

INTEGRATIONIST LINGUISTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF 20TH-CENTURY THEORIES OF LANGUAGE

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To begin, sincere thanks to George Wolf: this timely convergence of speakers has been a most satisfactory integrational sequel to his organizational efforts.

One clear pattern in the discussions of Integrational Linguistic thought presented here and in recent publications concerns its linguistic ancestors, its *semblables*, its antecedents and secret sharers. Several commentators, in different ways, have been asking the question 'Who were the proto-integrationists in the 20th century?'

Now as is well-recognized such a seeking out of respectable parentage, of a sturdy lineage whose influence one can belatedly acknowledge (so that the acknowledgement is Whiggish, and entirely without anxiety), is a familiar practice. In generative linguistics, Chomsky famously looked considerably further back than Zellig Harris to identify the Port-Royal grammarians and Descartes as his intellectual antecedents. And the suspicious observer is always inclined to look quite sceptically at these claimed genealogies; they seem all too reliant on that self-deluding talent we have, which President George Bush once famously called 'clairvoyant hindsight'.

At the same time, being of a suspicious and questioning turn of mind on principle, integrationists are guarded about asserted genealogies, explanatory histories, and the general appropriation of heavyweight authorities as having validated, *avant la lettre*, the central principles of the integrational stance. It is implausible to imagine that out there in the literature, in the true history of western linguistics, there is some notional 'dream team' of covert integrational-linguistic thinkers--some team which might include the later Wittgenstein, parts of Dewey, Sextus Empiricus, Alan Gardiner and J.R. Firth. Rather, some of these current commentaries simply draw our attention to ways in which aspects of the thinking of major philosophers and linguists, although not their main projects, suggest that they might have been sympathetic to the integrationist resistance to the segregationism that predominates.

With those qualifications in mind we can suggest, for example, that Firth, on occasion, advocated an integrational linguistics. In 'Personality and Language in Society' Firth characterized his central notion of 'context of situation' as a schematic interrelating of the following aspects of a language event:

- a. the relevant features of participants, including their verbal and non-verbal action.
 - b. the relevant objects.
- and

c. the effect of the verbal action.

In other words, while not denying for a moment that context of situation was a 'convenient abstraction', Firth emphasizes that it must foundationally address person, personality, verbal and nonverbal action, and outcome, as a unified, mutually-constituting complex. And that is integrationist; so too, to my ear at least, is his subsequent description of personality and language. They are, he says, 'in some sense vectors of the continuity of repetitions in the social process' (1957: 183).

Having mentioned Firth, let me draw a connection to a valuable recent article by Paul Hopper (1997)--an article which begins, in effect, with a Firthian example. Although not writing or riding in integrationist colours, Hopper is interested in the unravelling, even in such standardly segregationalist activities as dictionary- and grammar-book-writing, of such foundational segregational units as the Verb. He begins with Firth's amusing example of the uncertainties we are likely to have over saying just where the verb 'ends' in a perfectly typical utterance like the following:

She kept on popping in and out of the office all afternoon.

Hopper goes on to note the enormous frequency and variety of multi-word dispersed verbal constructions in a fairly ordinary personal narrative of recollected experience. In that narrative, constructions initiated with one of the multi-purpose verbs *take*, *make*, *give*, *start*, *keep*, etc. are numerous: narrative participants routinely start over on levelling the lawn, or make, sort of, amends, and so on. On the basis of his real narrative data, so different from the invented and non-narrative sentences still relied upon in the most influential grammar books, Hopper suggests:

The English sentence is ... characterized by a dispersal of verbal elements over various parts of the predicate, such that it is often difficult to assemble from texts a 'verb phrase' consisting exclusively of continuous elements. (1997: 93)

I don't think it is facile or a misrepresentation to suggest that what Hopper is pointing to here is a certain kind of integration--the integration of a sentence's process and participants, or its argument and predicates, in such a way that the old segregational picture, of distinct and sharply-bounded constituents, is unsatisfactory. A not dissimilar revision is emerging in some of the linguistic description of English emerging from the Cobuild, corpus-based, studies, where emphasis is placed on the diversity of varying patterns of collocation into which, in actual usage, words enter. Thus at the robustly empirical end of language studies, I would like to suggest, in the work of linguists who may not identify themselves as integrationist, new developments are emerging which are consonant with the integrational stance and which support its theses.

Let me turn now, briefly, to some of the specific points made by the previous speakers. We have been reminded today, by Professor Harris, that integrationists can hardly be described as neo-Saussurean, since all the key Saussurean principles and dichotomies are disavowed. Are we, instead, 'Saussure-transcending'? Perhaps nearer the mark, analogous to the ways in which postmodernism respects but differs from modernism, would be to say that Integrational Linguistics is 'post-Saussurean'. Alternatively we could characterize integrationism as a post-structuralist linguistics; this seems to me implicit in Harris's remark that "it is through

understanding the structuralist legacy that you are in a position to see how the ideas it brings into play relate to your own understanding of your own linguistic experience."

Professor Harris suggests that Integrational Linguistics transcends Saussure by a) demythologizing it and b) reorienting linguistics. But we need to discourage possible interpretations of this as amounting merely to a redeployment, as it were, of the theoretical deckchairs on the linguistic Titanic, so that the selfsame chairs simply point in a new direction. To protect against this assimilative interpretation, I suggest invoking another of Harris's key terms, namely *design*: the post-demythologizing stage is one not merely of reorientation but redesign. Redesign additionally and appropriately suggests something more engaged and more active than reorientation.

As has been reiterated here this afternoon, the integrationist wishes to return to the linguistic reality that exists for particular language users. I call this a return to the reality and the perspective of actual language users since Saussure, as has often been noted, first invoked it. But perhaps we seek a true turning to the user's perspective for the first time. And what, the critic may ask, is the language user's perspective, precisely? I think our answer, at present, is that in large areas we simply do not know; but that clarifying what it is, and understanding it better, is a central and permanent goal of integrationism. There are one or two things we are confident are partial and misleading descriptions, which we want to displace: one is the cognitive-generativist conception of linguistic knowledge as abstract and internalized rules, inaccessible to consciousness. We do not regard the know-how that humans draw on in linguistic communication as at all analogous to the know-how involved in walking. The latter is automatic in senses that do not apply to the former. A second picture of lay users' knowledge which it may be worth affirming we do not wish to overvalue is the ragbag of articulated and semi-articulated ideas, opinions, prejudices, usage shibboleths, and so on, about correct written language, proper English (or French, etc.), about what speakers assert they always do or, for that matter, declare they never do. An integrationist study of the language-user's communicational situation (her expectations, resources, and so on) does not at all entail an impoverishing reliance on or trust in interactants' weird and culturally-saturated commentaries, revealing though these certainly are. It is in no spirit of superiority that we say that ordinary speakers are, in the metalinguistic arena, rank amateurs (as we in turn are in the arena of automotive mechanics); because we immediately add that in the linguistic or communicational arena they are all professionals. If we conceptualize lay language users as, linguistically, professionals, we can add that this oldest and largest profession contains, like any other, many ordinary practitioners, a few duds, and some virtuoso performers.

Professor Wolf intriguingly highlights ways in which Quine's ontological relativism might be seen to have affinities with integrational thinking, at least insofar as his 'regimentation' is a project of local or contingent clarification of ontology, of locally-valid coordinate systems. If essences are displaced by bound variables, it is worth noting, too, that a bound variable is a contingent variable. I doubt that Quine wants to see such clarifications as anything like as local and fragile (so 'radically contextualized'--or, as one might prefer to phrase it, so 'situationally rooted') as integrationists are prepared to do. Nevertheless his articulated rejection of the 'museum myth' of determinate word meanings and similar objectifications amounts to common cause with integrationism. Wolf notes Quine's citing of Dewey, and I am reasonably confident that Dewey, who has also been a significant influence on contemporary American pragmatists like Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, had an outlook much in common with that of integrational linguists. Indeed Wolf goes on to identify the crucial place where Integrationists and Quineans

will part company, namely concerning whether or not there is an extra-contextual bedrock of referentiality, no doubt deeper or more foundational than matters of word meaning, which we can rely upon and have recourse to when probing speakers' commitments, their 'assent to' or 'dissent from' particular propositions or assumptions. Wolf calls such Quinean assumptive parameters "the leap of faith necessitated by the attempt to connect units of our subjective experience ... with units of an external world". That 'leap of faith' could equally be characterized as a familiar effort of theoretical bootstrapping; and I see it as a significantly parallel attempt at theoretical bridging as can be found in Searle's speech act theory, where, as Dr Love notes, a declared attempt is made to connect institutional facts with brute facts.

As a matter of 'fact'--although that might be a controversial construction to use, in the circumstances--the parallels between Wolf's critique of Quine and Love's of Searle may go further. In the case of Love's contribution, the crux concerns the status of a fact, brute or otherwise. Searle suggests that the sun's being 93 million miles distant from the earth is a brute fact which pre-exists any human institution, including that of language. But as Love points out, that would be the most brutish state of affairs, since without language it is neither statable nor imaginable. No doubt the sun and the earth still exist, at a certain distance from each other, without benefit of language. But whether it is a fact that they do, where there is no language in which to construct this fact, seems highly questionable. Is it any less questionable than suggesting that the building materials of the Palais des Congrès are aware of the fact that a linguistics congress is currently in session here? If facts are contingent upon language, then Love is right to doubt whether there are any pre-institutional facts. And in asserting that facts are distillations from the human world of languages and other articulatory systems, one subscribes to the same principle of inescapable embeddedness, without transcendent groundings, articulated in Wolf's commentary.

From the earliest reception of Harris's integrational arguments up to recent reviews of *Signs of Writing*, one familiar complaint about integrationism concerns the 'overwhelmingly negative' tone of the critique, and the lack of an extensive laying out of an alternative agenda, a set of research questions, and a methodology. A recent review of *Signs of Writing*, for example, includes a judgement that might be found in a review of almost any integrationist-minded book: the reviewers complain that "the unequivocal negativity is not counterbalanced by a strong positive statement" (Hughes and O'Hara, 1997: 153). I think these criticisms are not particularly well-founded. One might consider the metaphor of bridge-building (since I do not find I can elaborate the drawing-board one very satisfactorily). And we might think of integrational linguistics as an attempt to build a bridge, as conventional linguistics has attempted, between two figurative places: place A is what we observe and think we know about language, place B is a fuller understanding of what linguistic communication is and entails, and of how it works. Integrationists believe that the mainstream bridge, which uses much of the finite supply of materials for bridge-building, is full of profound design flaws. As a result an extensive period of dismantling and salvaging, which can look like no progress at all, is a necessary first stage. But in suggesting that integrationism never gets beyond the negative, dismantling stage, I think its critics are simply failing to notice the positive steps towards an alternative and quite different design. To date these have been most extensively elaborated in Harris's recent introduction to integrationist semiology, *Signs, Language and Communication* (1996). But aspects of it have been evident in the contributions today, also, in particular in some of Dr Davis's comments. Those comments concern, inter alia, whether late Wittgenstein (the book) was obdurately apolitical even as late Wittgenstein (the man) was vehemently political. And Dr Davis sees a lesson or warning, for integrationist linguists, in Wittgenstein's

seemingly depoliticized philosophical writings. He warns that, if we leave politics out of our linguistics, we shall end up producing what in American English is succinctly called 'the same old same old' (a nice derangement of epithets for the grammarian of the noun phrase to go to town on).

Of course there is plenty of scope for debate as to whether the later Wittgenstein's writings are apolitical. And certainly in the case of the *Philosophical Investigations* it would be strange to claim that this has been no more than the 'same old same old' as was available from, say, Russell or the logical positivists. But the larger provocative and crucial issue that I think Dr Davis's remarks point to concerns how exactly we should characterize and situate politics (as he says, with upper or lower case P) within our studies of language, speakers, and communication. Noam Chomsky's admirable politics are utterly segregated from his linguistics; that can't be right. At the same time we may not want politics at the level of specific matters of policy--pro and con Scottish devolution, or whether the European ban on British beef should now be lifted--woven directly into our linguistic theorizing. Nor do we want to be confined to adjudications of particular cases, such as whether calling a rowdy group of African-American female students water buffalo is racist speech or not; this is not, however, to imply that particular cases are trivial or insignificant: on the contrary, the integrational spirit is very much concerned with casuistry in a non-pejorative sense--the examination of fully integrated cases or situations, of real interest or consideration to real people, parallel to what happens in law. What we do wish to explore, and these are threads running through most integrationist discussions and those of some of its 20th-century precursors such as Firth, are the interdependencies among an individual's sign-using, their actions, their morality, and the varied consequences of these. In short, we unreservedly acknowledge the political nature of linguistic communication. Relatedly, integrational linguistics is willing to 'keep the politics in' the linguistics; I don't believe, however, that we yet understand all the ramifications of this, or how in fact to 'keep the politics in'. Arguably, a certain kind of politics has won for itself a respected place in present-day socially-oriented linguistic studies. I am referring to the various kinds of study that to one degree or another fall under the aegis of Politeness Theory. On balance I would regard studies that apply politeness theory as welcome in keeping a certain kind of politics within the linguistics; but we might also complain that politeness theory is much too constricted a version of politics, a politics made safe for incorporation into mainstream linguistics. From an integrational point of view, we should regard politeness theory as one starting-place for the re-integration of politics and linguistics, but not as a stage of completion.

Finally, I do not believe that integrational critiques of particular branches of discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and stylistics have fallen on ears as unheeding as has sometimes been presumed. If one looks at more recent contributions from various practitioners in these fields (e.g., Deborah Schiffrin, in a recent article in *Language and Communication*), one finds what I take to be genuine attempts to assimilate some of the tenets of integrationism into a revised version of the sociolinguistics, or discourse analysis, or stylistics, that was the practitioner's goal. Such incorporations or assimilations are far from smooth or guaranteed of success--very much to the contrary, in light of the fact that the integrational approach seems designed to resist easy incorporation (in the sense of co-option). Nevertheless gains, and connections, are increasingly being made: slowly, perhaps reluctantly, those writing in systemic linguistics, for example, who have always been sympathetic to the idea of situated semiotic innovation, and of the inadequacy of code modelling, are addressing these issues again, in part in response to felt pressure from integrationist quarters. So, too, have some at least of the field's sociolinguists, sociologists of language, discourse analysts, and stylisticians. The

integrational theses are being addressed not so much because they are the most coherent and thoroughgoing rejoinder to generativist-nativist theory, but rather because, even if the role and coherence of a nativist UG project is conceded, the integrational stance emerges as the most comprehensive and foundational model of speaker-based linguistics, of what generativism discards as External language, yet to be articulated. Integrationalism is seriously user-friendly, that is, friendly to the ordinary language-user, as an individual or in groups. As a corollary, and a sometimes painful or inconvenient one, it is rather less 'linguist-friendly' than most schools; under the integrational aegis, it really should not be possible to be an armchair authority--at most our armchairs become platforms (or drawing boards!) from which we gather and disseminate arguments and evidence which demonstrate the ultimate semiological authority of situated language-users and language-makers. In these ways, I suggest, and just before the inexorable and foundational dynamic of time puts an end to the twentieth century, the principles of integrationist linguistics may be beginning to compel adjustments and revisions to what the open-minded would attend to as representative of the full range of language theories espoused in this century.

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