NOTES

Radical Linguistics

It is perhaps not immediately obvious how there could be a radical linguistics. After all, much linguistics, particularly grammatical theory, has no obvious political or social significance. Chomsky was recognizing this when he wrote some years ago that 'I do not see any way to make my work as a linguist relevant, in any serious sense, to the problems of domestic or international society... The only solution, I can see, in this case, is a schizophrenic existence...'[1] It is increasingly obvious, however, as the Chomskyan paradigm loses its pre-eminence, that there is much more to linguistics than grammar. Even grammarians, furthermore, cannot wholly avoid political and social issues.

A useful way in to these questions is provided by Dell Hymes' paper, 'The Scope of Sociolinguistics'.[2] Hymes here criticizes the Chomskyan paradigm and its identification of linguistics with grammar both on linguistic grounds and on grounds which are broadly political. He advocates a 'socially constituted' linguistics, founded on 'the view that social function gives form to the ways in which linguistic features are encountered in actual life', and concerned 'with "social" as well as referential meaning, and with language as part of communicative conduct and social action'. He goes on to argue that '... if linguistics is to realize its potential for the wellbeing of mankind, it must ... consider speech communities as comprising not only rules, but also sometimes oppression, sometimes freedom, in the relation between personal abilities and their occasions for use'. Hymes is somewhat vague as to how he sees such work developing, but a number of other linguists have done work which points the way.

The context of much of this work is explored in Fritz Newmeyer and Joe Emonds' paper, 'The Linguist in American Society'.[3] In this paper, Newmeyer and Emonds investigate the institutional framework of american linguistics, in particular the pattern of funding, and discuss its effects on the orientation of the discipline. They show how the main sources of funds have been the armed forces and bodies like the Ford Foundation. The rationale for military funding was outlined by Mortimer Graves in 1951. Referring to 'Ideological World War III', he commented that 'In this war for men's minds, obviously the big guns of our armament is competence in languages and linguistics.' Not surprisingly, the Airforce and Navy have supported considerable research on Southeast Asian languages. They have also funded 'pure' grammatical research in the (largely erroneous) belief that such research could lead to advances in military computer systems.

Considering the impact of this pattern of funding, Newmeyer and Emonds discuss two collections of sociolinguistic papers. Of the first, 'Explorations in Sociolinguistics' edited by Stanley Lieberson,[4] they observe that 'Totally absent are papers on how language habits are a reflection of and how they reinforce racist and sexist attitudes in American culture... Even more clearly absent ... are studies on language as a manipulative device.' On the second collection, 'Language Problems of Developing Nations' edited by Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta,[5] they note 'that not one single paper ... considers the possibility that a fundamental revolutionary change might lead to a solution of that country's language problems.' Commenting further, they write that 'We do not feel it would take a total cynic to reason that the Ford and Rockefeller foundations are not interested in spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to be told that what we need are more Third World revolutions... We feel that the source of funding for most sociolinguistic projects is in large part responsible for the directions taken in these projects and the conclusions arrived at.' After discussing a variety of ways in which American linguistics shows the effects of the prevailing funding pattern, Newmeyer and Emonds conclude by urging linguists to work 'to replace our dependence on funding agencies whose survival and raison d'etre are rooted in the current arrangement of political and economic power.'

'Verbal Deprivation'

A particularly notable example of radical linguistics is William Labov's critique of verbal deprivation theories, 'The Logic of Non-standard English'.[6] Prominent among the psychologists who have developed the notion of verbal deprivation are Arthur Jensen, who has claimed that 'much of lower class language consists of a kind of incidental "emotional" accompaniment to action here and now', and Carl Bereiter, who claims that 'the language of culturally deprived children ... is not merely an underdeveloped version of English, but is a basically non-logical form of expressive behaviour.' From such premises, Bereiter and others argue the need for pre-school programmes to provide culturally deprived children with sufficient language to benefit from schooling. Labov argues that Bereiter and his associates 'know very little about language and even less about Negro children.'

Labov demonstrates in detail just how standard interview techniques fail to come to grips with the linguistic capacities of Negro children. He shows how the interview situation is seen as a threatening one by the child, and just how difficult it is to elicit the kind of speech that is characteristic of the street culture. The ghetto child, he suggests, far from being verbally deprived, is 'bathed in verbal stimulation from morning to night.' He goes on to demonstrate the highly developed debating skills of many ghetto children, and the pretentious verbosity of much middle class speech. He concludes that 'in many ways working class speakers are more effective narrators, reasoners and debators than many middle class speakers who temporize, qualify, and lose their argument in a mass of irrelevant detail.' That verbal deprivation theories seriously misrepresent the speech

(1) 'Philosophers and Public Policy', in V. Held, K. Nielsen, C. Parsons (eds.), *Philosophy and Political Action*.
(2) In *Georgetown University Monograph Series on Languages and Linguistics*, no.25, 1972.
(3) In *Papers from the Seventh Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 1971.
(4) Indiana University Research Centre in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, 1967.
(5) John Wiley and Sons, 1968.
(6) In P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context*, Penguin, 1972.

of Negro children is fairly clear. It is fairly clear also that such theories contribute to the educational oppression of these children. As Labov puts it, they 'are giving teachers a ready-made, theoretical basis for the prejudict they already feel against the lower class Negro child and his language.

Language and Class

Somewhat similar to the work of the verbal deprivation theorists, although more sophisticated in its formulations, is Basil Bernstein's work on 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes. Surprisingly, Bernstein's work drew little criticism from the Left until recently. Two years ago, however, Harold Rosen published an excellent critique of Bernstein in his pamphlet, *Language and Class: A Critical Look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein*.[7]

A crucial question which Rosen considers is just why Bernstein's ideas have enjoyed such prominence. He notes here that Bernstein's early papers appeared just as the ideology of IQ testing which had played an important role in justifying selective practices in education was beginning to collapse. Crucial to the acceptance of Bernstein's ideas, he suggests, was the fact that they 'seemed to offer theoretical respectability to the widespread notion among teachers and others that an intrinsic feature of working class language, rooted in their way of life, disqualified working class children educationally and, by the same token, justified the notion of the superior educational potential of the middle-class.'

Rosen develops a systematic critique of Bernstein's work, stressing, in particular, the inadequate concept of class on which it is based, and the stereotyped view of working class life and language which it presents. As for its impact on the education of working class children, Bernstein himself has observed that such terms as 'cultural deprivation' and 'linguistic deprivation' 'do their own sad work'. Equally, however, one would expect his own terms 'restricted' and 'elaborated' to 'do their own sad work'. In various places, Bernstein stresses the great potential of the restricted code, but, as Rosen notes, such remarks are always parenthetic. Furthermore, although Bernstein seeks to differentiate his views from those of the verbal deprivation theorists, he also writes that 'the normal linguistic environment of the working class is one of relative deprivation.'

One question touched on by Newmeyer and Emonds is he attitude of linguists to non-standard English. This question is taken up again by Newmeyer in 'Prescriptive Grammar: A Reappraisal'.[8] His target here is the conventional dogma according to which modern grammarians are solely descriptive, simply describing how people speak, in contrast to the prescriptive grammarians of earlier times, who insisted on telling people how to speak. Newmeyer argues that prescription and description cannot wholly be separated, and that the majority of linguists in the past and present have in effect functioned as prescriptivists, consciously or unconsciously prescribing the dialect of the socially dominant class. Developing this view, he quotes a variety of linguists who have urged non-standard speakers to try to adopt standard forms and pronunciation. No doubt they did so from the best of intentions, but there is no reason to believe that such prescriptions have had socially beneficial consequences. On the contrary, there is every likelihood that they have had a most damaging impact on the educational prospects of working class children.

Questions about the linguistic problems of the Third World are a natural concern for radical linguists. A notable article here is Talmy Givon's 'Linguistic Colonialism and De-Colonization'.[9] Givon identifies the impact of linguistic colonialism clearly: 'When you have succeeded in instilling in a person a deprecating attitude towards his own language, you have succeeded in instilling in him a deprecating attitude towards himself.' In this article, he is concerned with the persistence of linguistic colonialism in Zambia.

Although Zambia received political independence in 1964, English remains the dominant language. Thus the Zambian child entering school finds there is no one who can teach him properly about his own language. He finds his own tongue is persistently deprecated. In contrast, all sorts of superlatives are conferred on English. Givon identifies three arguments used to justify the adoption of the colonial language as a national medium. He argues that none of them carries real weight. Furthermore, the price of retaining the colonial culture is an appalling one. Its result is 'the systematic bombardment of the psyche with the message: "You are no good; your colour is no good; your language (and thus thought pattern) is no good; your Gods are false; your music primitive; your dance barbaric, your customs outrageous".' All this 'has inevitably produced in the white-educated African a pattern of de-cultured, insecure, frustrated and alienated personality.'

Questions about language and sexism are another natural concern for radical linguists. Here a crucial paper is Robin Lakoff's 'Language and Woman's Place'. Lakoff argues that '"woman's language" has as a foundation the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concerns of life, which are pre-empted by men. The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of. In appropriate women's speech strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favoured, and means of expression in regard to subject matter deemed 'trivial' to the 'real' world are elaborated. Speech about women implies an object, whose sexual nature requires euphemism, and whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men.'

Lakoff develops this picture at length with a variety of subtle observations. She notes, for example, the frequency of tag questions in women's speech (only a woman would naturally say 'The war in Vietnam is terrible, isn't it?'), the contrasting connotations of superficially parallel words like 'master' and 'mistress', and 'bachelor' and 'spinster', and the fact that one can speak of 'John's widow' but not of 'Mary's widower'. On the latter point, she comments that 'Like "mistress", "widow" commonly occurs with a possessive preceding it, the name of the woman's late husband. Though he is dead, she is still defined by her relationship to him. But the bereaved husband is no longer defined in terms of his wife ... once she is gone, her function for him is over, linguistically speaking anyway.'

I have outlined here the ways in which a number of linguists have taken up radical themes. There is nothing in linguistics quite like the radical philosophy movement. There is, however, as I have tried to indicate, some important radical work being done. Given the increasing emphasis in linguistics on the social dimension of language, there is considerable potential for further work of this kind.

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(7) Falling Wall Press
(8) Forthcoming in Bruce Mannheim (ed.), *The Politics of Anthropology*.
(9) In *Ufahamu*, Vol.1, No.3, 1971
(10) In *Language in Society*, Vol.2, 1973