The linguistics of writing

Arguments between language and literature

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Linguistic Utopias

We are in the process of creating a new civilization in which, for the first time, people everywhere are beginning to take part in the events that are shaping our common future. The realization of the dream of world-wide communication and the growing belief that men *can* plan for change are opening new potentialities for human relationships.

(Margaret Mead, 'One world, but which language?' *Redbook Magazine*, April 1966)

A language that works has been shaped by men and women, old people and little children, intelligent people and dunces, people with good memories and people with poor memories, those who pay attention to form and those who pay attention to sound, and people with all the diversity of interests present in their culture over generations. This very multiplicity of speakers creates the redundancy that makes a language flexible and intelligible to all different kinds of people who are its speakers at any time.

(ibid.)

On the fourth of July 1986, as this paper was in preparation, an enormous celebration was held in the United States to commemorate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. 'It will include,' exulted the London *Times* (2 July 1986), '60,000 boats in New York Harbour, 3,100 dinners at $5,000 a plate, 22 of the world's tallest sailing ships on parade, 76 trombones in the all-American collegiate marching band, 300 Jazzercise ladies in leotards, 150 fiddlers, 200 dancing Elvis Presley look-alikes, and the largest fireworks display ever mounted.' At the time, one was tempted to undertake a neopoetic analysis of this event – as a Baudrillardian simulation re-enacting a lost form of patriotism, or as a next step in the elevation of high consumption and mass media to the status of official culture, or perhaps as the grandest ever projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.

For my purposes here, however, it was more helpful to recall the original dedication of the Statue of Liberty a hundred years before. On that occasion, according to historian Leslie Allen (1985), a sizeable number of male dignitaries and two or three of their wives gathered round the base of the statue to

perform the official dedication, while members of the New York City Women's Suffrage Association circled the island in a rented boat protesting the event. In a statement issued separately, the suffragists declared themselves amused that the statue of a woman should be raised to symbolise liberty in a country where women lacked even the most minimal political rights.

The imagined community

I would like to hold on to that picture of the statue surrounded by dignitaries surrounded by suffragists, as a parodic image of a kind of linguistics I propose to talk about here under the label 'linguistics of community'. This phrase is intended to underscore a utopian dimension shared by a good deal of modern linguistics, including what are sometimes called its 'critical' varieties. I use the term *community* here in the interesting sense suggested by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson observes that with the possible (but only possible) exception of 'primordial villages of face to face contact', human communities exist as imagined entities in which people 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. 'Communities are distinguished', Anderson goes on to say, 'not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically – as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship. Until quite recently, the Javanese language had no word meaning the abstraction "society"' (p. 15).

What emerged 'quite recently', is of course the modern nation-state, an imagined community in whose origin and character Anderson is particularly interested. He proposes three features that characterise the 'style' in which the modern nation is imagined. First it is imagined as *limited* by 'finite, if elastic, boundaries'; second, it is imagined as *sovereign*; and third it is imagined as *community*, a 'deep, horizontal comradeship', a 'fraternity'. 'Ultimately', says Anderson, 'it is this fraternity [the genderedness of the term seems intended] that makes it possible over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people not so much to kill as willingly to die for such limited imaginings' (p. 16). As this image suggests, the nation-community is embodied metonymically in the finite, sovereign, fraternal person of the citizen-soldier.

Anderson believes that the European bourgeoisies are distinguished by their ability to 'achieve solidarity on an essentially imagined basis' (p. 74) on a scale far greater than previous élites. Literature and the linguistics of writing play a central role in his argument. Anderson maintains, as have others, that the main instrument that made bourgeois nationbuilding projects possible was print capitalism. The commercial circulation of books in the various print

vernaculars, he argues, was what first created the invisible élite networks that would eventually constitute themselves and those they dominated as nations. (Estimates are that 180 million books were put into circulation in Europe between the years 1500 and 1600 alone). In the eighteenth century there flowered the novel and the newspaper, and two 'forms of imagining' which 'provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation' (p.30). Both these print forms present worlds in which multiple story lines are pursued discontinuously and simultaneously, connected only by their adjacency, and totalised in the imaginations of omniscient narrators or readers.

Now Anderson does not underscore this point, but the three characteristics he mentions, limitedness, sovereignty and community, make clear that the 'style of imagining' of modern nations is strongly utopian. I mean this in both the particularistic sense that they are imagined as islands, as discrete and sovereign social entities, and in the more general sense that the imagined version is an idealisation, embodying values like fraternity, equality or liberty, which the societies profess but, as the suffragists were pointing out, they have utterly failed to realise.

This prototype of the modern nation as imagined community is, I would like to suggest, mirrored in linguistics's imagined object of study, the speech community. Put another way, Anderson's limited, sovereign, horizontal brotherhood is the image in which the speech community often gets conceived in modern linguistics. Indeed, it makes sense to see a good deal of linguistic description, of both critical and 'uncritical' kinds, as engaged in producing this imagined utopian entity. Many commentators have pointed out how our modern linguistics of language, code, and competence posits a unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony – as a device, precisely, for imagining community. The prototype or unmarked case of language is generally taken in linguistics to be the speech of adult native speakers face to face (as in Saussure's diagram) in monolingual, even monodialectical situations – in short, the maximally homogeneous case linguistically and socially. This is the situation where the data are felt to be 'purest', where you can most clearly see the fundamentals of how language works, with minimal distortion, infelicity or 'noise'. Now one could certainly imagine a linguistic theory that assumed different things – that argued, for instance, that the best speech situation for linguistic research was one involving, for instance, a room full of people each of whom spoke two languages and understood a third, and held only one language in common with any of the others. A UN cocktail party, perhaps, or a trial in contemporary South Africa. Here, one might argue, is where you can most readily see how language works – it depends on what workings you want to see, or want to see first.

Behind Langue, behind Saussure's diagram, stands the image of the modern imagined community: discrete, sovereign, fraternal – a linguistic utopia. In the Chomskyan tradition a maximally homogeneous object of study is

achieved in the construct of the ideal speaker whose competence the theory is to account for, while the 'deep, horizontal comradeship' Anderson talks about is embodied in the idea of competence as an innate, discrete resource all humans share. Though the ideal speaker is an abstraction, it (he) cannot in principle be characterised or even conceived in a socially neutral fashion. So, for instance, within formal grammar, national standard varieties do continue to function as standards, defining the problematics of phonology, negation or quantification, and so forth. The distance between langue and parole, competence and performance, is the distance between the homogeneity of the imagined community and the fractured reality of linguistic experience in modern stratified societies.

'Community' in discourse

Though more closely tied to social interaction, pragmatics and discourse theory likewise often produce language in the image of the imagined community. Work in pragmatics and inference assumes the existence of principles of co-operation and homogeneity corresponding to the 'deep, horizontal comradeship' Anderson talks about. In standard versions of speech act theory, the preparatory conditions for speech acts include conditions formulating shared understandings about who wants or needs to say what, and conditions that both speakers share the same competence in the single language in use. Research on interaction in conversation, classrooms, medical settings and so forth tends overwhelmingly to present exchanges in terms of single sets of shared rules and understandings, and the orderliness they produce. Disorders (like boatloads of suffragists) are almost automatically seen as failures or breakdowns not to be accounted for within the system. Models involving games and moves are often used to describe interaction. These preserve the sense of finite options, the presence of borders, rules shared among equal players. Despite whatever social differences might be at work, it is assumed that all participants are engaged in the same game and that the game is the same for all players.

Perhaps more importantly, in these games-models, only legitimate moves are named in the system, where 'legitimate' is defined from the point of view of the party in authority. Teacher-pupil language, for instance, tends to be described almost entirely from the teachers' point of view. According to one standard account, 'verbal interaction inside the classroom differs markedly from desultory conversation in that its main purpose is to instruct and inform' (Coulthard 1977, p.101). The reference point here is obviously teaching, not pupiling (the term doesn't even exist) – indeed the pupils are not even conceptually present in that formulation, despite its mention of interaction. The standard Flanders taxonomy of classroom discourse posits seven discourse types for teachers, while for pupils there are only the two contentless categories, 'initiate' and 'respond' (see Coulthard 1977; Coulthard & Montgomery 1981).

Students are present, in other words, only as they are interpellated directly by teachers, and even then in a reduced and idealised fashion. Parodies, refusals, rebellions and so forth fall outside the account, and with them the struggles over disciplining that are such a fundamental part of the schooling process. ('Obviously,' we read in one account, 'there has to be some linguistic etiquette inside the classroom ... There are several ways in which teachers decide who will talk.' Coulthard & Montgomery 1981, pp. 9–10). Whatever students might be doing with each other, and however they might involve the teacher in those doings, remains invisible, despite being an important dimension of pupiling. Thus of the classroom exchange that follows, the most we are told is that it represents a normal instance of the standard 'teaching cycle':

T: Can you tell me why you eat all that food? Yes.
P: To keep you strong.
T: To keep you strong. Yes. To keep you strong. Why do you want to be strong?
P: Sir, muscles.
T: To make muscles. Yes. Well what you want to use – what would you want to do with your muscles?
P: Sir, use them.
(Coulthard & Montgomery 1981, p. 5).

Many questions could be asked about what the pupil is doing in this exchange, about what kind of pupiling is going on here. What is the social meaning of the minimalness of the responses in comparison with the questions? How is the pupil appropriating the teacher's language and distancing himself from it? How is his discourse gendered? How is he positioning himself in the pupil-based social order? The point here is not that standard descriptive approaches are altogether wrong, but that they are limited in ways they themselves do not acknowledge, ways the linguistics of community makes it difficult to acknowledge.

Sometimes the impulse to unify the social and linguistic world displaces other quite compelling social logics. There is an irony, for instance, in the thought of schoolrooms as stable, harmonious, smoothly-running discursive arenas in which teachers and pupils go on producing the same orderly cycles together day in and day out. For indeed, classrooms are supposed to be places where things change all the time, where pupils do and say different things from one day to the next because education and socialisation are going on. Seeing them as communities in the sense I am describing actually obscures those processes, or suggests they are not taking place. Child language, for instance, is commonly described in terms of its progression toward adult speech – which is to say it is analysed from the point of view of the adults raising the children. What would it look like if analysed as efforts by children to deal with the adults in charge over them, or as children's enactments of the gendered social category 'child', which they learn about from interacting with adults or watching TV

shows about muppets? It is after all only through difference from children that adults know they are adults!

Medical and bureaucratic exchanges are examined by the linguistics of community along similar lines. Analyses tend to be conducted mainly in terms of whether the medical or bureaucratic objective is achieved, which is to say the analysis situates itself *within* those same structures of authority that govern the exchanges themselves. Such a stance limits possibilities of critical under-standing – it cannot, for instance, readily distinguish co-operation from coercion, compliance or more complex responses, and indeed might see no need to make such distinctions. These limitations are exhibited by Aaron Cicourel's (1982) discussion of a case of a woman gynaecological patient who expresses continual scepticism about the diagnoses and treatment prescribed by her doctor, even while she submits to the treatment (a hysterectomy). This situation is defined by Cicourel as an abnormal one, since 'normally, the patient would follow the tacitly agreed upon aims of the conversation (sub-mitting to a medical interview and examination), and would believe the speech acts expressed (the diagnosis and the action being offered by the physician)' (p. 72). Again, the social and verbal roles assigned to the patient here, sub-mission and belief, are entirely reactive, and in fact nonverbal. Women familiar with the conversational genre known as the 'gynaecological horror story' will quickly question this norm on empirical grounds. Methodologically, Cicourel's characterisation simply presupposes established structures of medical authority, and therefore can neither examine nor question them.

And question them he does not. In fact Cicourel's analysis has the effect not only of legitimating the status quo but of actively delegitimating critique. The difficulty between the patient and the doctor is characterised as a clash between the woman's 'beliefs' and the 'factual knowledge' of the physician. The woman is seen as continually unable or unwilling to 'revise her beliefs' in the light of the information she is given by the doctor, a recalcitrance attributed to certain 'emotionally charged preoccupations' she has about the quality and reliability of medical care, and to certain 'experiences' she has undergone. Two non-interchangeable vocabularies thus construct the analysis: the doctor has *knowledge* in the form of *facts* and *information*; the patient has *beliefs* anchored in *emotion* and *experience*. On the one hand, one is led to ask why the doctor is nowhere assumed to have *beliefs* of his own that are in play; and on the other hand, one wonders why none of the woman's 'experiences' get to count as *knowledge* or *fact* (they include a period of working in a hospital and witnessing medical misconduct, caring for a husband dying of cancer in a military medical facility, seeing a television documentary on surgical fraud, and having been previously misdiagnosed for the same ailment by another gynaecologist).

The conclusion Cicourel offers is a generalisation to be applied, interestingly enough, to both medical patients and subjects in psychological experiments: scientists need to know that such people's 'schematised knowledge base'

includes 'a set of metapropositions ... driven by emotional elements that can lead the patient or subject to deny or resist accepting contradictory facts, yet reveal an awareness of them; there is a general reluctance to revise beliefs in light of new evidence, while an active cognitive search continues for new information to support the metapropositions' (p. 72). Cicourel's analysis itself, made the subject/patient of a critical diagnosis, might well convince one of such a conclusion. At the same time it is obvious that despite the rigid intransigence of their metapropositions and emotional elements, people do change all the time.

'Community' as male

On the whole, as the example above might suggest, the linguistics of community has also been an androcentric project, reluctant to address language differentiations along gender lines. It has been an obstacle to understanding the social production of gender and the social reproduction of male dominance — surely one of the most urgent and viable critical projects now at hand. We all know speech activity is deeply, even ruthlessly, gendered. Practically any conversation or classroom exhibits radically different behaviour by and towards male and female participants. In formal grammar, however, gender is excluded along with all other social categories. In mainstream pragmatics, the mark of gender is present only implicitly in the lines drawn, for example, between which linguistic practices are seen as unmarked, felicitous, acceptable, co-operative, and so forth — what is in the system — and which are marked, deviant, infelicitous, or otherwise problematic for the system. Here for example, is a list of verbal practices which have been associated with women. They can be readily connected either to women's relative powerlessness or to their association with the domestic sphere:

1. Planting suggestions in the minds of other people so that they think they thought of it themselves.
2. Speaking to one person in such a way that another might hear and be affected in the desired fashion.
3. In academic writing, gradually building up evidence toward the main point rather than stating it at the beginning and then backing it up.
4. Storytelling as a way of communicating values (to children, for example).
5. Gossip as a means of supporting and surveilling each other, and as a form of power over men, who fear this secret network.
6. Talking often repetitively with one another for the purpose of maintaining a shared world (small talk).
7. Talking to subjects who don't know language at all (babies, animals, plants, TV sets, the walls).[1]

It is not my purpose to argue whether these practices in fact are used more by women than by men — quite likely they are not. What is of interest is the fact that they are associated with women, and that in mainstream

pragmatics they often fall outside what is labelled normal, straightforward communication. Gossip, for example, is routinely referred to as violating conditions of relevance or the maxim of quantity or felicity conditions requiring that hearers need to know what speakers are telling them. Story-telling is nearly always considered pseudo-language of some kind, in which the rules governing normal communication are somehow suspended. Planting suggestions and other forms of manipulation violate speech-act theory's sincerity conditions. Talking to nonverbal entities, of course, violates pre-paratory conditions calling for shared competence.

The marginalisation of speech forms associated with women and women's spheres is symptomatic not simply of androcentrism in linguistics, but of an extraordinary, really pathologically narrow conception of what 'the normal system' or 'straightforward communication' is. Theories routinely exclude all forms of ludic activity, and other practices commonly associated with nur-turance, intimacy and socialisation. Even further off the scale, one assumes, would be the taboo practices of protest — demands, grievances, interruptions, refusals. The linguistic utopia, it seems, is not just any fraternity. As imagined by formal grammar and systematics, it seems often to be a fraternity of academics or bureaucrats, or perhaps talking machines speaking either the true—false discourse of science or the language of administrative rationale (see, for example, Bach & Harnish (1979) as discussed in Pratt (1986)).

One understands a particular reluctance to confront the issue of gender within the linguistics of langue. To include both the island full of dignitaries and the boatload of suffragists in the same picture is to introduce a deep cleavage indeed into the imagined community. It is to bring even the domi-nant class into a zone of profound internal incoherence and conflict that is almost unbearable to confront. It places the dignitaries at odds not just with the suffragists behind them, but with the wives at their sides, the statue before them, and indeed with themselves: why have they chosen to celebrate their ideal in an image not of themselves but of their subordinated other?

Subcommunity/Subutopia

Sociolinguists have often criticised the homogenising and normalising tenden-cies of formal grammar and discourse analysis and have placed the social variability of language at the centre of their agenda. In standard accounts, the language of a speech community is seen as divided into numerous different styles (Hymes 1974, for example) or registers (Halliday 1977, for example). This insistence on heterogeneity does not necessarily mean that the linguistics of community has been left behind, however. Styles, registers and varieties are typically treated not as lines which divide the community, but as shared property, a communal repertoire which belongs to all members and which all seek to use in appropriate and orderly ways. Here again one recognises the

impulse to unify and harmonise the social world, the same impulse at work in the examples from discourse analysis discussed earlier.

Such is the momentum of the linguistics of community that when internal social division and hierarchy *are* studied, the linguist's choice is often to imagine separate speech communities with their own boundaries, sovereignty, fraternity and authenticity. To pick a well-known example, this is the angle from which William Labov (1972) represents American Black English. Indeed there is a real sense in which Labov's concept of Black English Vernacular (BEV) *created* a speech community along the utopian lines I have been referring to. Similarly, some early feminist work in linguistics sought to lay out an entity called 'women's language'. One could speak here of a 'linguistics of subcommunities', akin in many respects to ethnographic and sociological work on subcultures (for example, Hebdige 1979, Willis (1977). Considered as critical practice — as critical linguistics in the sense given by Roger Fowler and his associates (Fowler et al., 1979) — work of this type can be extraordinarily empowering. It indeed does challenge the normative force of standard grammar, insisting on heterogeneity, on the existence and legitimacy of lifeways other than those of dominant groups. In this way it participates directly, as has the work of many linguists working on the language of marginal and stigmatised groups, in the political and social enfranchisement of those groups.

What the 'subcommunity' approach does not do, however, is see the dominated and dominant *in their relations with each other* — this is the limitation imposed by the imaginings of community. The linguistics of community tends to construe social divisions rather the way nineteenth-century linguistics construed dialect differences, as products of pre-given obstacles to communication, like rivers and mountain ranges. Social difference is seen as constituted by distance and separation rather than by ongoing contact and structured relations in a shared social space. Language is seen as a nexus of social identity, but not as site of social struggle or a producer of social relations. As David Silverman and Brian Torode observe in *The Material Word* (1980), Labov's vindication of Black English Vernacular in effect suggests 'there is no problem here' or if there is a problem here, it has nothing to do with language (Silverman and Torode 1980, Chapter 8).

As one might expect within the linguistics of community, where Labov does encounter a problem is on the blurry frontier where dominated and dominant meet. He denounces the speech of a black middle-class speaker, asked by a white interviewer to give his views on the supernatural. The speaker 'fails' to speak in BEV, and instead produces the 'turgid, redundant, bombastic and empty' English of the American middle class. 'In the end', says Labov, 'we do not know what he is trying to say, and neither does he' (1972, p.200). This reaction reveals rather startlingly the limits of a critical project grounded in an ideology of authenticity. Silverman and Torode try to surpass this limitation, reanalysing the exchange as an intervention on the part of the black

speaker in the dominant, implicitly racist discourse introduced by the interviewer's questions. The interview itself is treated not as a one-sided display by the interviewee of the spontaneous speech patterns of his community, but as a concrete encounter between two subjects constituted within a hierarchical and conflictive web of social relations in which racism and race conflict are pervasive. This is not the kind of reading one can do from within a linguistics of community.

Interpretive community

There is an interesting parallel to be made here with literary criticism, where the concept of interpretive community has recently come to the foreground, a concept in many respects modelled on linguistics's speech community. Just as some linguists have dealt with language variation by simply reimagining the community as a set of autonomously-conceived subcommunities, so some reader-response critics deal with diversity of interpretation by positing separate interpretive communities (Fish, 1980). Interpretive differences simply indicate boundaries between these communities, again the way the Pyrenees divide Spanish from French (and Basque from both). The subcommunities themselves are again imagined like Anderson's nations — as sovereign, horizontal brotherhoods.

Again, the limitation of the approach is that the interpretive communities are not seen in their relations to and interaction with each other. It is symptomatic that the linguistics of subcommunities typically seeks its data from the private sphere, from domestic and leisure contexts where indeed ethnic groups, classes, age groups and so on seem most self-contained, their communication most homogeneous. Likewise for literature, interpretive communities are conceived on the whole as privatised entities, where reading is a form of leisure consumption, or at least a *sui generis* activity connected to nothing in particular outside itself (Pratt 1982).

In both the linguistic and literary conceptions of subcommunity, then, one readily discerns nostalgia for the lost totality of the larger community. In the literary case, diversity of interpretation is often spontaneously, though by no means necessarily, perceived as *lack* of consensus, a loss. And a loss there has certainly been, or rather a change. For if recognition of linguistic variability breaks up the imagined idea of homogeneous national languages, interpretive variability breaks up the idea of canonical national literatures held in common and forming the object of literary study. National literatures motivate what one might call a 'criticism of community', another long-standing utopian project whose task has been to secure a national patrimony or official culture. In the relativising reader response era, literary understanding gets reconstituted as a specialised, self-motivating professional activity or, as in the case of feminist and radical criticism, as an active disruption of the patrimony.

Reader response criticism and related anti-foundationalist developments register among other things a weakening of national literary projects, a process in turn linked, it seems, to a realignment of the university's own relation to the nation, nationalism, and the state.²

Indeed, the concept of the nation-community itself, as a cultural and political entity, is challenged by large-scale changes in the past thirty years. Economically and politically, we are told, the world order has become increasingly transnational, as nationally-based political structures continually find themselves challenged by transnational economic interests. The decolonisation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s produced new nations very different from the European model. Many were decidedly multilingual, and had no clear candidate for a national language or a national literary-artistic tradition. Some solved the problem by adopting European colonial languages whose relation to national identity would always be problematic. Within the borders of western nations, large-scale immigration, also since the 1960s, has produced new and dramatic linguistic and cultural diversity, making traditional nationalist imaginings problematic. One can scarcely be surprised that explicit connections between speech community and nation have disappeared from linguistic theorising; while the nostalgia for community, the impulse to unify the social world remain pervasive. Even as social theory flourishes, formal linguistics retreats ever farther into neuro-biologism and artificial intelligence, while sociolinguistics in many places seems methodologically and theoretically becalmed.

I have been discussing the linguistics of community so far as a utopian project that postulates unified, idealised social worlds. It will not be altogether surprising to find that it has dystopic versions as well, in which the unified social worlds are discovered, then denounced as claustrophobic and degraded. There have been, for instance, dystopic as well as utopian accounts of women's speech, the most conspicuous probably being Robin Lakoff's early *Language and Women's Place* (1975). Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1977) might be seen as a dystopian account of pedagogical interaction. It is perhaps fruitful to think of Basil Bernstein's view of working-class language as a dystopian account within the linguistics of community. Working within the norms of the dominant class, Bernstein constructs working-class life as a linguistic dystopia whose internal character accounts for the social disenfranchisement of the working class (Bernstein 1971). A paradox results: Labov, because he is working within the linguistics of community, suggests Black English represents no problem; for Bernstein, because he is working within the linguistics of community, working class verbal culture represents nothing but a problem. As with most dystopian arguments, the solution that seems to follow from Bernstein's argument is the dissolution of the subcommunity, a move which completely transgresses the community ideal, and rightly enrages its adherents. (Literary criticism, incidentally, has its dystopia too: around the edifice of the utopian national canon spreads the behemoth of mass culture in an ever-expanding alien ooze ...)

Towards a linguistics of contact

I have been suggesting that the tendency to postulate social subgroups existing separately from each other gives rise to a linguistics that seek to capture identity, but not the relationality of social differentiation. It ignores the extent to which dominant and dominated groups are not comprehensible apart from each other, to which their speech practices are organised to enact their difference and their hierarchy. This is a point Noelle Bisseret Moreau has taken up (Moreau, 1984). Claiming that 'dissimilarities between language practices are meaningful only in the light of the [overall] social organization', Moreau argues that 'each class speaks itself according to the same hidden referent. This social referent is the dominant group ... because the social referent is the same for all classes, class language practices are *not* homogeneous, and this *non*-homogeneity is necessary for domination' (pp. 59–60). Here we have, I believe, a somewhat different style of imagining a speech community. In situations of domination, in Moreau's view, linguistic heterogeneity is *produced by* the homogeneity of the shared social referent (or dominant ideology). From this perspective, the codes, *langues* and competences postulated by the linguistics of community are embodiments of this shared social referent with respect to which all messages, paroles or performances situate themselves. (The same would be true for canonised literary texts.)

Moreau's view suggests a somewhat different linguistics. Dominated groups, in her view, are forced into what she calls a split subjectivity, because they are required simultaneously to identify with the dominant group and to dissociate themselves from it.³ Their discourse consequently is both distinct from and permeated by that of the dominant group, as Moreau documents from interviews with women and working-class university students in Paris. Moreau is thus able to move out of an ideology of authenticity, and see social differentiation relationally. This move in turn makes possible a more effective critical stance in which the way language produces dominance can be addressed.

At the same time, Moreau's commitment to the concept of a unified, dominant social referent continues to tie her closely to the linguistics of community. In the end, her argument coincides with Bernstein's in seeing subordinated classes only in terms of their supposed lack of what the ruling class supposedly have — in Moreau's case, a unified subjectivity and a unified discourse to go with it. It is symptomatic that Moreau's analyses, like Labov's, rest on formal interviews in which the interview process itself is not examined. Interviewees' statements are treated as neutral self-representations, and no question is raised as to how the interview itself might be constraining interviewees to present themselves in terms of the discourse of unified subjectivity. The social solution that *follows* from Moreau's argument reasserts community: the dominated, she says, must find a distinct logic of their own in which to 'interpret their social condition' (p.60), a way, that is, to unify their social world. As in the view of Jürgen Habermas, the only sure sign of a

non-hierarchical society would be complete linguistic homogeneity (Habermas 1984).

Moreau's argument nevertheless offers an entry point for thinking about kinds of linguistics that might begin where the linguistics of community leaves off. Deconstruction has taught us a great deal about the need to decenter the centrifugal, homogenising tendencies of western thinking, not because they are false, but because they are limited in ways they themselves cannot acknowledge. Imagine, then, a linguistics that decentered community, that placed at its centre the operation of language *across* lines of social differentiation, a linguistics that focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, that focused on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language. Let us call this enterprise a *linguistics of contact*, a term linked to Jakobson's notion of contact as a component of speech events, and to the phenomenon of contact languages, one of the best recognised challenges to the systematising linguistics of code. The term is not a satisfactory one, particularly because it attracts utopian overtones of its own, but let it suffice for the moment.

To give a highly contrastive example of how such a linguistics of contact might look at the world, let me illustrate it with the very loaded but pertinent case of South African apartheid. White westerners are encouraged to think of apartheid in terms of the segregation of whites and blacks. This is the way the western press predominantly portrays it, juxtaposing shots of Soweto or the so-called homelands with shots of white luxury suburbs. This is also the way apartheid asks to be understood, the way it represents itself to itself – as separation, apartness. Linguistically, it invokes a world where white speaks to white, in Afrikaans or English, and black speaks to black, in Zulu, Xhosa or one of many other languages.

The picture changes somewhat, however, if you think of apartheid as referring to particular forms of relatedness of whites and blacks, as a system in which they are not at all separate, but continually in each other's presence and contact, in workplaces, businesses, in dealings with the state, through religious organisations, surveillance procedures, through writing of many kinds. Such a perspective foregrounds different dimensions of the lived texture of apartheid society. It sees apartheid as activity, something people are doing, something enacted through practices in which difference and domination are ongoingly produced in conflict. When zones of contact are centered one can see, for example, the enormous significance of domestic labour in radical social stratification, of the fact that, in the case of South Africa, within nearly every white household there lives at least one black woman labourer, whose duties include maintenance and socialisation of white children. One can begin to enquire how through these interactions, through simultaneously intimate and ruthlessly exploitive relations, apartheid is acted out, reproduced, and opened

to change. One can also ask how very differently apartheid is lived by children, women, and men.

Such might be the perspective of a linguistics of contact, a linguistics that placed at its centre the workings of language across rather than within lines of social differentiation, of class, race, gender, age. As my example suggests, it is as a critical project that I am discussing this linguistics here, that is, as a project intended to inform a critical scholarly praxis. In the case of what has come to be called 'critical linguistics' (Fowler et al., 1979), the project is to produce critical knowledge of the workings of domination and dehumanisation on the one hand, and of egalitarian and life-enhancing practices on the other. As Fredric Jameson has taught us (Jameson, 1981), the utopian has a place in such critical projects. At the same time, one would want to avoid, in the case of a linguistics of contact, a utopian impulse to joyfully display all humanity in tolerant and harmonious contact across all lines of difference, or a dystopian impulse to bemoan a world homogenised by western media or run only by misunderstanding and bad intentions.

I have been speaking of a linguistics of contact in hypothetical terms, but of course many readers will already know of linguists, ethnographers, sociologists and literary critics who are doing work of the kind I am describing. I would like to use my last few paragraphs to mention some examples of work in the areas of speech, writing, and literary study that is pertinent to a linguistics of contact. This enumeration is intended only to be illustrative, and not in the least programmatic. Not coincidentally, it is made up mainly of work in cultural and ethnographic studies rather than in mainstream linguistics. The examples come mostly from a zone of contact in which I have a personal scholarly interest, namely the frontiers of European colonialism, where the limitations of a linguistics of community are perhaps most striking.

In the case of writing, a linguistics of contact will be interested in the conditions under which literacy is taught, by whom, through what institutions, what texts, and in what language. One thinks here of the work of Elinor Ochs and Alessandro Durante (1981) on literacy teaching in New Guinea, for example. Second, where does writing come into play within relations of domination, or relations between states and citizens? How is it assimilated? Shirley Heath's (1983) work on oral processing of written texts in a small southern community touches on these issues, as does Homi Bhabha's (1985) study of oral renegotiating of biblical doctrine in nineteenth-century India.

A linguistics of contact will be deeply interested in processes of appropriation, penetration or co-optation of one group's language by another – and in how or whether to distinguish among those three kinds of contact. One pertinent example is the one mentioned earlier, of the black middle-class speaker seen by Labov as copying white English and by Silverman and Torode as appropriating and intervening in white English. These are the questions Silverman and Torode (1980) began sorting out through their concept of interruption.

In writing, Johannes Fabian (1985) has studied the use of Swahili terms in two European travel accounts about East Africa. He concludes that this appropriation mediated a contradiction for the European writers between the need to use given forms of discourse for a home audience, and the need to capture the immediacy and shock of the contact experience. How, one wonders, does this practice look from the point of view of the Swahili speakers? In a related vein, Vicente Rafael (1984) has examined the discursive dilemmas of Spanish religious authorities introducing Christianity into the Philippines. On the one hand, supplying Tagalog analogues for Christian terms like 'obligation' or 'sin' inevitably meant incorporating indigenous ideologies that conflicted with Christianity; on the other hand, simply introducing the Spanish terms into Tagalog texts as 'untranslatable' items meant that key concepts existed as floating signifiers to which Tagalog speakers could attribute their own meanings. Within and between languages, these kinds of interpenetrations and appropriations are so common that, contrary to Moreau's claim (Moreau, 1984), nobody's world will be found to be linguistically or subjectively homogeneous, not even that of dominant classes. When seen as a site of social reproduction and struggle, language cannot be imagined as unified.

As the examples I have outlined suggest, a linguistics of contact would take the much-debated slipperiness of signifiers for granted, and will be much concerned, as students of contact languages are, with the improvisational dimensions of meaning-making. (When told by a Glaswegian to be sure to take a 'woolly jumper' with me on a visit to Glasgow I did not need to determine what 'jumper' meant to my interlocutor in order to know (a) that it did not mean what it means in my own usage and (b) that I should come prepared for cool weather.)

Of equal significance to a linguistics of contact is the immensely widespread phenomenon of bilingualism, less as an attribute of a speaker than as a zone for working out social meanings and enacting social differences. In the American Southwest, an Anglo who addressed a native Spanish speaker in Spanish would almost invariably receive a reply in English – the minority language speaker uses the dominant language to reject the majority language speaker's attempt to unify the social world. A rather different dimension of bilingualism is discussed in Braj Kachru's work on the phenomenon of 'international English' which, he argues, is creating élites in other countries, who are then able to erect language barriers within their own societies and develop English-based social practices which enact and reproduce their privilege. Here the second language becomes the sole instrument creating new social stratification (Kachru, 1984).

To a linguistics of contact, the distinction between speech production and reception is likely to be of much greater importance than it is to the linguistics of community. For a linguistics of contact, it is of great interest that people can generally understand many more varieties of discourse or even languages than they can produce, or understand them better than they can produce them.

What Bernstein would call 'restricted code' speakers necessarily have extensive competences in 'elaborated codes', at least on the reception end, competences they develop in continual dealings with elaborated codes in workplaces, educational institutions, mass media, political or religious participation, dealings with the state and so forth. What is the nature of these competences, and how are they engaged in reproducing class relations? Likewise, white English speakers in the United States do acquire degrees of reception competence for Black English, a phenomenon one must take into account in order to understand the co-optation of Black culture in America, or the political possibility of a Jesse Jackson, or the limits on that political possibility.

How does one study the internal variability of reception, the fact, for instance, that women and men learn to listen differently, with women highly trained at second guessing, at looking for emotional subtexts that will divulge the unspoken need to be met, the desire to be fulfilled? I think here of Tanya Modleski's work on television soap operas (Modleski 1981).

Finally, there is obviously an agenda for literary criticism here. A main item on it is the range of phenomena now being studied under such rubrics as 'colonial discourse', and the 'discourse on the Other'. Another is what Ronald Carter (1986) and others refer to as contact literatures, literatures in European languages produced outside Europe and North America. How are postcolonial societies grappling with western literary and cultural legacies? A related phenomenon is the current emergence of transnational academic and literary cultures that can almost instantaneously bring Garcia Márquez, or postmodernism, or the linguistics of writing, to the lips of people all over the planet. They have given rise to global academic and literary élites which, to return to Benedict Anderson's terms, probably need to be imagined in a style very different from the sovereign, horizontal brotherhood of community.[4]

Such developments create the need for critics trained in the reception of works not anchored in national categories. There are films like *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, made by a Brazilian from a novel by an Argentine living in exile, using North American and Latin American actors, Spanish, English and Portuguese languages, filmed in Brazil and (I think) Mexico, intended for release abroad with special thoughts for the large Spanish-speaking and homosexual viewing publics in the United States, and for the crisis in Central America. Or, to take a more disturbing example, what about the South African film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* which became a box-office hit even at the height of anti-apartheid sentiment? How did this film succeed so brilliantly in packaging the politics of apartheid in such a way as to neutralise the critical faculties of virtually the entire American film public? What did it say that white westerners wanted to hear? How did it make white westerners into a unified category?

Even as national dignitaries gather around their statues, and speak across the airwaves in national languages to imagined national brotherhoods, texts are appearing in their very midst that should puzzle them.

For example, a book recently enjoyed immense success in the United States called *The Golden Gate*. It is a sentimental-comic novel about California written by Vikram Seth, an East Indian, Oxford-trained ex-economist who studied for several years in China. The novel is written in verse, inspired, according to the author, by Charles Johnston's English translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Is this a work of American literature? Could one find a clearer example of the transnationalisation of culture? Alongside Seth's verse novel, there has appeared a book called *Shallow Graves* (ILarsen and Nga, 1986), an autobiographical work by two women, an American journalist and a Vietnamese office worker, who met in Vietnam and renewed their relation in the United States. It too is written as a verse novel, in English, following a Vietnamese form called the *truyen*. Such new forms, new challenges to linguistic, cultural, and critical understanding, will continue to appear and to call upon our capacities as linguistics and critics. Such challenges can only be ignored or mystified by a linguistics of community whose view of language is anchored in a normative vision of a unified and homogeneous social world. It is hard to give up the enormous mental comfort of that vision. But it is worthwhile to give it up, in hopes of gaining a linguistics and a criticism whose engagement with the social world is not confined to the utopian.

Notes

1   For these examples and others, see Lakoff (1975), Harding (1975), Hiatt (1977), Key (1977), Thorne and Henley (1975). For more contemporary views on the subject, see Thorne *et al.* (1983); Steedman *et al.* (1985), Kramarae *et al.* (1984).

2   Hobsbawm's claim that 'schools and especially universities are the conscious champions of nationalism' (quoted in Anderson 1983) seems no longer to apply in the 1980s, some twenty-five years after it was made.

3   One is reminded here of W. E. B. Dubois's concept of 'double consciousness' developed in his classic *Souls of Black Folk*.

4   Given Anderson's comments on the novel, it is worth noting that the inter-national academic elite has recently begun to appear as the subject of novels such as those of David Lodge and Marilyn French. It would be interesting to examine whether the academic novel represents an attempt to imagine this transnational formation as a community in Anderson's sense, or whether its emergence reflects a shift in the novel away from the community model.

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4 *Morris Halle*

A biblical pattern poem

It is a commonplace of literary criticism that an essential prerequisite for a proper appreciation of a text is a good grasp of its form. In what follows I shall try to show that one of the best-known psalms has striking formal properties that appear not to have been previously noticed. It is my hope that in bringing out these features of the psalm I shall contribute something towards a better understanding of a poem about which so much has been written that it might seem that there is no longer anything new to be said.

Some years ago, John McCarthy and I discovered that Psalm 137, the one that in the King James translation of the Bible begins with the words 'By the rivers of Babylon', is composed in conformity with a rudimentary vowel-counting metre which is quite similar to that utilised in most of the major poetry of the different Romance languages. (For details see Halle and McCarthy (1981)) Typically in such metres the number of vowels per line is limited in accordance with some simple principle. To make the writing of such lines a bit more challenging in most of these traditions not all vowels are counted equally. For instance, in French verse the *e-muet* counts only if followed by a syllable beginning with a consonant, whereas all other vowels are counted without regard to what follows. As an example, consider the well-known lines of Verlaine:

Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville,
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon coeur?

If we count the vowels that are actually pronounced in each line in standard literary French, we get five in the first line, six in the second, five in the third, and five or six in the fourth. From the point of view of its metre, each line has precisely six vowels. We can get the correct count if, in conformity with the rule stated in the preceding paragraph, we count the *e-muet* in the first line. On the other hand, in the second line neither of the *e-muets* counts: the one in *comme* is discounted because it is not followed by a syllable with consonantal onset, whereas that in *ville* is not counted because no syllable whatever follows