HOW TO DO GOOD THINGS WITH WORDS: A SOCIAL PRAGMATICS FOR SURVIVAL¹

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0. Introduction: Pragmatics in the nineties

The British novelist Margaret Drabble describes in one of her books how the chief character, following her husband's need to spend a year away from home for reasons of work, decides to pick up the family and move with him. The year spent in Hereford turns out to be a year 'in between', in which the protagonists go through a number of theatrical antics and frantic affairs on and off stage, for in the end to find themselves where they started off: truly a 'Garrick Year' (Drabble 1966).²

In the same vein, 1993 could be called a 'Garrick Year' for pragmatics, a year in between years, in which the actors go about their usual, more or less frantic, business, without reflecting too much on the present, but with a great deal of concern for the past and the future.

As to the *past*, we have seen some shows being put on the road; others are supposed to follow in the near or more distant future (mentioning a few buzz-words such as 'Handbook' and 'Encyclopedia' will probably suffice for most readers); it is still too early to say anything about the success of all these ventures, but they certainly have resulted (as in Drabble's book) in a number of heart-breaking scenes and heavy frustrations on the part of the actors and would-be actors involved in their production.

As to the *future*, one could point to the fact that more and more workers in pragmatics are beginning to realize that pragmatics and human survival have something to do with each other; as example, compare the growing interest in problems of minorities (not only linguistically determined) and the dangers that threaten many languages spoken by people on their way to extinction. The dangers themselves are of

¹ I want to thank an anonymous referee of *Pragmatics* for his/her many useful hints, critical remarks, and corrections (even the present, new title was one of this referee's suggestions; the original title of the talk was 'Pragmatics in the Nineties: Topics, Trends, Perspectives').

² The title alludes to the actor and playwright David Garrick (1716-1779), founder of the famous Garrick Theatre in London and one of the great histrionic talents of all times.

different kinds; among them, one might want to single out the phenomenon of 'linguicide', as defined by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas in a number of publications (most recently 1994); I will come back to these issues below, section 3.

But also in other respects, 1993 is typically an 'in between' year. If one is interested in, and lends credence to, dates as representative of trends and happenings, here are some typical landmarks (chosen rather arbitrarily among many possible ones):

The year before this, in 1992, it was 30 years since pragmatics was born, so to say, out of the posthumous brain of John L. Austin: *How to Do Things With Words* appeared on the scene in 1962.

The year 1993 itself celebrates the tenth anniversary of the publication of two major treatises on pragmatics, Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics* and Levinson's *Pragmatics*. Both works have since come to be recognized as classics, even if they are notoriously difficult to use as texts; especially the latter is more of a comprehensive handbook than a textbook in the usual meaning of the term: a text to be used as the mainstay of an introductory course in pragmatics. (Horn, writing about Levinson in 1988, thinks otherwise; for a different view, cf. my own (1986) review of both books).³

Finally, next year, in 1994, we will be able to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Austin's 'second coming', one could say, at the hands of John Searle, whose *Speech Acts*, that other classic of pragmatics, first saw the light of day in 1969.

One of the things that happen in Drabble's 'Garrick Year' is that Emma, the heroine, finds herself in a new situation with which she has some difficulty to cope. When I was asked, in early 1993, to deliver the plenary lecture (on which the present article is based) at that year's International Pragmatics Conference, I felt a bit like an elderly uncle who is supposed to tell the younger crowd what life's all about: where we came from, where our roots are, and where we are going: typically the kind of speech you'd expect from an elder statesman (not to say a Dutch uncle) and not quite the kind of stage I normally feel happy on.

Let me therefore mention another Garricky happening, this one on the personal level. In 1993, I submitted a book on pragmatics to a serious publisher under a title that I thought was extremely appropriate, but that the publisher adamantly and consistently refused to place on the cover: 'Out of the waste-basket: An introduction to pragmatics' (some of my readers may have seen a pre-publication copy). The book was eventually accepted under a new title (Mey 1993), and I suppose one could call my present production a Garrick-type stage show, something like: 'Out of the waste-basket, into the fire!', harking back to my book's original inscription as well as to the great

³ Here is Horn, in his own words:

"If the coming of age of an academic discipline is at least partly conditioned on the emergence of a broad, comprehensive, intellectually honest, and pedagogically sound introductory textbook, pragmatics is in pretty good shape. With the publication of Levinson (1983), we have a text for pragmatics that is superior to any extant analog for its 'mother discipline' semantics, and compares favorably with standard texts in phonology and syntax..." (1988: 113)

actor's talent of finding excruciatingly banal titles for his own comedies.⁴

As we all know, titles are tricky - they may trick you into reading a book that you had no intention of reading, into doing things that you were not supposed to do, into wanting to say things that you didn't mean or want to say. As an instance, take the title of the present piece. Originally, I had ventured forth for my Kobe talk with an exuberant and grandiloquent 'pragmatics in the third millennium' - which was supposed to furnish the audience with a vista of pragmatics after the turn of the century. (One question that might have been discussed in this connection is, of course, the vexing problem whether there will be any pragmatics left at all at that point of time).

Realizing that this was far beyond the reaches and capacities of my little crystal ball, I decided to go for the less bold title (actually the one heading the present introductory section): 'Pragmatics in the Nineties'. This title had at least the advantage of covering a period of which roughly one third is past already, thus relieving the strain on my gazing powers by about the same factor, since I wouldn't have to worry about predicting what had already taken place (as Austin and Searle themselves admonish us in connection with that particular speech act of 'predicting').

But even though some pressure thus was taken off the title as far as predicting the future is concerned, part of the 'nineties is still with us in the form of the past; so are, and will be, the things happening right now and up to the magic year 2000. Wanting to make my 'nineties picture as complete as possible, I would have to base my gazings, for whatever they're worth, not only upon an analysis of what has happened so far, but also on an interpretation of what is happening right now, and on a tentative outline of the developments that I expect to take place in the coming years.

A major concern of pragmatics, in general, is how to help people become *better* users of the word, not just *users*; pragmatics, in this view, does not limit itself to merely looking at the users and describe what they do, but goes actively out (sometimes even out of its way) to discover means of helping the linguistically underprivileged. This explains the title of my piece. One major development of pragmatics, in my opinion, will center itself around questions of linguistic survival; hence my subtitle.

An earlier subtitle of my piece considered these matters under the headings of 'Topics, Trends, Perspectives'; since this still seems a practically useful division, I shall stick to it in what follows.

1. Topics

Dwight Bolinger, one of the nestors of American linguistics, once remarked that in his opinion, there had been in our century "one - perhaps only one - upsurge of popular interest in how language affects our lives" (Bolinger 1980: vii). The remark is made in the *Preface* to a book that Bolinger published after his wife's death; it is a labor of love,

⁴ Some samples: *High life below the stairs*, *The clandestine marriage* (this one is actually performed in Drabble's story!), *Miss in her teens*, *The lying valet*.

and dedicated to the dear departed one. The book is also quite unlike the other things that Bolinger had produced in the course of a long and fertile life as a linguist. In short, it is a book in the spirit (albeit not in the tradition) of pragmatics.

The 'upsurge' Bolinger is referring to, is that generated by Alfred Korzybski and his so-called 'General Semantics' - a word that soon came to be a bugaboo for young linguists in the fifties like myself, who were warned explicitly against Korzybski (and against his best known follower and popularizer, the late S.I. Hayakawa, of sixties notoriety and assorted other, senatorial fame). We were told that an interest in matters such as 'language and society', 'language and mind', 'language and people' had very little to do with science, and certainly nothing with linguistics.

As a result of all this, I never got to read Korzybski or Hayakawa, and Bolinger's book, *Language the loaded weapon* (1980), only rather late in life - to be exact, six months after I had talked to its author on the phone for the last time, a year before his death. Only then I decided to find out what that funny little book of his was all about. By the time I had finished the book, and had taught a freshman class based on it as a text, Dwight Bolinger had passed away, so I never had a chance to tell him how much I liked this work, and how close I felt he was to many of the things that we, as pragmaticists, stand for.

One may safely assume that Bolinger would not have objected to being considered a pragmaticist (he never called himself that explicitly).⁵ The term 'pragmatics' is not mentioned anywhere in his book. Yet, the general tenor of it is pragmatic, as witnessed by the quote above. It is also clear that Bolinger, in unraveling the threads emanating from Korzybski's work, got as far back as to Sapir and Whorf - the rest is silence. Taking into account the transatlantic gap, attested also by the lack of knowledge of Bolinger's book among most Continental Europeans⁶, as well as the fact that what Bolinger published in 1980 had been written a number of years earlier (in fact, most of his examples stem from the years 1970-74), it seems safe to say that Bolinger (and probably most people on his side of the Atlantic) were unaware of a European development in the seventies that was to spur a new "upsurge of interest in the way that language affects our lives", a movement in linguistics that subsequently came to be known as *pragmatics*.

As Bolinger's case nicely shows, you don't have to believe in pragmatics to be a pragmatician - although it certainly helps. Not all of us are Bolingers; most of us are hidebound by our petty beliefs and predilections, and rarely lift our eyes to look across the fence that we so laboriously have erected to protect ourselves from alien influences and from disturbances of our small circles.

In the spirit of the celebrated M. Jourdain (from *Le bourgeois-gentilhomme* by

⁵ Jef Verschueren (pers. comm.) has drawn my attention to the fact that Bolinger actively served on the IPrA Consultation Board from 1986 through 1990, when he had to step down because of his failing health.

⁶ A few honorable exception, such as Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren, deserve to be mentioned; the latter actually reviewed Bolinger's book right after it came out (Verschueren 1981).

Molière), who came to look upon himself one day and discovered that for forty years, he had been speaking prose, for many of those who now regard themselves as pragmaticists, the coming of the new discipline was a welcome event. But there is a difference: while Dwight Bolinger was a true, natural pragmaticist, we must become worthy of that name by laboring (sometimes against the trends of our time), carving out a niche for what we think is the most important element in language studies: humans and their use of language.

But notice that what today reads like an invocation, or even worse, a platitude, was not at all commonly accepted in Bolinger's times of writing. The spirits of the 'upsurge' he is referring to: not only the Korzybskis and Hayakawas, but even more so (but naturally *sans comparaison*) the Whorfs and Sapirs, were still haunting the linguistic backwoods, and woe unto him or her who ventured out there without the necessary protective gear. Many would-be pragmaticists of the early hours trying to enter the Linguistic Garden were apt to suffer mutilation, or even untimely death, at the hands of the syntactic henchmen and the semantic gatekeepers, who prevented the non-initiated from approaching the garden's more remote parts, let alone communing with the ugly things in the pragmatic woodshed.

If you allow me to indulge a little more in personal reminiscences: the first mention of anything 'pragmatic' in my own writings turns up as late as 1976, in a talk I gave in Finland under the title of 'Qualification, emancipatory language and pragmatic linguistics' (notice that I didn't dare to let 'pragmatic' stand alone!). In actual fact, I had already started the publication of what was to become, after a number of editorial mishaps and collapsing publishing houses, the 1979 volume entitled *Pragmalinguistics: Theory and Practice*, which managed to come out in one of the fortunate, but erratic interstices when the venerable publishing house of Mouton, The Hague (who had published Chomsky's first book in 1957) was not either going bankrupt or being bought up by the expanding firm of Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Incidentally, if I may continue my reminiscing, that volume was itself an offspring from an earlier paper I had given at the XIth Congress of Linguists in Bologna in 1972 - however, that paper's title doesn't mention the word 'pragmatic' at all, but uses the safer, less offensive, less programmatic term 'practical': 'Some practical aspects of a theory of performance' (Mey 1974; notice how the title, judiciously and studiously, covers the author's linguistic tracks by appealing to the then-current official lingo). Even so, after the talk a representative of Mouton's walked up to me and asked if I could be persuaded to do a collection of articles on subjects related to pragmatics. To which, of course, I said Yes, and it was this collection which finally appeared under the 'pragmalinguistic' label (Mey 1979), a term that had become popular for a while in Germany, but had already fallen into oblivion again by the end of the decade (see Maas 1973 and especially Hager, Haberland and Paris 1973; by the way, if one is into dates, we have yet another memorable twentieth anniversary here).

By and bye, people decided that it would be appropriate to start talking about 'pragmatics' also on the English-speaking linguistic scene, as it had happened earlier in Denmark, in 1970/1971, where the pragmatic tide was in, riding on top of the anti-authoritarian crest surging up from Western Germany. Here, the "dominant doctrine"

(Maas 1973b) of Chomskyanism was being dethroned and replaced by a 'societally-relevant' linguistics, often understood in terms of the 1968 student revolts and of the political commitment that many academics were trying to make in those years.

Browsing through the writings on pragmatics from that early period, one often stops up and wonders. A formal definition of pragmatics, if given at all, usually defers summarily to Charles Morris' famous tripartition (1938): syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. When it comes to a content-oriented description of the new trend, one notices that many linguists who consider themselves pragmaticists, rely mostly on Searle's theory of speech acts, which had just seen the light of day (thus Wunderlich in his famous 'Mannheim Notes', printed 1972, but to be dated much earlier, probably into the late sixties; cf. also Wunderlich's (1970) often quoted essay 'On the role of pragmatics in linguistics', published in a journal for teachers of German, but copied and off-printed, nationally and internationally, more than any single piece of pragmatic literature in those days).

Others again, mainly from the Anglo-American linguistic camp, took their point of departure in Grice's famous (mostly not- or half-published) lectures, in which he set forth the principles and maxims that became his claim to fame: the Cooperative Principle and the Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner (Grice 1975, 1978). Even today, allegiance to Grice is a kind of shibboleth in linguistic pragmatics: some couldn't dream of basing their thinking on anything but Grice (philosophers and mainstream linguists venturing out into pragmatics; thus Wilson, Green, Horn, and many more), while others, mainly those whose research originated in the 'Southern Californian' tradition⁷ of 'Conversation Analysis' originating with Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (cf. their seminal article in *Language*; Sacks et al. 1974) take issue with Grice on counts of the (real or alleged) claim to universality of the maxims (thus, e.g., Ochs Keenan 1976) or the restriction of pragmatic questions to asking 'what does the language user intend to mean with his or her utterance?' (as pointed out by Verschueren 1994).

These researchers stress the importance of the concept of 'context' in all pragmatic thinking, and how this context shouldn't be considered static, but rather, be seen as a dynamic and continually developing 'activity systems' (Goodwin & Goodwin 1992: 149ff; more on this below). Interestingly, the name of Grice does not occur in all of the volume from which the previous quotation is taken: none of the authors in Duranti & Goodwin's important collection *Rethinking context* (1992) even mentions Grice; neither his principle or his maxims occur in the Index of the book.

For others, the points were set in different ways, one of them being the well-known one of socio-linguistics (often still spelled with a hyphen); such a choice was berated by people like Wunderlich, who declared that "sociolinguistics is unable to explain anything at all" (Maas & Wunderlich 1972: 281); for others again, pragmatics seemed to have become the all-encompassing umbrella uniting socio- and

⁷ In contrast, the tradition inspired by Grice, and later by Searle and their followers, is often called the 'Northern Californian' one - which is a bit unfair, to say the least, to the 'Berkeley school' around people like John Gumperz.

psycholinguistics, as well as the sociology and psychology of language (thus Wille & Harms Larsen 1970: 61ff; cf. also the cautious plus sign in the title of the groundbreaking work of Hager, Haberland & Paris (1973): *Soziologie + Lingvistik*; one should recall that the latter three were students of Wunderlich's, who were not going to have any trouble with their master and mentor).

Common to all these trends is the desire to declare pragmatics an autonomous zone within (sometimes outside) of linguistics; this autonomy needs to be established especially in relation to the closest competitor, semantics. (More than a decade later, Geoffrey Leech is still battling with the same problematic in his *Principles of Pragmatics*, where he tries to divide the waters between semantics and pragmatics without shortchanging the one or the other, or throwing out some hidden babies; 1983: 6).

Interesting, too, is the fact that the development of the Morrisian tradition in more philosophically-oriented approaches (Carnap, Lewis, Montague) almost entirely escaped the attention of the linguists trying to establish pragmatics as a decent member of the linguistics club. Especially Carnap is very clear in his statements about the placement of pragmatics, and uses words that deserve to be quoted even today, and perhaps with more right than the rather bland and programmatic, endlessly quoted passages from Morris (1938). Here is Carnap, writing more than 50 years ago, in 1942:

"Linguistics, in the widest sense, is that branch of science which contains all empirical investigation concerning languages. It is the descriptive, empirical part of semiotic (of spoken or written languages); hence it consists of pragmatics, semantics, and descriptive syntax. But these three parts are not on the same level; *pragmatics is the basis for all of linguistics...* semantics and syntax are, strictly speaking, parts of pragmatics." (1942: 13)

Carnap's approach to pragmatics continued to fascinate the philosophers, but did not appeal to too many of their linguistic or behavioral science coevals. This is all the more astonishing because Carnap, in his view of pragmatics, does not exclude any of the traditional human disciplines that have to do with human behavior; he mentions in particular "the analysis of the relations between speaking behavior and other behavior; ... ethnological and sociological studies of the speaking habits and their differences in different tribes, different age groups, social strata; ..." (ibid.) - all subjects that earlier would have been classified as sociolinguistic or ethnolinguistic, but which today are considered as truly pragmatic in nature.

The only direct historical continuation of that early use of the term 'pragmatic' with relation to studies of human (nowadays we would say 'user') behavior is found in the work by Watzlawick et al. (1967); in their pioneering study, these authors did the groundwork for a branch of pragmatic research that would only come to fruition decades later, in work (e.g. by Lacoste (1981) or Frank & Treichel (1989)) on language use by real people, here in a particular type of situation: the medical or psychiatric interview. But the studies of Watzlawick and his colleagues remained mainly unobserved by most of the linguistic community, even by those who called themselves pragmaticists in the seventies.

Another early topic, identifiable as early as the beginning of the seventies, is the setting aside of pragmatics from the rest of linguistics as something which is not 'exact',

not 'formalizable', and perhaps should not be formalized at all. This methodological 'iron curtain' - which, incidentally, goes back to the general aversion among pragmaticians to the formalizing apparatuses imposed by the Chomskyites on the study of language - and which now (just like that other Iron Curtain) is a historical curiosum, remains remarkable, if not for other reasons, then because the present writer, in a joint 'Editorial' to the first issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, explicitly distanced himself from such formalizing attempts (Haberland & Mey 1977: 6).

In those days, formalism was thought of as the enemy of societally relevant research; the implication being that formalism and formal procedures were nothing but a way of idly spending one's intellectual capacities on all sorts of inconsequential trifles. Curiously enough (and fittingly, one could say), the quasi-official public resurrection of 'Formal Pragmatics' happened in 1993 at the very Conference where my original plenary talk was delivered, in a panel discussion convened by, among others, two of the same authors who in 1977 queried the use of formal approaches, and - though they did not explicitly exclude them from their *Journal* - at least showed a profound skepsis towards them, as witnessed by their eminently diplomatic (not to say pragmatic) remark: "We'll see" (Haberland & Mey 1977: 5).

Even more curious is the fact that one of the first articles on formal pragmatics was written as early as 1973 by a person, Werner Kummer, who a year before had published a full-sized book in which he defended a Marxian-based theory of texts (Kummer 1975, 1976). Clearly, in those very early days, the waters were not as neatly divided as they became later; one could perhaps say that a little more murkiness would have been to the advantage of some who, being forced to come out of the closet, had to show their 'true' colors as either formal playboys or as serious, society-oriented linguists and pragmatists - with the benefit of hindsight, surely a ridiculous distinction, if ever there was any. Here, it behooves us to remember (borrowing and adapting the words of a great linguist, in a book that became widely read and famous before ever breaking into print 20 years later): 'There is always a formal turtle under the pragmatic hedge'⁸ (Ross 1964).

Among the more hotly debated topics of early pragmatics was the question of restrictions on co-occurrence. The generative framework allowed only for very specific rules that determined what could be combined with what, if grammaticality was to be conserved. In an early article, George Lakoff (1971) was one of the first to question the wisdom of such restrictions, and the validity of imposing them across the board. He pointed out that the rule according to which a non-human or inanimate referent should not co-occur with the 'human' pronouns *he/she/who*, was liable to be broken in many cases where we had what the ancient grammarians called a *constructio ad sensum*. (cf. Lakoff's (1971) example: 'My cat, *who* believes I'm a fool, enjoys tormenting me'; see also Mey 1993: 26).

Another of the early masters, Chuck Fillmore, directed his attention as early as 1971 to the problem of 'pragmatic reference'. The classical examples, by now common

⁸ The last word for the occasion to be pronounced [haz].

property of every first course in linguistics, need only to be mentioned to draw forth a smile of recognition: 'Hello, this is Chuck Fillmore. Could you send over a box yea big?' (see, e.g., Fillmore 1976: 90; there is a footnote reference to an earlier paper, originally delivered at the 1971 Georgetown Round Table; Fillmore 1972). The point of this and many other, similar examples is to identify a referent under syntactically cloudy ('opaque'), but pragmatically quite clear ('transparent') conditions. The same holds for Lauri Karttunen's and Barbara Partee's so-called 'lazy pronouns'; let me just quote the famous man who gave his paycheck to his mistress, and was said to be more stupid than the one who gave it to his wife (Partee 1972). (As one sees, ours are not the only times when a real linguist is one who is able to construct a societally relevant example).

Also about the same time, a number of people in the linguistic camp, following the philosophers, started to worry about presuppositions (and some haven't stopped worrying ever since). The worries here were initially of the more philosophical, truth-conditionally oriented kind: under what conditions can a sentence stay true even if some of its implicit ('presupposed') content becomes negated? And then there were the conditions for speech acts and their validity, where one couldn't always (or too well) speak of 'truth' - one of the first great insights (due mainly to Austin and Searle) which helped to break the stranglehold that the syntacticians, and above all the semanticists, traditionally had had on the linguists. Truth conditions were replaced by felicity conditions, but still within the environment of the single speaker and his/her utterance. Questions of 'contextualization' had to wait another decade or so (more on this in Section 2, below).

All these topics, many of which have become classics in the linguistic-pragmatic repertoire, bear witness to the incredible barriers that had to be overcome for a phenomenon to be recognized as transcending the (syntactic or semantic) domains where it originally had been discovered. Less charitably, some talked about such 'transcendental' phenomena as having the 'wastebasket' as their proper destination (one of the first to do so was Yehoshua Bar-Hillel, in a very early paper, 1971). A wastebasket is a place you put things that you want to get rid of, or don't know what to do with; hence a category was established for phenomena that wouldn't let themselves be neatly described with the utensils that were available in classical syntax and semantics.

One could say that the first characteristic of pragmatics thus was a *negative* one: pragmatics was alien to the 'regular' linguistic categories and domains. In order to be respectable, a pragmatic discovery had to be placed within the well-known confines of the linguistic territory, and exhibit a property that was recognized as legally classifying the phenomenon in question as either belonging to syntax or semantics. This 'reductionist' tendency kept things in their places, and linguists happy; the wastebasket is thus an expression for the typical linguist's *horror vacui*, a reluctance to leave things out in the open, undefined spaces of reality.

By contrast, the pragmaticists themselves started out by insisting, *positively*, that some things not only did not fit into, but *had* to stay outside of, the recognized categorizations in order to be 'saved as phenomena' (to paraphrase a classical

expression).⁹ Often, it took a non-linguist to say these things, and insist on them in the proper fashion, much against many linguists' will.

The case that first comes to mind as an early instance of this 'interference' by non-linguists in linguistic matters is, of course, the discovery and propagation of the phenomenon called 'speech acts' by philosophers such as Austin and Searle, and the subsequent incorporation of their discoveries into classical linguistic thinking. But notice that it took years before the initial semantic cast in which speech act theory was clad, finally could be dismantled (speech acts as a case of 'encodingism', to use Bickhard & Campbell's terminology: 1992), not to speak of the traditionalists' endeavors to reduce speech acts and other phenomena to particular cases of certain syntactic or semantic properties of the language, e.g. by assuming some kind of 'performative' deep (or at least 'deeper') structure, as in the early versions of the so-called 'performativity hypothesis', originally (and specifically) devised to explain away some of the problems raised in the wake of the burgeoning theory of speech acts. (For a discussion of this hypothesis, see Mey 1993: 118, 148).

2. Trends

For all the topics mentioned in the previous section, a common metaphorical denominator could be that of a 'disruption', respectively an 'eruption', to be controlled, respectively contained, by and within the given framework. The case of speech act theory is a clear example of this double tendency. While speech acts, on the one hand, threaten to disrupt the framework of syntactic theory by not always or necessarily respecting the 'grammaticality' criterion (i.e., being expressed in grammatically correct sentences), and thus have to be controlled (preferably by rule-like statements), at the same time they transcend the boundaries of syntax and semantics: they are eruptions that have to be pushed down below the surface, preferably with the help of 'constraints', that is, conditions controlling output (on rules vs. constraints, see Mey 1991).

A first approximation of this trend is already visible in syntax in the late sixties in the form of what George Lakoff called 'global rules' - in reality a further development of Chomsky's earlier (1965) concept of 'selectional restrictions': whereas the former were put in the form of rules and conditions on rules, the latter were formed as conditions that operated on the output of several rules at one and the same time.

In the same sense, one could say that the 'sincerity conditions' and 'felicity conditions' on speech acts, developed by Austin and perfected and systematized by Searle under the watchful eye of Grice, are different animals: the former are derived from a rule, the sincerity rule (Searle 1969: 63), the second are really conditions on output, constraints on 'where to put your act', or 'where to do things with words', as

⁹ The quote (very popular among Medieval scholars) goes back to the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (416-485 A.D.) (1901: 5.10).

Ross pointed out in an early (1975) article. Ross' conclusion is typical for the trends of the times: while seeing clearly that it is impossible to separate syntax and semantics from pragmatics ("it is not possible to relegate syntactic and pragmatic processes to different components of the grammar"; 1975: 252), his solution is to create yet another 'component', a 'pragmantax', in which all of the three can live happily together ever after. In other words, if one cannot put pragmatics into syntax or semantics, the next best thing is to put everything into everything ("without abandoning the distinction between pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic aspects of linguistic structure", as Ross wishfully remarks a few sentences further down).

The real problem here is perhaps not the trend to have constraints rather than rules as one's explanatory mechanism, but the fact that one simply cannot operate pragmatically within a strictly grammatical framework. The reason for this is not to be sought in a more or less theoretical problematic: whether or not the grammar has certain parts ('components'), or whether or not those parts should be kept separate or allowed to coalesce, but in the fact that human use of language is characterized not by isolated messages with separate structures and meanings, but by greater units of context overarching the individual utterance and assigning it its proper value, also in terms of the classical grammatical distinctions.

As one of the 'Great Danes', Louis Hjelmslev, put it a long time (actually more than 50 years) ago, the unit of linguistic research is not the sentence or the word or the morpheme, but the text "in its undivided and absolute integrity" (Hjelmslev 1943: 13; Engl. transl. 1954: 7). What we are dealing with here, is a trend away from individual meanings and interpretations, and toward an understanding of the utterance and its parts in relation to a greater whole; however, this whole cannot be defined uniquely in 'immanent' terms, as Hjelmslev and the structuralists thought. The term *discourse* that has crept into the linguistic terminology in recent years, tries to capture this trend by pointing out that the meaning of a sentence cannot be formally deduced from its syntactic and semantic components: there is always a partner to any utterance, and any utterance is in essence part of a greater dialogue, a 'discourse'.¹⁰

This insight came to linguistics as part of what is often called 'the pragmatic turn', defined not so much in terms of the *topics* that I talked about earlier as disruptions (or eruptions) of (or on) the linguistic surface, as in terms of *trends* that came in from the heat, so to speak, or at any rate from without linguistics. Among those incoming outsiders, two proved to be especially successful in gaining a foothold; they were, first of all, conversation analysis (CA), and second, studies of what we were wont to call in the seventies: 'the societally relevant aspects of linguistics'.

While CA originated within ethnomethodology, it soon captured the linguists',

¹⁰ 'Discourse' is taken here in the tradition established by Michel Foucault (see, e.g., 1972). Duranti & Goodwin remark, much to the point, that

"Discourse, here, should not be confused with its usage in other analytical traditions in which it means simply the flow of conversation, or a text longer than a sentence. Rather, for Foucault, a discourse is a cultural complex of signs and practices that regulates how we live socially." (1992: 30).

particularly the pragmaticists', interest (witness, e.g., the amount of space and coverage it is given in one of the standard reference works on pragmatics, Levinson's 1983 classic of that name, where almost one-fourth of the book is devoted to CA). Conversation analysts were among the first to establish the principle that whatever is said, is said in a *context* where it must have a meaning, independent of all sorts of grammatical considerations. In a way, the conversation analysts stick to Hjelmslev's tenet about the text as the "absolute and undivided" unit of linguistic analysis; but they don't buy into his demand for 'immanence', understood as the requirement that the meaning of an utterance be arrived at by a *deductive* process. Instead, they maintain that e.g. in a question-answer situation, whatever is given as the answer, *is* the answer; what the analyst should worry about is how this answer came to be given in the actual surroundings, which 'traffic rules' were valid, observed, and/or broken.

Recalling our earlier distinction between rules and constraints, one could say that in CA, rules and constraints flow together: what is a rule for one speaker, becomes the next speaker's constraint, and so on, recursively. One speaker's utterance sets the scene and marks the turn for the next speaker in a continuous process, the result of which is not clear until one of the parties calls an end to the interchange.

What many conversation analysts did not worry about, at least not initially or explicitly (and this is where the other 'outsider' is coming in) are the background elements of any conversation: CA deals only with *visible* (or audible) partners, with visible (or mostly audible) 'contextualization cues' (to use Gumperz' term; 1992). By contrast, pragmaticists have long been aware that users of language, in their linguistic dealings, are faced with a *hidden* partner: society. If one can be permitted to call CA the 'overt' dark horse of linguistics, society is its 'covert' match, an even darker horse to boot. Society is the silent, but never sleeping, partner of all conversation; society determines what we can say and how we say it, and in what kind of situation or context.

It is in this connection that the important notion of 'contextualization' was first developed. Earlier, linguists had distinguished between what they called the (immediate) 'co-text' of an utterance, and its (broader) 'context'. However, it was still understood that this context based itself primarily on what was 'known', or 'the case', and on the ways interactants were able to use inferencing processes to get at those 'facts': that which was called 'mutual' or 'background knowledge'. Gumperz, on the other hand, made it clear that such a concept was far too static: context is a dynamic notion, and not only that: the context is built up, 'constructed', by the interactants in their activity of interaction: 'hors de l'interaction, point de contexte', one could paraphrase a well-known theological apophthegm. Here is Gumperz himself:

"Although such background assumptions build on extralinguistic 'knowledge of this world', in any one conversation this knowledge is reinterpreted as part of the *process of conversing* so that it is interactively, thus ultimately socially, constructed" (1992: 230; my emphasis).

Others (such as Duranti) go even further: for them, the language used in a social context does not only *reflect* the world, it actively *creates* it, to the extent that the interlocutors agree on their respective placings in that world and accept the 'coercing' force of language persuading them to take their proper stances, "an emergent

pragmatic force that constrains human behavior and makes recipients do what they might not otherwise do." (1992: 80). In other words, this use of language is not just interactive, but 'reflexive', as Duranti & Goodwin call it in the introduction to their recent reader (1992: 7).

One of the first in Europe to become aware of the importance of social factors in situations of language use (such as the classroom, official encounters, public speaking, etc.) was, again, not a linguist, but a teacher (an educationalist, if one prefers): Basil Bernstein (see, e.g., 1971-1975, 1990). And even though his theories have met with much well-founded criticism, Bernstein's basic insights are pretty uncontroversial: the societal context has a decisive influence on the way we use, and are able to use, our linguistic inheritance: some of us are simply better at using language, because we have been better endowed otherwise (in all senses of the word).

The trend towards a societally relevant linguistics became embodied in pragmatics as early as the late sixties, especially in Western Europe. Much of this trend was influenced by the rise of neo-Marxian doctrine, and much of it stayed captive in an unfruitfully exploited theoretical framework which later collapsed under its own weight. Yet, a number of fertile approaches and hypotheses were generated within this framework, some of which have survived one way or another, in different guises and shapes, even though they no longer can be called explicitly Marxian.

A central notion in this respect is that of *power*: Who has the right to define a linguistic situation, and what power gives him or her the right to do so? Being conscious of the existence of a (perhaps invisible, but no less real) societal power in situations where one would not even begin to dream of such a possibility, can contribute to 'liberating' the users from their invisible, but very effective 'linguistic chains', to use an expression due to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. In this respect, pragmatics has been instrumental in discovering and unveiling those hidden power structures; as instances, cf. the work by people like Bourdieu, Fairclough, and the whole tradition of what used to be optimistically called 'emancipatory linguistics' in the seventies.

3. Perspectives

Linguists have seen it as one of their most important tasks to assist in, and to further, the conservation of the human cultural heritage called language. To this end, they have deployed immense resources of time and personal effort, and elicited (often successfully) uncounted (although, of course, never sufficient) contributions from various interested and not-so-interested agencies, such as the various national research funding institutions, local enterprises, and even their own and others' private pockets.

The philosophy behind this policy of conservation has been that language reflects one of the most interesting and encompassing manifestations of the human mind, and as such deserves to be respected, treated well, and kept alive, even against great odds. The ongoing debates on 'endangered languages' (e.g. at the XVth International Congress of Linguists in Québec, 1992, and the discussions in recent issues of the

journal *Language*) have been symptomatic in this respect (See Hale et al. 1992; Ladefoged 1993; Dorian 1993).

The emphasis here has been on keeping what (still) is there, and delivering it to the next generation; *conservation* is the name of the game. To do the conservationist job properly, however, one has to be sure that one does not propagate an erroneous picture of reality; hence a great concern with the factual, descriptive aspects of the languages that are focused on, as well as (albeit to a lesser degree) with the classificatory aspects, both genetic and typological, such as have been in the focus of much linguistic thinking, both in earlier periods and recently.

In pragmatics, the need to distinguish itself from exclusively descriptive approaches has been accompanied by an emphasis on taking the 'describée' into account as an essential part of the object (language) that one wanted to describe. The social and cultural *contexts* of languages, as well as the conditions these contexts impose on their users, have been of paramount interest for pragmaticists, as we have seen in the previous section.

All these activities, however, can be said to be basically *retroactive*, in that they attempt to reproduce a state of affairs, or bring a more primitive state of affairs up to date. An example of the latter is the emphasis on alphabetization, as embodied in the literacy campaigns that have been waged in recent decades both at the home front and in the bush. The purpose of such campaigns was to give the 'natives', whether they were residents of the inner city or of the Gran Chaco, a chance to come up to par, and participate in modern life on an equal footing with the rest of humanity. What happened with them after that was not our concern. Once they had 'grown up', linguistically, they were supposed to manage their own lives.

The retroactive policies that were defined in this way had a necessarily static character. Moreover, they were usually determined with the needs of the campaigners (the linguists, subsidiarily, the teachers, the colonizers, or the evangelists) in mind. The needs of the *dominated* population at large, of the 'language carriers', were filtered through the *dominant* needs of the people who were in charge, the gatekeepers of the language game. The people, rather than playing the game as *subjects*, were considered to be *objects*, pawns that could be moved across the board whenever the real players deemed such a move necessary or useful.

At the same time that being 'native speakers' of an endangered language gave many of these dominated peoples a certain status and authority (that of 'being always right', as we used to say), their real status remained that of a subordinate group; and (apart from an occasional 'Thank You' in the preface of a doctoral dissertation) they didn't get much in return for their assistance from the visiting linguist or anthropologist. The bartering was not on a scale of mutual parity; there was no real *interaction*.

The interaction that *did* take place, moreover, was often, if not always, prefaced by the thought on the part of the dominating visitors: 'How can I use this for my project, proposal, article, talk, firm, religion, etc.?' Real interaction, that is, interaction on equal terms, with actual needs and wants placed on the bargaining table, was impossible, also because in addition, neither party mastered the other's language and culture well enough to engage in a discourse of parity. A truly interactive mode of

language description, maintenance, and cultivation was therefore the exception, not the rule.

And even in cases where there was a real will on the part of the linguist to interact on equal terms with the 'natives', he or she found him-/herself often in the impossible position of being defined, not by the interactants, but by the interaction itself and its linguistic ways of expression. The Belgian ethnographer-linguist Rik Pinxten tells a moving story of how he initially came to be defined as the 'enemy', only later to be called a "medecine [sic] man" among the Navajos, as a token of respect; but even so, every effort at discussing 'privileged knowledge' (such as that regarding the Navajo world view) with members of the tribe was barred by the fact of his being an outsider, who could not partake of information belonging to the tribe and its elders. Only after one of their 'very wise old men', Curly Mustache, had died, Pinxten and his wife were given access to information which earlier had formed part of the old man's stock of knowledge. (1991: 136).

From another point of view, this lack of interaction is also one of the main elements in the concerns of otherwise well-meaning scientists and administrators (both native and non-native) who advocate a policy of 'leaving the people alone'. This attitude goes back all the way to the Romantic period; for instance, the well-known Dutch 19th century novelist Multatuli adopted this stance in his famous novel *Max Havelaar, or: The coffee auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* (which was later made into a very successful movie). In certain cases, the colonizer would go as far in this 'leaving alone' as to become one of the colonized ('going native', as it used to be called), thus disappearing as a foreign element by adopting a quasi-native (but not necessarily dominated) status. Cases in point are the Jesuit Fr. Ricci in 17th century China, or the French painter Gauguin on Tahiti in the 19th century, as well as numerous dedicated missionaries, doctors, and other development workers in our times.

While such a negative colonialization policy (or lack of policy) fits in well in with the general tendency of our times to withdraw from colonial and oppressive positions, it has also its drawbacks. First of all, as Nancy Dorian has remarked (in connection with the *Language* debates on endangered languages; Dorian 1993), "one's fieldwork, however antiseptic it may try to be, inevitably has political overtones" (1993: 575). In particular, she points out (arguing against Ladefoged 1992), that "linguistic salvage work ... is inevitably a political act, just as any other act touching that language would be" (ibid.: 574). The implication is that the linguist who decides to 'leave language alone' in the case of the native peoples (as Ladefoged seems to advocate; cf.: "That choice [either to preserve or not to preserve their language] and any other choices that the Toda [a Central Indian tribe of Dravidian stock] might make, are clearly their prerogative"; 1992: 810) is just as political as the linguist who decides that something has to be done to preserve an endangered language. The linguist "cannot enter the threatened-language equation without becoming a factor in it", says Dorian (1993: 578).

On the other hand, decolonialization has not always resulted in better conditions of life for the former colonized. The colonial powers, pulling out of their lost territories, often left them in a shambles: there just was nothing more for them to do, in every possible sense of the word. By contrast, the linguists pulling out of the responsibilities

that formation and experience, implicitly or explicitly, have placed upon their shoulders, cannot defend themselves by stating that "it is paternalistic of linguists to assume that they know what is best for the community" (Ladefoged 1992: 810). The linguist may not *know*; but he/she usually possesses some information that could be useful if it were shared with the speakers of the endangered language (thus, Dorian mentions the fact that first generation speakers who decide to abandon their language in favor of a dominant idiom, risk to be told by their grandchildren that they were wrong not to preserve their linguistic heritage; 1993: 576-577). Clearly, some implications of language loss can be seen better at a distance by 'neutral' observers who have no practical axes to whet.

Yet, if we turn the perspective around, it remains true that linguists and fieldworkers have not formulated any *proactive* policy with regard to native, possibly endangered languages. First of all, the immediate aim has been to give the people a way to write and read their language, to make them 'literate', often with the underlying aim of familiarizing them with Western moral, religious, and political values and systems: to allow them to 'join the twentieth century', as it is often called. Second, linguists have not asked themselves the question what to tell these people to do with their language, once they are able to write it: provide more and better examples to the linguists, or take over the linguists' job, and 'salvaging' their own language? (Not that this problem is restricted to the underdeveloped and developing countries; one could equally well ask if the purpose of making our own people literate is to enable them to read the tabloid press and comic strips). It stands to reason that no linguist (alone or as a group) is able to change the political and economic conditions of the people he or she is working with. In particular, as the Danish linguist Rischel perceptively has remarked (1986), if damage has been done to the survival conditions of the local people, and thus also to their language's chances of surviving, the odds are that such damage may already have been done before the linguist arrived on the scene, by forces that are out of the linguists' (and the native speakers') control. Hence, we need to ask the question of conservation in a more pertinent, proactive fashion, one that could guide pragmatists into new areas of study.

It is commonly agreed that one of the areas in which linguistics has 'come of age; in pragmatics is the shift of interest in language *as such* as contrasted to *language as used*. The idea of the Native Speaker (that I commented on above), who is always right, and therefore never found, except in Chomsky's works (e.g. 1965), is replaced by the language user, who is almost always *wrong*, judged by the standards of prescriptive grammar, but who manages to get a message across, who is able to communicate.

The Native Speaker idolatry goes basically back to the romantic notion of the noble, unspoiled native, whose very nature was good and whose language only needed to be written down to become the object of the greatest - indeed the only legitimate - interest for the linguist. Traces of this can be found in the terminology used by linguists, also in connections where the Native Speaker does not explicitly enter the linguistic scene. Cf. the following passage from Britto (1991: 66-67):

"[a]uthentic ... language use [is that] which one speaks spontaneously, interpersonally, in natural

or real-life situations, ... Authentic speech relates to the type of communication that existed when humans were still illiterate and had not yet learned to manipulate language purely for aesthetic, oratorical, artistic, literary, or histrionic purposes."

Apart from the fact that it is patently false that 'illiterate' societies should not be able to 'manipulate' language for artistic purposes (think of Homer!), underlying this whole passage is a notion of 'naturalness' which is alien to the real language that the pragmaticist studies. After all, what is 'natural language'? (I am not concerned with the thing that computer people call 'natural language' - that's another story, and their headache). Natural language, like Winnicott's little child, does not exist - at least not in the sense eulogized by Britto in the passage quoted; neither does 'conversation', considered by many of its protagonists as the "prototypical kind of language use", the 'natural dialogue' in which all acquisition (and use) of language is embedded as in a 'matrix' (cf. Levinson 1983: 284).

Parallel with the romantic notion of 'authenticity', another popular notion (also already mentioned) deserves to be debunked in the name of pragmatics: that of languages as 'endangered species'. The kind of linguistic botanism that exclusively focuses on the disappearance of a linguistic variety, without asking who were the keepers of that variety, who were the language's speakers, and under what conditions their languages disappeared and how they became 'endangered' in the first place, has nothing to do with a realistic, proactive view on language as used by real humans, not by abstract Native Speakers, as we have seen above.

Similarly, a proactive approach to *literacy* would envisage potential future uses of the written word, and take measures and precautions to ensure that it would be used in the best possible way. But not only that: a proactive approach will focus on recent advances in the areas of discourse analysis and literary pragmatics, with emphasis on the 'role of the *reader*', to quote a famous title by Umberto Eco (1979): the user of language, in this case the reader, is supposed to be a major, active element in the creation of the text. Texts are not packages delivered neatly at the consumer's doorstep, like milk used to be in the good old days; the package that is delivered is in reality a benevolent kind of time bomb, Bolinger's 'loaded weapon', destined to be set off or fired by the reader at the moment of opening the book, or by the spectator at certain time.

Similarly, a proactive approach to *communication* would ask what kind of knowledge and information would be important to future generations, and how we should go about communicating it to them. Rather than give our successors a neatly wrapped up, but mainly passive, legacy of our culture (in the spirit and image of our would-be communication with extraterrestrial beings; cf. the notorious 'Voyager tablets'), we should endeavor to guide them on and help them avoid our mistakes, rather than tell them what to do with their *own* lives, languages, and cultures.

Finally, a proactive approach to problems of *context* (in the widest sense of the term: not just the immediate co-text of a message) would not merely establish contextual conditions for a particular use of language, but look further into the problems of contexts, and of contextualization in general: what conditions are favorable

to what kind of language use, and what contexts would we like to promote in this connection in the name of such time-honored concepts as 'evolution', 'progress', 'development', or even the now increasingly popular notion of an 'ecology of language'?

In this connection, the role of the linguist, especially the linguist as fieldworker, becomes once again crucial: the contextual conditions for his or her work have to be scrutinized critically and defined in a larger setting than a simple registration of perishable material. Just as there is no true 'Native Speaker' (see Mey 1981), there is no really 'true and blue' linguist. Every linguist represents some political power and some political stance; what we can do to encourage the development of an ecological approach to language studies and field work is to ensure that the conditions *locally* are such that we do not have to interfere as much with the language as we traditionally have been forced to, in the best interest of the languages and their speakers. An ideal situation would of course be one where the speakers of the language were empowered, or empowered themselves, to deal with the linguistic issues that they are confronted with in their daily and professional lives; but we must realize that in order for them to do that properly, it will be necessary for us to interfere at some point, minimally to share experiences and give advice, maximally to engage actively on the side of the threatened populations without thinking too much about our role as "responsible linguists with professional detachment" (Ladefoged 1993: 811).

The perspective of the study of pragmatics at the end of the 20th century is closely bound up with this notion of proactively trying to identify some trends in the spirit of the above: a *proactive evolution* on the basis of the prevalent conditions of use and users. Clearly, in this process we are faced with a dialectic: historically, the material basis for evolution determines the possibilities of evolution itself, but on the other hand, evolution cannot be understood as a mechanical process that just happens; it is determined by the understanding that people have of their own lives, including their futures. The future may already have begun, as Robert Jungk used to say, but that is only half the truth: *we* have begun the future, *we* have cut into it, not like one slices off and gobbles up a piece of birthday cake before the party, but rather by pulling away the rug from under the party itself.

One could perhaps define the future *mission* of pragmatics as 'the *transmission* of vital contexts for language use'. The word 'mission' is used here on purpose, since what is at stake can be compared to what religious people call a 'mission': pragmaticists are missionaries for a better use of language, they prepare the way for the true linguistic message, they are 'messengers of the word' - not the lifeless word of the grammarians, but the living word, as spoken by real users.

However, the word is nothing out of its environment; understanding the users' *world* is a necessary prerequisite for understanding their *words*. Every word has to be fleshed out in its proper context, so that we can 'see its glory' (and real meaning), 'while it is living amongst us'.

Take again the case of the 'endangered languages': their words cannot be saved in isolation, except in a grammatical description, for the edification of the linguists only. To save languages, one has to save their users. Words need a world; languages, like users, need a *vital context* for survival.

Such vital contexts, furthermore, are social, that is, they originate in, and are continued through, the medium of society. The emphasis on words as 'signs', carriers of meaning, or 'signifiants', tends to overlook this social aspect. For Saussure and his followers, the syntagmatic context of the signifier is purely concatenative, whereas the paradigmatic context is at most an 'associative' (individually-psychological) one; neither is a truly social context. But if it is the context that carries the meanings of the words, wording itself should not be described exclusively as simple signifying, but rather, as a process of establishing and continuing a *social* signification, in a societal *discourse*. Words are carriers of social meaning; the 'signifiant' is in reality a 'sociofiant', a creator of a social context.

The words, furthermore, "[do] not belong to a particular individual, but to the society which that individual belongs to", to borrow the Japanese linguist Yamaguchi's pithy expression (1994: 239). Both language itself and its context are primarily societal, i.e. they belong to the people living, breathing, and working in that society. That means, not only that their signifying in 'sociofication', their creation of the social context, is inextricably bound up with their words and with their culture; but also, that they are the first natural 'gatekeepers' to, and authorizers of, any use of their social realities and cultural artifacts, among these their language. Such an attitude may conflict with the traditional expectations of the linguists and other cultural fieldworkers (such as sociologists, anthropologists, and so on) who have considered people primarily as sources of data, as 'informants', and not as partners in a joint effort of safeguarding the culture, or protecting 'endangered languages' from extinction, as in the cases quoted above.

Fortunately, there are signs in the air that this attitude among linguists and other culture workers is changing. Linguists are becoming more and more aware of the basic problems involved in gathering information in native settings, in 'extracting' data from their 'informants', as we used to say. A heightened awareness of the conditions under which many native people live, in close contact with their history, as it is embedded in their sacred sites and burial places, has helped linguists avoid some of the worst pitfalls of patronizing attitudes such as 'knowing what is best' for those 'primitive' people.

A good example of natives regaining control over their own past and present lives and culture, including their language, is found in the institution known as CRATT (for 'Cultural Resources Advisory Task Team'), operating among the North American Hopi. CRATT is a body consisting of a dozen and a half tribal cultural and religious leaders who are actively concerned with the issues of conservation and maintenance of the Hopi cultural and religious heritage. They act currently as a governing body for anthropological research work to be performed among their kin. CRATT operates under the auspices of the Hopi Culture Preservation Office, and is thus fully under the control of the members of the social context in which the Hopi culture and religion is embedded. Field workers in anthropology and linguistics will have to conform to the norms, and stay within the limits of the traditional culture, and perform their field work in accordance with the 'Hopi Way' - which in certain cases may entail a ban or a limitation on what researchers will be allowed to publish of their work on Hopi matters. (Source: Dongoske et al. 1994).

Needless to say that such a situation, which contrasts sharply with the earlier state of affairs, in which the traditional anthropology or linguistics worker went into 'the field' and came back with some 'data' (which he or she as a rule hadn't even paid for) may strike us as novel, and maybe even a bit annoying. The reason is that for the longest time, we have been accustomed to a situation where the representative of the dominant culture also was the *de facto* dominant actor in the research process, while the members of the dominated culture acted as passive providers ('donor' is too strong a word) of the incoming fieldworkers' needs.

There is no doubt that anthropologists and linguists need to be critical of their own ways, and that they should not wait until they come under fire from the native populations for massive pillage of cultural values (not to speak of the other values that often were the motives behind the 'anthros' penetration into uncharted, but presumably exploitable territory). Clearly, the future of anthropology and linguistics as social sciences depends on the degree to which we can manage to become critical of ourselves: "not only natives questioning anthropologists but anthropologists seriously questioning each others' wisdom", as Bion Griffin remarked recently, à propos the Seventh Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS) in Moscow, August 1993 (1994: 12).

But not only do we have a problem communicating with people from other cultures, and working with them on an equal basis, there is also the question of our communication with those who come after us. Traditionally, knowledge has been passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth or by written documents. Most of the time, the continuing 'handing over' of knowledge and wisdom has prevented such information from getting lost, at least in recent times. But this 'tradition' may well not be sufficient to handle future communication problems. While we cannot say much about communication as regards our future in a broader sense, and cannot too easily predict what kinds of problems posterity will encounter in this respect (the explosive growth of communication devices and techniques over the past decades may well lure us into a pretty sanguine view on this), it is our duty at least to try and think about how we can communicate with people millennia ahead of us about the problems that already are here, and are here to stay.

One linguist who has given this crux of the future some thought is Roland Posner (1990; see also Mey 1994). He squarely puts the question on the agenda of how to relay crucial information concerning nuclear waste and its disposal to a generation of humans whose language we don't even know. Most radioactive material will still be dangerous tens of thousands of years from today; but if we look at what means of communication (such as, presumably, spoken languages) were used tens of thousands of years ago, and then turn this retrojection into a projection, the result is not encouraging for any future understanding. Still, the question remains: how can we tell those that come after us what we know *now*, in a fashion that they will understand *then*, so as to know how to avoid the traps that lack of knowledge will set?

Many will say that such a venture is preposterous, even futile, since we cannot possibly predict what future generations of humankind are going to be like, let alone what they will need in the nature of informational input. Imagine us giving advice as

to how to deal with problems that will arise in upcoming millennia, when we are not even able to deal with our own!

But even if one concedes this point, the matters touched upon here remain eminently *pragmatic* in nature: that is, in dealing with them we are not only or mainly concerned with the nature of the information as such, but first and foremost with how to get it across to future users. We will have to speak to them in a language that they will understand, in a way that will prevent their safety and well-being from being jeopardized by the lasting effects of our actions.

A pragmatic look at future communication will not just concentrate on language as an abstract system of signs, on the individual languages as collections of 'sign bearers' or 'sign makers' (the original meaning of the Latin term *significans*, that which later became narrowed down to Saussure's '*signifiant*'), but will respect languages as the bearers of communication, of culture, of society, indeed even of human life itself; the pragmatics of the future will be a *social pragmatics for human survival*.

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