectical historiography foregrounds the constitutive role of political epistemology and institutional praxis in shaping national imaginaries. His analytical framework particularly emphasizes the sociopolitical instrumentation of invented traditions and legal-institutional apparatuses as catalytic mechanisms in nation-state crystallization. [13] Wang Jiping conducted a comprehensive study on Eric Hobsbawm's theoretical framework regarding national languages, systematically analyzing Hobsbawm's perspectives on three critical dimensions: the genesis and evolution of national languages, their intricate relationship with state political power, and their interconnection with ethnic identity. Hobsbawm's theoretical paradigm posits that national languages predominantly emerge through artificial social construction, wherein political ideologies play a decisive role in their institutionalization. His analysis emphasizes state political power as a pivotal determinant in both the establishment of official languages and the preservation/abolishment of ethnic linguistic systems, identifying formal education and bureaucratic apparatuses as principal vehicles for linguistic standardization. In examining the language-ethnicity nexus, Hobsbawm underscores the instrumental function of national languages in ethnic formation, developmental processes, and the construction of collective identity, while also prognosticating potential trajectories for the evolution of linguistic systems in modern nation-states. [14]

3.2. Critical Research Review and Analytical Commentary

Synthesizing existing scholarship, academic inquiries have predominantly concentrated on three analytical dimensions within Hobsbawmian nationalism studies: the substantive content of Hobsbawm's nationalist ideology, distinctive methodological characteristics in nationalist research, and theoretical formulations

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concerning nation-state formations. These investigations have generated substantial theoretical frameworks conducive to comprehending Hobsbawm's nationalist paradigm. Nevertheless, discernible lacunae persist in current research trajectories. Primarily, extant studies predominantly engage Marxist and historiographical analytical lenses, whereas political-scientific examinations of Hobsbawm's nationalist conceptualizations remain underdeveloped. Secondly, while Hobsbawm stands as a seminal proponent of constructivist approaches in nationalism studies—particularly through his systematic analysis of ethnolinguistic elements in nationalist construction—scholarly attention to the constructivist essence permeating his nationalist theory remains disproportionately limited. In response to these scholarly omissions, this study proposes a political-scientific reorientation, prioritizing the examination of ethnolinguistic mechanisms in nationalist construction processes, thereby constituting an epistemological advancement in Hobsbawmian nationalism scholarship.

4. The Construction and Promotion of National Languages

Hobsbawm argues that national languages are largely artificial constructs, as exemplified by modern Hebrew. [15] Hebrew was the language of ancient Israelites, but with the Jewish diaspora, it ceased to be a spoken language in daily life, losing its primary communicative function and becoming primarily a religious symbol and tool for studying sacred texts. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the vigorous development of the Zionist movement, Jewish scholars began to revitalize and promote modern Hebrew to better unite Jewish people and construct a Jewish nation-state. This transformed Hebrew into a core linguistic tool for daily communication, cultural preservation, and national building among Jews. The creation of modern Hebrew demonstrates that the emergence of national languages is not a result of natural evolution, but rather a deliberate construction shaped by human needs.

4.1. The Construction Standards and Purposes of National Languages

Hobsbawm argues that the selection of regional dialects as the basis for national languages constitutes a critical issue faced by nascent nation-states. Through historical analyses of European cases in establishing national languages, he identifies three key criteria governing dialect selection and linguistic construction.

First, political considerations dominate. Language serves as both a vehicle and symbol of political power. Hobsbawm contends that political imperatives outweigh demographic factors like speaker population size or linguistic accessibility in dialect selection. For instance, Croatian elites initially used Kajkavian dialects but strategically adopted the Štokavian dialect of Serbs to foster South Slavic unity. This politically motivated linguistic shift consolidated Croatian nationalist forces and provided ideological justification for territorial expansion.

Second, practical utility proves essential. Dialects demonstrating superiority in higher education or facilitating technological/economic communication hold decisive advantages. Hobsbawm observes that ruling elites and intellectuals predominantly determine linguistic practicality, favoring dialects already employed in governance, academic discourse, and public debate. This criterion leads him to critique Herderian notions of linguistic "literary purity," asserting that functional efficacy outweighs aesthetic considerations. Indeed, literary value rarely factors into deliberate language standardization processes.

Third, linguistic marginalization follows naturally. Hobsbawm predicts the gradual decline of unselected dialects and minority languages through state promotion and socioeconomic development. Crucially, he emphasizes that such linguistic attrition stems not primarily from "oppression" by dominant national languages, but rather reflects the inherent political nature of language construction as an instrument of state power and class dominance.

Hobsbawm posits that the fundamental aim of constructing a national language lies in linguistic nationalism's aspiration to elevate its ethnic tongue to the status of an official state language, thereby consolidating political control over the nation. He emphasizes that linguistic nationalists prioritize not the communicative function or cultural symbolism of language, but rather its capacity to embody power, status, political agendas, and ideological dominance. A paradigmatic case is India: Prior to independence, Gandhi contemplated adopting Hindi—a widely spoken and functionally accessible North Indian language—as the national language. However, in post-independence India, English was ultimately institutionalized as the official language. This choice, Hobsbawm argues, was rooted in its perceived utility for mitigating internal conflicts and suppressing dissent across the linguistically fragmented nation-state.

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4.2. The Promotion of National Languages

The 19th century witnessed a transformative synergy between transportation/communication revolutions and state centralization. Technological advancements dissolved spatial constraints on direct governance, while innovations in statecraft—manifested through bureaucratic institutions, regular censuses, grassroots organizations, and police networks—tightly interwove individual lives with the machinery of the state. From birth to death, citizens became enmeshed in an omnipresent state apparatus that penetrated every facet of daily existence. This expanding state capacity generated centrifugal pressures: to dismantle communicative barriers between central authority and regional populations, and to standardize governance across linguistic divides. Consequently, the imposition of a unified national language emerged as a critical instrument for modern nation-states—not merely to enhance administrative efficiency and public service delivery, but fundamentally to consolidate citizenship management and safeguard territorial integrity through linguistic homogenization.

The implementation of national languages constitutes a tripartite power structure involving state apparatus, educational systems, and military institutions. Hobsbawm categorically asserts: "Only political power can alter the subordinate status of minority languages or dialects".[16] Without state endorsement and official recognition, no language can attain privileged status as a national or official language within administrative and pedagogical domains. The Finnish case exemplifies this dynamic: By the late 19th century, Swedish remained dominant among Finnish intellectuals due to its perceived practicality. Finnish only achieved official status through governmental imposition, demonstrating how linguistic hierarchies are politically engineered rather than organically evolved. Crucially, Hobsbawm identifies political ideology as the operational core of state power in language planning. Modern Hebrew's revival epitomizes this principle. Phonetically complex and linguistically distant from European tongues, it lacked the communicative efficiency of Yiddish—the literary lingua franca for 95% of Ashkenazi Jews. Yet its deliberate construction from ancient Hebrew roots served as a political semiotic: By evoking Jewish collective memory through sacred linguistic forms, it became an ideological vehicle for Zionist nation-building and identity consolidation. This linguistic engineering reveals a fundamental paradox: The selected national language need not possess intrinsic literary merit or functional superiority, but must effectively materialize political symbolism through historical resonance.

The establishment of a unified written language constitutes a vital mechanism for modern states to engineer homogenized and standardized citizenry. Within evolving democratic frameworks where universal suffrage prevails, vernacular national languages emerge as crucial political instruments—enabling candidates to articulate platforms and mobilize electoral support through mass communication channels. Concurrent technological and cultural advancements, particularly the rise of cinema, radio, and television, exponentially amplified the sociopolitical currency of standardized languages. European nation-states strategically leveraged educational systems as linguistic engineering apparatuses to propagate both spoken and written forms of national languages: (1) Primary Education as Linguistic Foundry. Pre-compulsory education eras witnessed fragmented linguistic landscapes dominated by regional dialects, with formal communication bifurcated into "literary languages for bureaucratic decrees" and "lingua francas for oral transmission". The institutionalization of universal primary education systematically eroded dialectal strongholds, exponentially expanding the demographic reach and functional dominance of standardized spoken languages. (2) Secondary Education as Standardization Catalyst. Through expanding compulsory education to secondary levels, states transformed schools into ideological laboratories for disseminating codified written languages. This created an epistemological infrastructure essential for manufacturing linguistically uniform citizen-subjects.

Complementing educational strategies, military conscription systems operationalized linguistic homogenization. As political enfranchisement expanded through democratization, states reciprocally imposed military service obligations. Armed forces became linguistic crucibles where standardized national languages were drilled into conscripts from diverse dialectal backgrounds through regimented training and indoctrination programs. This military-linguistic complex accelerated the displacement of regional vernaculars, cementing the national language's hegemony across all societal strata.

5. The Construction of National Languages and Nationalism

Hobsbawm conceptualizes national languages as potent instruments of statecraft—critical for enhancing civic governance, consolidating national consciousness, and engineering collective identity. He posits that these languages function as "tools for fabricating nationality and perpetuating particularistic cultural

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legacies".[17] Crucially, he deconstructs the invented nexus between linguistic systems and ethnonational formations, arguing that the perceived interdependence of national languages, ethnic groups, and nationalist ideologies constitutes an artificial historical construct.

5.1. National Languages Promt the Construction of Nation

While language emerged as a pivotal element in modern national definition, Hobsbawm contends that national languages did not inherently function as instruments for ethnic demarcation or identity consolidation. Their significance evolved dialectically through historical processes aligned with the needs of emerging nations and nation-states. During nationalism's formative phases, linguistic criteria constituted merely one among multiple parameters for defining national belonging, rather than serving as determinative criteria. [18] The mid-19th century witnessed an epistemic shift in European states' linguistic consciousness. Statist thinkers began incorporating vernacular speech into census frameworks, postulating that "language alone provides an objectively measurable and tabulable criterion for determining national affiliation".[19]

First, non-state nationalism movements provide significant reference for nation-states to construct nationalism through national languages. In the first half of the 19th century, Europe saw two major non-state nationalism movements: one in Germany and the other in Italy. According to Hobsbawm, both movements essentially aimed to unite people from different regions through the advanced culture and high - quality literary languages used by intellectuals. [20] For Italians and Germans, national languages not only facilitate government orders and communication but also convey progressive ideas, fostering public recognition and providing an ideological and mass foundation for national development. The middle class, a key supporter of nationalism, drove these two movements. For the Italian and German middle classes, language was crucial for shaping national identity and building a unified nation. The non-state nationalism movements in Germany and Italy offer valuable experience for other countries in leveraging national languages for national construction, highlighting the significance of national languages in nation-building.

The cultural revival movements of the late 18th century constituted a catalytic force in the co-evolution of linguistic nationalism and ethnonational consciousness. Under the sway of Romanticism—which valorized folk authenticity—European elites initiated antiquarian projects to excavate "authentic" ethnic traditions, with the systematic collection and codification of vernacular folk ballads proving particularly seminal for nationalist mobilization. Hobsbawm, building on Miroslav Hroch's tripartite model of national movements, periodizes 19th-century European nationalism into three dialectical phases:

Phase A (Cultural-Literary Incubation): Characterized by apolitical cultural synthesis, this stage focused on literary anthologizing and folkloric rediscovery. The compilation of dialect dictionaries and phonetic transcription systems (e.g., Grimm Brothers' Deutsches Wörterbuch) exemplified Enlightenment-era linguistic taxonomy merging with Romantic nostalgia.

Phase B (Proto-Nationalist Articulation): Marked by the emergence of radical intelligentsia advocating linguistic sovereignty as a precursor to statehood. Figures like Johann Gottfried Herder operationalized folkloric materials as epistemic weapons, framing dialects as "fossilized national souls" requiring political actualization.

Phase C (Mass Nationalist Mobilization): The institutionalization phase where folk ballads and standardized dialects became pedagogical tools for manufacturing "authentic" national identities aligned with state-building agendas.

Herder's ideological blueprint proved transformative: By reimagining folk ballads as mnemonic devices encoding ethnic myths and collective trauma, intellectuals weaponized oral traditions into: Textual canons for nationalist historiography, Melodic propaganda leveraging folk tunes' mnemonic potency, Linguistic capital through dialect standardization (e.g., Norwegian Landsmål vs. Danish-influenced Riksmål). This cultural engineering created a feedback loop—"rediscovered" folk idioms were aesthetically refined to fit bourgeois literary norms, then re-disseminated as "authentic" national heritage through compulsory education and choral societies. Crucially, as Hobsbawm notes, these constructed traditions served not to preserve but to invent linguistic continuity, providing pseudo-historical legitimacy for emerging nation-states.

Overall, the cultural revival movement has provided important cultural resources for the development of nationalism and the construction of national identity. The collation of dialects has provided an important language foundation for the construction of national languages. The national languages constructed based on dialects have enhanced the acceptance and recognition of them by the people and promoted the construction

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of national communities. The collation of folk songs has enabled the discovery and dissemination of the national spirit contained behind them, and has stimulated the national consciousness of the people.

5.2. National Language Strengthens National Identity

Within a state, different classes form significant class differences due to their varying claims and ideas. These differences pose a major challenge to national building and governance, making the national language an important vehicle and tool for reducing class differences and enhancing class commonalities to shape national identity.

The upper - class elite are more proactive in promoting the national language than the middle class and lower - class people. Hobsbawm believes that the dominant language, usually spoken by the upper - class elite, is crucial for national language construction. It can create an elite group communicating in this language. If this group aligns with the national domain or language range, it can develop into a "national" communication network, providing a good language and group foundation for nation - building. [21] Hobsbawm stresses that national languages are artificially constructed. Their promotion relies on printing - press development, but linguists' correction and standardization are more critical. Thanks to linguists' correction and standardization, national languages are created, unifying the languages of different regions and better fulfilling their nation - building and cohesion role.

Moreover, the upper - class elite are important human promoters of national language dissemination. Their political dominance, compared to the middle class and lower - class people, enables them to expand the dominant language's use through education and administrative measures, consolidating its national - language status. Overall, the elite's dominant language provides a key model for national language construction. To maintain this dominance, the elite continuously promote language standardization, laying the foundation for the national language's nationwide implementation. Using their power, they establish the national language as the official language for education and administration, expanding its use and providing an important vehicle for national identity construction.

The national language is crucial for shaping national identity among the middle class and the general public. For these groups, it serves as a living - skills tool, and mastering it is vital for enhancing their competitive edge. A unified national language is essential for technological and economic progress and helps the state directly manage its large population. As technology advances, the state's governance capacity improves, centralization strengthens, and the state - public link tightens. Effectively managing and supervising the public has become a pressing issue. Consequently, the state continuously enhances and expands its administrative agencies and public - service institutions. It recruits staff from the public to optimize management, supervision, and services. During this period, the national language is used for state - business conduct and policy implementation. The middle class, mainly composed of intellectuals, is more competitive than the lower class in seeking public - sector jobs. However, to gain more opportunities to enter national institutions and elevate their social status, the middle class intensifies its study of the national language. While promoting the national language, the state, through the middle class, increases the number of civil servants, improves national - institution settings, and achieves effective governance. The middle class, in turn, uses the national language to enter administrative institutions. This not only boosts their status but also fosters recognition of the national language and national identity.

Initially, the general public didn't care about language issues and were a key focus of the state's national language promotion. Their lives were centered around their villages, and their social circles mainly included villagers and neighbors. Their original dialects and simple gestures met their daily communication needs. However, with economic and social development and population migration, the self - sufficient rural system collapsed. The influx of outsiders made the original dialects insufficient for daily communication, and the national language became vital for people's livelihood. Elementary education and the military are crucial for the state to promote the national language and shape national identity among the general public. In elementary education, the state has made it compulsory, lowering the threshold for the general public and their children to access it. The state mandates the use of the national language in elementary education, driving its spread and usage. The curriculum combines the national language with state ideology. Through elementary education, the state ideology is spread more standardly and accurately to the general public. This subtly unifies their ideology and shapes national character. By mastering the national language in elementary education, the

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general public can use it as a living tool. The instrumental value of the national language promotes the construction of national identity among the general public.

In summary, the state, leveraging its political power, has established the dominance of the national language and applied it in school education, promoting its widespread use. The national language, with its practical and social functions, has become the unified language for writing and public communication for all citizens through state promotion. It is mastered by all social classes, strengthening commonalities between different classes and helping the state achieve homogenization and standardization of the population. Moreover, the promotion and use of the national language also serve to meet the interests of different classes. It conveys the ideology of the upper class. The middle class can enter national institutions through social mobility, aiding the state in effective citizen management. The lower class gains livelihood opportunities by learning the national language. Thus, the national language unites the strength of different classes and strengthens the collective identity of the nation-state.

5.3. National Languages Separate Nationalism

Hobsbawm recognized that national language plays a significant role in shaping national identity and constructing nations. However, he also highlighted the need to be aware of its potential to tear nations apart, stating "ethnic nationalism can go the separatist way and become independent of state power". [22]

To sum up, Hobsbawm recognises the national language's significant role in nation - building and shaping national identity. Yet, he stresses that it may also tear nations apart. "Ethnic nationalism can go the separatist way and become independent of state power". The construction and promotion of a national language have enhanced the commonalities among different social strata and helped distinguish "us" from "them" domestically. However, this doesn't mean local dialects are completely abandoned. Instead, they coexist with the national language, leading to multiple languages within a country and causing internal distinctions between "us" and "them". By the late 19th century, language fanaticism of small nations emerged. Language became a tool and symbol for lower - middle - class groups like local journalists, school teachers, and lower - level civil servants to trigger ethnic conflicts. Compared to the upper - class elite and the lower - class public, the middle class, especially the lower - middle class, is most affected by the national language. For the upper - class elite, the national language is their long - used dominant language and a symbol of their political power and ideology. They are key promoters of national language construction and promotion. For the lower - class public, they initially ignored language issues but began to learn and use the national language to solve survival problems once their original living systems were disrupted. For the lower - middle class, the national language is a vital tool for gaining livelihood opportunities and improving their social status. "Being educated" is their key characteristic, but their initial education was mainly in local dialects. As the national language was constructed and promoted, the advantages of local dialects weakened, and the national language became the standard language for national administration, culture, and public affairs.

To further promote the national language, the state expanded compulsory education from primary to secondary education. Consequently, the upper - class elite retained their advantageous position. Supported by national compulsory education, the lower - class public began to learn the national language to address survival issues, enhancing class mobility and giving rise to a new middle class proficient in the national language. The original educational advantage of the dialect - based middle class gradually diminished. During this period, the state continuously improved and adjusted its administrative institutions to create numerous job vacancies. Acquiring positions in national administrative institutions became an important way for the middle class to enhance their socio - economic status. As the national language was the standard language for national public affairs, the language advantage of the emerging national - language middle class became increasingly prominent. This compelled the dialect - based middle class to learn the national language to maintain and improve their socio - economic status and enhance their competitiveness. Meanwhile, the promotion of the national language sparked feelings of injustice and dissatisfaction among the middle class, particularly the lower - middle class, towards their native languages being at a disadvantage. These emotions were then translated into political actions. By leveraging nationalist forces, they highlighted their own superiority. Thus, in the late 19th century, the middle class joined forces with militant nationalism. They used dialects as key symbols of ethnic uniqueness and superiority, pushing nationalism to the right, transforming it into racial chauvinism, imperialism, and right - wing xenophobic movements. They also actively promoted the goal of establishing independent nations, advocating for the separation of their own ethnicity from the existing state.

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Hobsbawm made predictions about the future of national languages and offered recommendations for nation-states' language issues. As the economy and society develop, large-scale population movements have led to an increase in the number of ethnic groups and communities within nations, giving rise to diverse language groups. Unlike past distinctions based on ethnicity, these language groups now originate from different countries, and the languages they use have never been spoken in their new host countries. As a result, there are situations within nations where different language groups cannot communicate at all. This has compelled states to seek a political language that can facilitate communication among all ethnic groups nationwide, without any ethnic affiliations. Only in this way can ethnic conflicts be avoided and equality in language be granted to all ethnic groups. Hobsbawm emphasized that it is not feasible to completely abandon existing national languages and construct an entirely new one based on the domestic multi - linguistic reality. Thus adopting just one language no longer meets the developmental needs of multi - ethnic nations and most countries worldwide. With the growing demand for international economic and cultural exchanges, a universal world language is emerging. Adopting non - competitive multi - or bilingual policies is bound to be the future for nations.

6. Conclusion

Hobsbawm, a key scholar in modernist nationalism theory, offers valuable theoretical and practical insights into addressing contemporary nationalism issues. Unlike other modern nationalists, he focuses on nationalism's modernity and adopts a constructionist view. He analyzes the political and cultural factors shaping nationalism through real - world cases. This article explores the cultural construction of Hobsbawm's nationalism, particularly the role of national language. It summarizes how national language constructs nationalism. For Hobsbawm, national language is central to defining a nation and the cultural bedrock of nationalism. It carries the upper class's ideology, helps the middle class gain socially and the lower class make a living, and via education, becomes a dominant language for citizen homogenization and national identity - building. However, he warns of the potential separation of national language and nationalism, advocating for multilingual policies in future multi - ethnic states to prevent language - related disputes.

This paper reviews existing academic research on Hobsbawm, sums up his views on national language and nationalism, and enriches the content of his nationalist ideology. However, it only analyses the role of national language in the cultural construction of his nationalist ideology. Future research could broaden the perspective and conduct a more comprehensive study on the construction of Hobsbawm's nationalist ideology.

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