

FORTY YEARS OF SPEAKING (OF) THE SAME (OBJECT) LANGUAGE – SANS LE SAVOIR

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Forty years of speaking (of) the same (object) language – *sans le savoir*

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Introduction

Sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology in their modern forms are disciplinary developments still referencing, in their very names, the matrix fields with respect to which they have emerged. If the main stemma of modern linguistics has been a *linguistique de la langue* in the Saussurean sense, as I will elaborate below, sociolinguistics has evolved into something of a *linguistique de la parole* as envisaged some time ago by Emile Benveniste. In the latter, language as a denotational code immanent in usage recedes into the background, in favor of investigating who (that is, what socially characterizable kind of individual) communicates what kinds of messages to whom when (that is, under what kinds of other discoverable conditions constituting the “context” of communication) – and why. In parallel fashion, the trends in anthropology (and sociology) dominant mid-20th century and beyond have focused on abstracting morphologies of institutionalized social life and systems of symbolically manifested value orientation that ground them, whether in Anglo-American structural-functional approaches and their developments or in French mid-century structuralist ones. One would never know from such anthropology – one did not care to know, except trivially – the details of multi-modal communication among human (and other) social actors that constitutes the mediating reality of all this, nor that therefore, attention to such communication is the *sine qua non* of ethnography. How, then, do people mutually coordinate as strategic, sometimes even agentive co-participants in such communicative events

using the affordance of multiple cultural codes, among them denotational language? It takes an *anthropologie sociale de la parole* to find out – one convergent, moreover, with a semiotically framed sociolinguistics of contextual variation.

Let me consider each of these developments in somewhat more detail.

Putting the socio- into linguistics

Synchronicization and its consequences

The late 19th century “synchronicization” of language theory, adumbrated by William Dwight Whitney’s contemplation of individual verbal behavior in relation to social institutionality, certainly culminated – with traces in explicit textual references to Whitney – in the Saussurean teachings that became the posthumous *Cours de linguistique générale* of 1916. In the 20th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, working out of the methodological consequences of this shift, including how to elaborate the new concept of “diachrony” that replaced the earlier Neogrammarian historical sense, was the brief for the rapidly professionalizing science. There were two important transformations implied here, not always clearly enough linked by theorists.

The first transformation involves the two kinds of temporality now explicit in structuralist conceptions of *langue* and *parole*. *Langue*, we recall, is a norm ascribed to a language community (Saussure’s “*masse parlante*”) and in reference to which grammaticality can be said to be immanent in any individual community member’s production of denotational discourse. Such “execution of the system” happens in the real-time of situated, intersubjective discursive events of communication, realized through speech acts as part of strategic social life. Such events presuppose the ontic autonomy of the shared norms of grammaticality as an affordance that is, for all practical purposes in structuralist thought, presumed to be fixed.

By contrast, labels such as “proto-X,” “classical-Y,” “modern-Z,” etc., presume upon the branching-tree *Stammbaum* of whole “languages” moving along in time as one language-state transforms into another. Diachrony, then, is this temporal dimension of *langue* itself, that is, of the grammatical system, distinct from the temporal dimensions of mere execution, mere discourse. Systems change into newly configured systems, a rearrangement of norms, as it were, which is the dimensionality of such temporal processes as “sound change,” “analogic [= grammatical] change,” “semantic change,” and so forth, as detailed in handbooks of

an earlier era. For Leonard Bloomfield, the “discovery” of the phoneme as a structural unit of lexical form within a grammar made a “science” of linguistics, one in which abstract phonemes were, diachronically, the true locus of what Neogrammarians had termed “sound change.” In the Praguean “*Thèses*” of 1929, comparable “re-, de-, and plain old phonologization” of structural contrasts of segments are the terms of systemic change at this plane of language. In fact, even today essentially saltationist, stadial views of systemic change of *langue* are propounded by generative grammarians who approach diachrony as sudden, inter-generational re-structuring of a set of rules in the knowledge of a representative “ideal speaker-hearer” of a language (more on which – or whom – below).

So if the norm appears to be static from the point of view of the event temporality of *parole*, and the norm, *langue*, changes in its own autonomous order, how – if at all – are these two temporalities, that of performing language and that of diachronic change of system, to be related one to another?

The synchronicizing revolution imported another difficulty into linguistics, the problem of the ontological character of – and therefore the epistemological routes to – the norm presupposed by the concept of *langue* and its various subsequent theoretical equivalents. The Ascended Genevan Master himself, for example, clearly thought of *langue* as what Emile Durkheim would term a “social fact,” that is, a property predicable of an aggregate of language users insofar as they form a collective entity, a language community. This is clearly also what Antoine Meillet, a close associate of the Durkheimian *Annéeistes*, invokes when he considers a language community to be the population of speakers “qui ont le sentiment et la volonté de parler la même langue,” that is, those who are oriented to and who in their usage are informed by a community norm. As well, even in his behavioristic theorizing, Bloomfield needed something akin to the grammatical structure of type-level *langue* – immanent principles of sameness and difference of linguistic form and meaning – as an autonomous factor in human life, the denotational medium through which people mutually coordinated in addition to momentary stimuli and token responses to them. (Despite his behaviorism, Bloomfield wholeheartedly approved of the *Cours*, excepting only its associationist psychology.)

Bloomfield’s successors in American “descriptive [= synchronic] linguistics,” however, turned to make their theorizing compatible with behaviorist methods of empirical investigation of language structure. For

them, two sets of relationships – an individual's linguistic production *vs* the community's norm, and the context-by-context token variability of even a single speaker's linguistic production – had become critical epistemological problems for investigating language through the methods of long-term elicitation in fieldwork. Indeed, from such conundrums was born the notion of the “idiolect,” a kind of norm for one individual speaker abstractable from and presumed to be common across speaking occasions. Hence arose the heuristic that by cumulatively sampling an “idiolect” in an elicitation environment one could factor out contextual variability otherwise occluding the structural analysis of an elicited corpus.

Such views present a conundrum: without some kind of sociological investigation to locate kinds of speakers of the language of a linguistic community, how could one guarantee that language sampled in this way represents the transparent execution of the shared norm of the community of which a particular speaker was a member? (Circa 1970 William Labov in like manner formulated what he termed “the Saussurean paradox” – though it is properly “the neo-Bloomfieldian paradox,” however indirectly deriving from Saussure.) And insofar elicitation and transcription tend to continue over many sessions even when one works with a single speaker of a language, how can one guarantee the consistency and systematic coherence in respect of the norm of material amassed over long stretches of data-gathering?

From dialectology to sociolectology

Within Neogrammarianism, the obvious geographical variance of language was recognized and documented, even in the face of the institutionalization of language standardization so central to the nation-statist order of modernity. Indeed, the concept of the ‘isogloss’, on analogy with isobars, isoclines, and other lines of differentiation of measurable physical characteristics observed on and over landmass, was useful to understanding the space-time dynamic of both sound laws and other systemic changes in languages and as well trans-linguistic processes of diffusion – borrowing – across geographically plotted boundaries of taxonomic nodes on a familial *Stammbaum*.

Central here to documentation has been the linguistic atlas, and every major nation-state of Western Europe and many to the east ultimately had its own, yielding in the pictorial form of annotated maps the individual or bundled lines of geographical differences of usage of particular forms – whether phonological, morphological, or lexical

– and/or their meanings, rendered visible in relation to topographic or geopolitical features. By 1928, the then recently established Linguistic Society of America began to plan for a projected Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada; with support of the American Council of Learned Societies, it brought Jakob Jud, head of the then ongoing southern Swiss atlas project, to the 1931 summer Linguistic Institute to teach young American linguists how to be dialectological field workers investigating North American English. (The project remains incomplete to this day.) In the less highly mobile social world of the 1920s and 1930s, field workers sought out those older speakers in small towns with deep local ancestry on both sides of the family, the idea being to find pronunciations, lexemes, constructions and collocations that were in a sense autochthonous and locally developed in situ over a long period. As Linguistic Atlas fieldworkers moved from small town to small town they were tapping into what was well the end of a relatively sedentary, local communicative economy.

Dialectal differences presented a real problem to an academic generation adhering to descriptivist concepts and methodologies. Paralleling syntagmatically conditioned variance in phonetic actualization of phonemic segments comprehended under the concept of “allophones,” was there a kind of sub-phonemic variation to be geographically plotted in terms of systems of “diaphones?” Could such “diaphonological” systematicity be found as well in plurilingual speech communities, a growing concern in the North American context as the polyglot abilities and communicative behavior of speakers of local minority languages – both indigenous and immigrant – were facts on the ground that could not easily be ignored. (Note the long tradition of description and classification of the languages of North American indigenous peoples, at this time in fact the central empirical concern of anthropological linguistics and the evidentiary underpinning of American linguistic theory. Likewise, massive immigration to North America, curtailed in the United States by act of Congress only in 1924, had resulted in flourishing, media-rich, non-Anglophone language communities in both urban enclaves and rural areas that assimilated linguistically only in later generations.)

But of course the geographical logic of dialectology applies just as well in macro-social space. That is, language varies as a function of demographic differences among speakers, their condition of social life, even within a single language community and within the precincts of a geopolitical unit of whatever sort. Anti-Neogrammarian linguists such as Hugo Schuchardt had long been interested in “argot” or slang registers

used among particular social groups, constituting in effect “secret languages” that could be used with impunity for purposes of restricted communication – until their “secret” terms and collocations were adopted by those in the matrix social formation. And of course drawing on the affordances of more than one denotational code, polyglot speakers of minority languages within nation-states have always “mixed codes.”

So in the American context, during the 1940s and 1950s those most concerned with field elicitation and structural analysis of indigenous languages, such as Kenneth Pike and Carl Voegelin, and those documenting immigrant languages, worried about the conundrums of structure in such environments. Einar Haugen and Uriel Weinreich in particular, perhaps the two most European and Eurocentric scholars among American linguists – both practicing polyglots and authors of pedagogical language texts – struggled to encompass such “-lectological” realities, as we might term them, within structuralist theorizing. In Haugen’s case, his own trans-Atlantic scholarly life, moving between Norway and the United States, and his studies of the fate of the Norwegian language in immigrant America during the 1930s and the history of the dual – and dueling – standard written registers in Norway since the mid-19th century, could not but reveal the shortcomings of the strictest American neo-Bloomfieldian formalism and its methodologically idealized monoglot, idiolectal speaker-hearer.

Weinreich, younger by two decades, had the advantage of being a student at Columbia University post-World War II during its Golden Age as the center in North America of European functionalism. On the faculty during this period were Roman Jakobson, André Martinet, Janos Lotz, and eventually Robert Austerlitz; as well, the functionally oriented American linguist Joseph Greenberg joined the anthropology faculty in 1948 (and co-taught with Weinreich during the 1950s until his departure in 1962). In this functionalist émigré milieu, Weinreich was exposed to the complexities of “languages in contact,” to the “dynamic synchrony” (as Jakobson coined the phrase) of the semiotic processes within complex language- and speech-communities, and to thinking about the sociolectal as well as dialectal mapping of these processes as the functional-structures-in-time, the growth edges of diachrony, in other words, to be recuperated for a social formation of past times as well as to be documented for one of the present time. Indeed, Weinreich’s own empirical projects immersed him in all three areas, language contact in the plurilingual speech communities of Switzerland, recuperating language and culture of the plurilingual worlds of pre-Holocaust Eastern

European Jewry, and navigating the still incomplete standardizing projects of the Yiddish-language intelligentsia of the post-War diaspora.

Thus we see the line of continuity to the manifesto of variationist sociolinguistics, the triply co-authored “Empirical foundations for a theory of language change,” a 1966 conference paper begun by Weinreich and brought to publication after Weinreich’s death by William Labov with input from Michael Herzog. The paper begins in Weinreichian review of Neogrammarianism and critique of neo-Bloomfieldian and related structuralist presumptions about homogeneity of code within language communities; it relates concepts of -lectal heterogeneity within them to problems of discerning a single or overarching emic structure in plurilingual speech communities (as in “contact” linguistics); and finally it presents a Labovian brief for what has come to be termed variationist sociolinguistics as the framework for studying “dynamic synchrony” in relation to that period’s generative phonology. Therein lies another set of problems.

The metaphysics of “competence”

Noam Chomsky’s ‘competence’ *vs* ‘performance’ distinction parallels in large part the *langue vs parole* distinction of Saussure (a parallelism Chomsky has several times noted, with anxious qualification). However, ‘competence’ as a formally representable structure of rules that “generate” pairings of propositional meanings and phonological forms of utterable sentences finds its place in a long line of claims about the “psychological reality” of grammar.

To be sure, in keeping with its fundamental sociologism, in the Saussurean *Cours* the language community – as we now say – indexically presumes upon the existence of the norm of *langue* as a characteristic not of any individual speaker, nor of an aggregate of individual speakers, but of the collectivity, the group so exemplified by producing and interpreting linguistic forms in the behavioral realm of *parole*.

In respect of such a norm, the term “psychological reality” was prominently used in Edward Sapir’s famous paper (originally published in French translation in 1933) on the “psychological reality of phonemes.” Sapir presents behavioral data – judgments of phonetically non-apparent (phonological) morpheme shapes; native transcriptional practices; first-language interference in perception; etc. – that are seemingly biased by precisely the underlying phonological representations that the analytic methods of phonemic modeling of phonetic data would set up as the linguistic norm. The metalinguistic intuitions and consequential

task-orientations of linguistically untrained native speakers – unlike those of linguists like Sapir, who have escaped such defaults through training in linguistics – seemed to confirm in their structured inattention to phonetics their intuitive knowledge of the analytically characterizable norm.

Sapir does not elaborate where such a norm exists, and precisely how its biasing effect arises (in several essays over the years he wrote of native speakers' intuitive knowledge of grammatical norms as well). In these treatments, consistent with the Boasian idiom of "psychology" as a social psychology of semiotic form, Sapir did not differentiate what we might term an organismal or pre-sociocultural level of mind from the enculturated mind-in-society (captioned, late in his career, as the "psychiatric" versus the "psychological"). Indeed, according to the Boasian doctrine of the "psychic unity of humankind" everyone is innately endowed with the capacity to learn the phonology – as well as the grammar – of whatever language to which he or she is exposed in childhood. So the biasing effect of any particular phonological system is "psychologically real" as the socially conditioned apperceptual grid a particular language that suppresses certain possible categorical distinctions in favor of other, phonologically distinctive ones.

Chomskyan generativist views on 'competence' have focused on syntax and have, over time, more and more problematically located both the "universal" of all language and the actual of particular languages as an autonomous computational module of cognitive function. The series of metaphysical moves entailed by such theorizing is highly inimical to any viable sociolinguistics. Chomsky's famous invocation of the intuitive knowledge of an "ideal speaker-hearer who knows its language perfectly" might at first be understood as an "as if" characterization of a language community's norm, completely consistent with its collective sociological character in the Whitney-to-Saussure tradition. But when taken non-metaphorically, it suggests that a generative grammar of a language is an actual psychological mechanism, a well-formed cognitive computational device that instantiates a biological universal of both species-wide and species-specific character. Of course the purported species-wide uniformity of some innate "language faculty" renders it exceptional within all of biology, where both genetic and somatic structural and functional variation are everywhere to be observed. The purported species-specific character of this "faculty" has increasingly been restricted to what seems now a single property of the computational mechanism, at least theoretically unlimited recursion on at least one categorical state, such as is

phenomenally encountered in restrictive relative clause constructions in particular (the universal occurrence of which has long been questioned, it should be noted).

Even though the most theoretically coherent variationist work has involved the phonologico-phonetic plane of language – in generative terms, only an “interpretative” module – Labov fatefully hitched variationism to generative phonology. The program sought to discover the probabilistic weights to be added to otherwise categorical contexts in which phonological rules operated or were suppressed that would yield fine-grained predictions of phonetic output of a generative grammar. In a real sense, whatever the claims, the achievable goal is merely to encompass in numerical terms the characteristic phonological “idiolects” within a community. Such a model is probabilistic in that weighted factors condition phonological rules applicable at points of variation, no matter whether intra-linguistic or extra-linguistic – so-called “social variables.”

So the conceptualization of phonological “knowledge” here within a language community has become quantitatively sophisticated insofar as comprehending or including measures of the range, medians, standard deviations, etc. of idiolectal variation. Under the rubric of “style” (on which, more below) one can even include measures of the manifold of variation within each idiolect under different conditions (task demands) of production of language. One can include as many correlations of variable production of linguistic form with as many demographic or other characteristics of speakers’ usage, and one will still have only what we might term a pluri-idiolectal statistical summary of usage. One can delimit more and less important weightings of inputs with computationally aided, sophisticated ANOVA programs, but of what relevance to phonological structure conceptualized in the generative sense?

It is perhaps no wonder that Labov and other variationists have ultimately de-linked their investigations from explicit models of generative phonology and taken up instead the Neogrammarian issue of phonologico-phonetic “change-in-progress” – let us recall Jakobson’s “dynamic synchrony” – by emphasizing trajectories of correlations of aggregate idiolect variance with birth cohorts as stand-ins for socio-cultural diachrony. This would all be fine in the thought-world of Neogrammarianism, where isolable, ever so gradually incremental “sound changes” take place among speakers basically unaware of the shifts they are enacting in articulation. But is it a theory of phonological change compatible with modern linguistics?

Enregisterment and the indexical “meaning” of variance

Of course, speakers of a language are not phonologico-phonetic automata merely “executing” intuitive structural knowledge. They are, in the first instance, aware of themselves as strategic, even agentive users of denotational language to communicate among their fellows, and even aware to some extent of the macro-social envelope of institutions and structural forces within which such communication takes place. We present ourselves as social personae and so interpret others as well. We indulge in “impression management” through what, with Bakhtin, we can term the relational ‘voicing’ of the self in relation to an imaginary of social differentiation; the variable use of linguistic forms and other, peri-linguistic behaviors by degrees satisfies or frustrates what Goffman termed our own and others’ situated ‘face-demands’. How is this relevant to variationist work?

As it turns out, virtually all of this work to date has been undertaken under conditions of linguistic *standardization*, a social institutional fact of decisive import informing strategic agentivity in discursive interaction as the very medium of social coordination. Through standardization a privileged register exists, a principle of textual coherence in discourse one can achieve by adhering to various prescriptions and avoiding various proscriptions. Aligned with other values, standard register is inculcated in a community of language users and enforced among them: standardization has empirically been the project of nation-state politics as these are imagined to embody language communities; the politico-economic organizational forms of the public sphere, among them the press, educational, commercial, legal, and religious institutions, all play a role in upholding and enforcing usage of standard register. The use or non-use of all such standard features, achievable by degree and hence statistically variable through the lens of *parole*, inevitably positions a speaker of a standardized language in respect of association with – and identifiability in respect of – all of these kinds of institutions and their values. In fact, within a generally correlated overall political economy of social stratification, variable usage thus positions a speaker as a persona locatable in relation to multiple dimensions of ascriptive social value.

The methodological entailment of working in such a sociolinguistic environment is that variationists’ “stylistic” variation reflects the task demands of articulation in contexts that, by degrees, differentially demand usage of standard-like register. In communities with standards anchored by graphic practices, at one “stylistic” extreme is intimate, in-group informal and unscripted conversation; at the other extreme

the presentation of graphic minimal pairs to be read out (or even print material in the form of continuous text or standardly spelled word lists). Aggregates of subjects in particular class, ethnic, age, sex positions respond differently to these various task demands, as a function of the degree to which they are anxiously oriented to standard register, culturally anchored in pedagogical and experiential practices of graphic-to-phonetic transduction and its converse, *i.e.*, “reading aloud” and “composition.”

But there is a larger point: all variability insofar manifest to people within a community is enregistered, that is, constitutes to the native users of language a way of saying “the same” thing in multiple ways appropriate to (or inappropriate in) social context – notwithstanding that structural analysis seeks an abstract norm. A language’s variability, to native speakers, is an envelope of registers, usage of elements of which indexes – points to – one’s identity and thus variability as structured by this envelope becomes the vehicle for strategic self-presentation, as noted above. Variation – even phonologico-phonetic variation – does not contribute as such to denotational distinction; it constitutes a mode of semiosis termed indexical, insofar pointing interlocutors to social identities and other features of context through the mediating ethno-metapragmatic model of register. Sociolinguistics, and in particular the newly emergent area of sociophonetics, is just coming to grips with this fundamental fact, ubiquitous in language communities no matter they are standardized or no.

Discovering that culture is immanent in how social actors communicate

Anthropology’s “silent” prehistory

Little, if any carefully documented interactional data is found in ethnographies of an earlier time. To be sure, technological advances – motion picture photography and disk, wire, or tape phonography under field-work conditions – had only reached a threshold of portability and unobtrusiveness in the interwar period. Hence, while we have excellent 19th century still photography of people, event tableaux, and places and even Edison cylinder recordings of songs, recitatives, and short monologic narrations, only summary written fieldnotes mediated between observation and published ethnographic accounts of interaction. Three other kinds of linguistic material do, however, occur.

In the Americanist tradition of anthropology, a kind of textual philology on behalf of the otherwise unlettered was developed in missionary times and elaborated as a lens on cultures by Franz Boas and his students. Thinking of the various civilizational textual corpora, Boas promoted corpora created by anthropologists writing from dictation in their field notebooks as indigenous experts recount cosmogonic narratives, traditional and remembered historical events, and the why and wherefore of customary practices. (Boas and students as well recruited indigenous assistants to the endeavor.) Such a fieldwork-based archive was to provide, in briefer compass, systematically gathered samples of cultural material “from the natives’ point of view” preserved for current and future ethnological study. Textual material formed the basis as well for an inductive analytic philology that resulted in a grammatical description of the language of the texts and a dictionary of its lexicon, the primary scholarly tasks of what came to be the field of anthropological linguistics.

From the mid-19th century, the social anthropological tradition of comparative sociology has as well appropriated language in a characteristic way – through its lexicon. The concern has long been how the denotations and conditions of use of lexemes and verbal expressions, sometimes revealed to be highly structured, reveal institutions and practices central to social relations in a particular group. Early on Lewis Henry Morgan solicited the systematic collection of “systems of consanguinity and affinity,” *i.e.*, genealogically reckoned kinship terminologies, from missionaries, teachers and colonial officers around the world, with the ultimate aim not merely of a typology but of a social evolutionary reconstruction of the social prehistory of humanity as suggested by genealogically based descent. Kinship terminologies indeed constituted forever more the focus of functionally oriented social anthropological studies of how institutions of law, politics, economy, religion, etc. were organized by particular transactional practices of exchange across social categorizations and corporate groups directly or indirectly constituted by kinship. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* and George Peter Murdock’s *Social Structure* of 1949 rest on the centrality of simplex (mono-morphemic) kinship lexemes as a transparent window onto the central relational categories of being in society; from a linguistic perspective this fetishizes simplex kinterms among all the grammatically conforming denoting expressions by which, under various conditions of communication, people refer to one another in ongoing discursive interaction – all with import for understanding social structures.

Of course, social anthropologists have been concerned with other simplex kinship lexemes. One need only look into any ethnography to see lexemes for various key cultural concepts – *hau*, *tapu* from Pacific societies; *totem*, *windigo* from North American ones; etc. – left untranslated. The idea is that it takes more or less the whole ethnography to give a proper and subtle gloss for such key concepts. In a later self-styled “symbolic anthropology” these key concepts were taken to be “key symbols” of a culture, central to the values organizing social life. Even so, the irony is that these lexemes frequently enter ethnological discourse as labels for cross-culturally recognizable phenomena, so no longer particular to the society for which an original ethnographic account was written!

In another development, based on analogies from the linguistic domains of structural phonemics and feature phonology, self-styled “cognitive anthropologists” or “ethnoscience” investigated the semantic structures of clusters of lexemes applicable to particular denotational domains – taxonomies of kinship (again!), flora, fauna, and other useful cultural things; paronomies (meronomies) of reticulated human and other bodies; etc. – frequently seeking to reveal the internal Boolean structures of feature-like dimensions that intersected in the categorial structures involved, as, for example, in kinship terminologies. By focusing on conceptual designata of simplex lexical forms in relation to their “literal” denotata judged in metalinguistic interviewing, this approach, too, provides no direct observational data of discursive usage.

Finally, ethnographic reportage frequently quotes people’s responses to queries in interview context, earlier taken down at long- or shorthand writing speed in fieldnotes, more recently audio- and even video-recorded. Taken literally, these are primary data about how and why the cultural universe seems to work the way it does to the interviewee. But though interviewing is itself a discursive interaction of questions and responses, this material has generally materialized in the flow of descriptive and analytic ethnographer’s reportage as verbatim (or close to verbatim) monologic responses of cultural consultants framed by its topical and thematic aptness in relation to the ethnographer’s communication to the readers of an account, not by its role in the interactional envelope where it emerged.

Each of these routes by which language in some respect materializes in ethnography, not to mention in explicit grammatical and lexical descriptions of languages, important as they have been, fails to document or even directly to treat how discourse – language in use in social context – lies at the center of all social interaction, thus universally mediating the experience of being-in-society.

Dynamics of the “interaction order”

In contradistinction to the anthropological linguistics focused on grammar and lexicon, or to the general social anthropological practical consciousness limited to simplex lexemes, the key nexus in social scientific concern with discourse as such links Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Berkeley, California at mid-20th century. Again here, a central figure stimulating the development of an analytic was Roman Jakobson, who had relocated to Harvard (and eventually MIT) in Autumn 1949.

Soon after arriving, Jakobson strategically sought a rapprochement of several aspects of his linguistics with the mathematical communication theory of “information” of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver. Their probabilistic modeling of “information” focuses on channel capacities linking senders and receivers through messages across channels based on coded repertoires of signals. In that heady and technological post-war milieu, Jakobson was able to domesticate some of Karl Bühler’s philosophical ideas of two decades earlier. (Parisian colleagues, such as Lévi-Strauss and Benveniste, as well emphasized the transactional, exchange-based nature of situated social interaction and the way the very structure of language incorporates such functionality.) By the mid-1950s, Jakobson had conformably reconceptualized the way a strategically communicated message is multiply framed by, and selectively highlights, the other speech-event components among which it co-occurs in its context. He outlines this in his 1956 presidential address to the Linguistic Society of America, “Metalanguage as a linguistic problem,” and in his 1958 closing statement at the Bloomington Conference on Style, “Linguistics and poetics.”

Through his Harvard colleague Clyde Kluckhohn, Jakobson came to know the then young Dell Hymes, protégé of Kluckhohn during the five years (1955-60) on the faculty. The association was transformative. Hymes’s own earlier work was strictly within the paradigm of anthropological linguistics; his 1955 doctoral dissertation was an inductively rendered grammar based on Boas’s 1901 *Kathlamet Texts*. Even Hymes’s 1964 edited “reader” for the field he now captioned ‘linguistic anthropology’, *Language in Culture and Society*, conceptualized and begun during his Harvard years, reprinted material showing the range of anthropologically interesting implications of facts of language structure, use, and history. But note Hymes writing to Jakobson (DH/RJ 25 VII 60 [RJ Papers: Box 42; folder 26]) at the end of the Harvard phase of his career about the senior scholar’s impact on his thinking:

One of my regrets at leaving Cambridge is that I shall not have the opportunity of discussing various problems with you. Unfortunately this spring has been such a hectic time that many things had to be put off or forgotten. But I have been reflecting on the scheme of speech functions which you presented at the Style Conference at Indiana, have presented it in classes, and extend it somewhat in the paper which I enclose. I would be grateful for your comments.

The paper was written as part of a project on the teaching of anthropology, being conducted by David Mandelbaum... My goal in the paper was to...attract every possible anthropological interest in language, and leading through that to linguistics proper. This, rather than to begin in the center of linguistics and work out. I believe this strategy and that implicit in the term 'linguistic anthropology' may be more successful in winning for linguistics the general anthropological recognition that it should have. Not just the recognition of prestige, but incorporation more fully into the bread and butter of anthropological fare.

Jakobson replied in due course with some terminological suggestions for aligning Hymes's paper more fully with his scheme, and at length Hymes writes (DH/RJ 20 VI 61) of his admiration:

As always, my writing style is a very assertive one, but I hope that criticisms and counterstatements do not conceal the fact that your work is the only work known to me on which an adequate anthropological approach to speech can build today, and that in trying to integrate your theoretical advances with ethnographic work, I am paying the chief tribute, indeed the only deep felt tribute that I can. I will be very grateful for help in correcting or avoiding mistakes, as I am already for stimulus and inspiration.

Jakobson's functional componentialization of the communicative event was what Hymes took to the Berkeley milieu when he arrived for the 1960-61 academic year. (See the numerous treatments of it in all of Hymes's major papers of the decade, many collected in his 1974 *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*.)

The wider university context into which Hymes arrived, appointed in Berkeley's Department of Anthropology, was most congenial to thinking about language in context. In Philosophy, John Searle was working out an analytically respectable version of J. L. Austin's theory of "speech acts." Susan Ervin-Tripp in Rhetoric (and only later, breaking through gender bias, in Psychology) was working on children's acquisition of sociolinguistic rules of use. Dan Slobin in Psychology was beginning a career of cross-cultural studies of acquisition of narrative skills centrally involving categories of deixis. Several colleagues

nearby in Stanford's Department of Anthropology, Charles O. Frake, Roy D'Andrade and others, were thinking of culture as like grammatical "competence" (in Chomsky's sense) that was implemented in "performance" of social action in context. Erving Goffman, then in the Department of Sociology, grounded in Chicago School symbolic interactionism, focused on the irreducibly contingent, intersubjective nature of what he was magisterially to call "the interaction order." (From this, several students, such as Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, developed their offshoot "conversation analysis.")

But most importantly, in Berkeley's Department of Anthropology was John Gumperz, who in the governmentally well-funded 1960s became a principal of the Language Behavior Research Laboratory, for a lengthy interval the intellectual home of a large number of graduate students and their Ph.D. dissertation projects centered on issues of sociolinguistics. An immigrant from Germany during the Nazi period, Gumperz had been a Germanic linguistics student of Herbert Penzl at University of Michigan (Ph.D., 1954), who organized an Army-style Hindi-Urdu course first at Cornell and then at Berkeley. Gumperz, like Hymes, had essentially no social anthropological background, but was also increasingly interested in language in interaction. In the Berkeley milieu, Jakobson's ideas, enriched by the multi-disciplinary concerns of the local scholars for the discursive dimensions of social interaction, eventually became "the ethnography of speaking" or "of communication" and "interactional sociolinguistics." For the San Francisco meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November, 1963, Gumperz and Hymes organized a symposium on the topic involving a number of local scholars (including some temporarily at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences), and by 1964 and again in 1972 published edited collections that solidified the sense that there was an emerging field of specialization under the disciplinary rubric of anthropology.

Interestingly, this "ethnography" focused for the most part very specifically on individual events of discursive interaction. On one side, it attracted the attention of folklorists who had been moving from the taxonomic study of fixed texts, a kind of literary museology of preserved oral aesthetic forms, to a concern with events of "performance" (relative to which questions of performativity as such loom large), aided by new infrastructures for documentation of unfolding discourse. And while ritual performance, long a focus of social anthropologists, would be an obvious interface for serious cross-fertilization, somehow they turned

instead to the more humanistic “performance studies.” So “ethnography of speaking/communication” was never really integrated into ethnographers’ practices or into social anthropological theory as such. At best, it was seen for a period as *sui generis* “linguistic anthropology” under the four-field umbrella in North America, just as “anthropological linguistics” – ultimately renamed “documentary linguistics” in the contemporary anxiety about disappearing language communities – became one of the specialties within departments of linguistics.

Anthropological semiotics of language

Indeed, while “ethnography of communication” or “interactional sociolinguistics” seemed to have little to do with either social anthropology or disciplinary linguistics, another approach emerged in North America about forty years ago that continued both of the already discussed lines of Jakobson’s work, and added a third, integrating one, bringing the lines of development to converge. In 1957, an *annus mirabilis* in the field of linguistics, Jakobson circulated a *samizdat* publication, “Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian verb,” discussing for the first time the ubiquity of the three semiotic functions identified in the late 19th century by the iconoclastic American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), seen in the deictic (or, in Jespersen’s terms, “shifter”) derivational and inflectional categories of language. These are integrated into the morphology and syntax of language as *langue* by virtue of being symbols; but they are integrated into the discursive forms of *parole* by virtue of their tokens being conventional indexes of structured communicational contexts in which they occur. (Indeed, language as a multiplex cultural semiotic became a continuing theme of his work from this time forward.)

Here was the key to investigating communicational ‘messages’ as indexicals pointing to the circumstances of their occurrence in “context.” Forms of discourse have both denotational purport and, in Gumperz’s terms, are laden with perlocutionarily functioning “contextualization cues” structured into paradigms of indexical alternatives. Here was the key to differentiating the internal indexicality of “poetic” co-textuality within emergent textual structures of discourse, central of course to ritual and other genres of performance. Here, as well, was the key to focusing on the essentially indexical meaningfulness of sociolinguistic variability, revealing that formal variables are interactional resources, “affordances” by which interlocutors coordinate as kinds of social beings always developed in-and-by discursive interaction.

So sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have finally discovered each other through the mediation of semiotics. The critical point is that systematically developing this last intellectual gift from Jakobson, the Hermes of Cambridge linguistics, has done much for reintegrating linguistic anthropology into the concerns of social and cultural anthropology more generally and into the new “waves” of variationist sociolinguistics, in which linguistic variation as a meaningful interactional affordance of social coordination has at last taken center stage.