CHAPTER 47

Speech Community and Beyond

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'Speech community' has been a troubled term, caught in a number of methodological and political cross-currents, and in this chapter I will try to trace some of the most important shifts in meaning since the 1960s. Some of this movement has occurred within the arena of Sociolinguistics itself, but Sociolinguistics has always been more than just a technical activity, and 'speech community' has been especially hard to isolate from the much larger debates that affect our understanding of community as a concept in everyday language and in social science more generally.

Prior to these changes in conceptualisation, there was a strong tendency to treat people's actions as a mere reflection of their belonging to 'big' communities that pre-existed them, but now there is much more emphasis on the part that here-and-now social action plays in the production of 'small' but new communities, and rather than just concentrating on behaviour at the core, there has been a burst of interest in the flow of people, texts, objects and ideas across local and global networks, as well as in the interaction with 'strangers' inside, outside and at the boundaries of specific groups and institutions. In comparison, scholarship itself is no longer regarded as simply reporting on communities – it also helps to create them, destroy and prevent their inception. To give a clearer idea of these more general changes in perspective and focus, I will suggest that during the 1960s and 1970s (and often much later), treatments of 'speech community' were dominated by a preoccupation with the encounter

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between 'tradition' and 'modernity', while we can make better sense of more recent developments if we refer to the discourses of late/post-modernity.

From the start of sociolinguistic discussion of speech community, the aim has been to show that social organisation and language use are profoundly interwoven, and so when our sense of speech community alters, there are often consequences for the kinds of language use that we attend to. In line with this, I also try to describe important changes in linguistic focus, covering expansions of interest from, for example, competence to ignorance and reflexivity, from use to representation and artful performance, and from regularity to spectacle. I will begin, though, with a comparison of how speech community figured in classic (modernist) research in ethnographic and variationist Sociolinguistics from the 1960s.

'Speech community' in ethnographic and variationist Sociolinguistics from the 1960s

Right from their inception in the 1960s, 'speech community' was a significant concept in both the ethnography of speaking (Gumperz 1962, 1968; Hymes 1972, this volume, Chapter 39) and in variationist Sociolinguistics (Labov 1972).

In the ethnography of speaking, which was rooted in anthropology, membership of a particular speech community was postulated *in the background* as the origin of the social norms that determined the appropriacy of speech, producing social meaning beyond referential intelligibility (Hymes 1972; this volume, Chapter 39; Gumperz 1968: 381). With the emphasis on the complexity of communicative action, on acts and events in their ecology, the ethnography of speaking entailed quite substantial immersion in the fieldwork setting, as well as analysis which treated language as just one among a great many resources for the creation of meaning (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 89). The practicalities of data elicitation and analysis generally required deep involvement with a relatively small number of informants, and the outcome was likely to be the detailed portrait of an internally differentiated but coherent group, outlining the cultural integrity of distinctive speech practices, as well, sometimes, as the ways in which they were transmitted intergenerationally. Claims about the extent to which the particular group being studied was representative of a larger population tended to be weak (Irvine 1987: 18), and the demands of fieldwork and analysis in this approach generally inhibited any empirical specification of limits to the demographic spread of a particular practice. In line with this, studies in this tradition moved rapidly beyond any technical notion to more intuitive everyday uses of 'community' to describe the settings where their fieldwork was located.

In striking contrast, variationist Sociolinguistics treated 'speech community' as the empirical territory spanned by the patterned variability of a linguistic structure. The multi-layered complexity of communicative action was subordinated to an interest in the social and historical spread, change and maintenance of specific linguistic variables, and survey methods elicited comparative data from quite large numbers of speakers, who often formed a systematic sample from larger populations (Labov 1981; Hudson 1996: 28; Trudgill 1974). The outcome of this was a map of the speech community which could point to its outer boundaries, and which claimed to be able to identify inauthentic members (Labov 1980). At the same time, however, it might only be a handful of linguistic variables that provided the empirical basis for this map (J. Milroy 1992: 61), and this meant that the definition of speech community was very vulnerable to revision by researchers looking at more or other language variables (Kerswill 1994: 26–27). As it became clear that different variables actually had different social distributions, with people in different regions sharing some linguistic features but not others, the meaning of speech community became increasingly item-specific and therefore technical, amounting to not much more than (some aspect of) the sociolinguistic patterning encompassed within the spread of a particular variable and/or its evaluation.

It would be a mistake to try to allocate sociolinguists unambiguously to either of these two approaches, but the logics of ethnographic and variationist enquiry led in different directions, and this has tended to undermine attempts to achieve a unified overall definition of 'speech community' available for use by sociolinguists generally (Hudson 1996: 24–30; Wardhaugh 1986: Chapter 5). Seen at a more abstract level, however, both approaches shared a common orientation to the problematic interface between 'tradition' and 'modernity', and below, I shall try to show that this distinguishes them from recent work.

Frames for Understanding 'Speech Community' – 'Tradition', 'Modernity', and 'Late/Post-Modernity'

The interface between 'tradition' and 'modernity' has been enormously formative for the social sciences, and according to Giddens:

> [S]ociology has its origins in the coming of modernity – in the dissolution of the traditional world and the consolidation of the modern. Exactly what 'traditional' and 'modern' should be taken to mean is a matter of chronic debate. But this much is plain. With the arrival of industrialism, the transfer of millions of people from rural communities to cities, the progressive development of mass democracy, and other quite fundamental institutional changes, the new world was savagely wrenched away from the old. (1990: 15–16)

In definitions of speech community in the 1960s and 1970s, the encounter between 'tradition' and 'modernity' was often mentioned, and one of the central missions of Sociolinguistics was to make *modern* institutions – especially schools – more hospitable to the diverse and often supposedly *non*-modern populations that they served. In the process, debates about the relationship between children and schools generated a large variety of binary dichotomies, many of which resonated with arguments about the philosophical underpinnings of liberal modernity.[1] These dichotomies ranged across:

modes of expression: vernacular versus standard, oral versus literate, concrete versus abstract, implicit versus explicit, narrative versus argument, metaphorical versus rational, contextualised versus decontextualised, particularistic versus universalistic, grounded in high versus low shared knowledge;

types of social organisation: home versus school, close versus open networks, homogeneous versus heterogeneous, solidarity- versus status-based;

social categories: migrant versus host, minority versus majority, female versus male, working versus middle class.

Sociolinguists often devoted considerable energy to contesting these polarities and the collocational chains that they tended to form (for example, vernacular + oral + narrative + particularistic + close networks + working class + traditional *versus* standard + literate + argument + universalistic + open networks + middle class + modern). Efforts were made to complicate, uncouple and refute these associations, to negate or reverse their valuation as better versus worse (Bauman and Sherzer 1989: xvii; Heath 1982; Hymes 1980: 129–130; Labov 1969; Street 1984), and when tradition and modernity figured in their discussions of 'speech community', Gumperz, Hymes, Fishman and others made deliberate efforts to prevent it from being primarily associated with the 'tradition' side of the 'tradition–modernity' dichotomy. 'Speech community', it was proposed, was a neutral *superordinate* concept, capable of embracing all types of society, from small face-to-face bands to modern nations, the differences between societies could be analysed with lower level concepts like network and role repertoire, and there was resistance to the more ordinary associations of 'community' with notions of mutuality, fellowship or locally based interactive *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 1963; Yeo and Yeo 1988). Nevertheless, it was difficult to stop 'speech community' from becoming the framework within which modernity's 'others' were studied, especially when it coalesced with more everyday uses of community.

In research that focuses exclusively on the functioning of modern bureaucratic institutions, community is an unnecessary term, since 'formal

organisational criteria can be counted upon to identify and separate the personnel within which relationships, behaviour and attitude are to be studied' (Arensberg 1961: 247) – it is enough to talk of 'middle managers', 'research officers', 'clients', 'patients', 'pupils', and so forth. But where (a) the focus turns to people and groups who don't conform to the expectations of modern institutions, and where (b) there is drive to conceptualise their performance in terms of difference rather than deficit – that is, not just as 'awkward patients', 'dim pupils' – it is difficult to find any term other than community to encompass the diversity of the alternative organisational forms within which these non-standard abilities are held to develop and be well-adapted. In the end, this makes it very hard to hold to the technical/neutral definition of speech community that the early theorists intended, and for a number of reasons (including the fact that it was actually subordinate groups that sociolinguists tended to study), community often came to be associated with the second element in the binary dichotomies above (vernacular, oral modes of expression; close, solitary, home-based networks; minority and working class groups).

At the same time, Sociolinguistics participated in a current of romanticism about the 'other' that ran deep in the social sciences, and along with a 'celebration of everyday oral language' and a suspicion of 'official socialisers' like teachers (Bernstein 1996: Chapter 7),[2] it also often treated community belonging as the prerequisite for *any* valid language use, emphasising shared norms and consensus – key community characteristics – as the condition in which people developed their communicative competence. The existence of internal differentiation was obviously an article of faith, but the assumption was that this was a describable sort of structure (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 8, 89), and the aim was to describe system-in-grammar and coherence-in-discourse in ways that *accommodated* diversity within the community. In the process, system and coherence retained their position (a) as the most highly prized attributes that analysis could recover, (b) as principal arguments in public advocacy of non-standard varieties, and (c) more generally, as cornerstone modernist values themselves (see Note 2). Pratt calls this cluster of assumptions about system, coherence and socialisation-to-consensual norms the 'linguistics of community' (1987; Barrett 1997; also LePage 1980), and she argues that 'when social division and hierarchy *[were]* studied, the linguist's choice [was] often to imagine separate speech communities with their own boundaries, sovereignty, fraternity and authenticity ... [This gave] rise to a linguistics that [sought] to capture identity, but not the relationality of social differentiation', a linguistics that looked within but not across the 'lines of social differentiation, of class, race, gender, age' (1987: 56, 59, 61). Conflict and misunderstanding were certainly recognised, but they were thought to occur *in the gap* between integrated cultural and linguistic systems. The gap itself was seen as (merely) the place for educational interventions designed to help the proponents of different systems

to understand each other and adjust, not as a site where people improvised practices and relationships that deserved sociolinguistic study in themselves.

The *development* of alternatives to the 'linguistics of community' can be linked to the discourses of late/post-modernity,[3] and among these, 'social constructionism' has been particularly influential. Instead of arguing that our worlds are the product of forces that few of us either control or comprehend, social constructionism takes the view that human reality is extensively reproduced, contested and created anew in the socially and historically specific activities of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Giddens 1984),[4] and this facilitates the development of two more recent approaches to the analysis of community. The first of these – the 'communities of practice' perspective – entails a close-up analysis of face-to-face interaction in relatively focussed settings and consolidated social relationships where feedback tends to draw conduct into close conformity with dominant expectations. The second – the 'language ideologies' approach – looks at how a sense of community itself gets constructed, focusing on the way it develops and operates as an ideological product and a semiotic sign.[5] These two perspectives are broadly compatible, but in the work on language ideologies, there is a more insistent sense of 'otherness' and of life *without* 'community'. This has opened the door, first to recognition of the inherent bias towards rather well-focussed situations in a number of major sociolinguistic concepts themselves, and second, to attempts to develop conceptual tools better suited to analysis of movement in diffuse, indeterminate and border territories. I shall take each of these perspectives in turn and then outline their complementarity, before concluding with an overview of the challenge to modernist concepts in Sociolinguistics.

Communities of practice (CofP)

Right from the outset, the adoption of a communities of practice perspective in Sociolinguistics has been linked to a rejection of the tendency in variationist survey research to treat speakers as if they are 'assembled out of independent modules: [for example] part European American, part female, part middle-aged, part feminist, part intellectual' (Eckert and McGonnell-Ginet 1992: 471; 1999: 190–191). Rather than seeing the identities of men and women – or 'ethnics' and 'mainstreamers' – as being defined and determined by biological or cultural inheritance, CofP research is concerned with the way in which these and other identities take shape within activities where constraints and opportunities are unequally distributed, positioning the participants differently within environments that are nevertheless still shared quite extensively. Rather than being just an aggregation of 'tickbox' social variables, speakers

are regarded as 'embodied, situated and social' (New London Group 1996: 82), and there is an interest in how their notionally multiple memberships and identities are constructed and integrated in social practice.

In the formal definition of a community of practice (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Wenger 1998), there is mutual engagement among the participants, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time, and this covers a wide range of social relationships of varying duration – for example, unions, trades, boards of directors, marriages, bowling teams, classrooms (cf. Lave and Wenger 1991: 98; Eckert and McGonnell-Ginet 1992). In fact, there are a number of ways in which CofP research retains links with the ethnography of speaking as outlined above in ethnographic and variationist Sociolinguistics from the 1960s, although the shift of focus from 'speech' to 'practice' is significant, since speech loses some of its centrality and empirical research quite often attends more intensively to situated activity as a multi-modal process involving visual, gestural and proxemic channels as well as the physical environment, material artefacts and other objects (Goodwin 1981; Hanks 1996: Chapter 11; McDermott, Gospodinoff and Aron 1978). This dovetails with the development of micro-ethnography as an alternative to traditional anthropological ethnography – itself extensively problematised in late modernity (Clifford 1983; Trueba and Wright 1981) – and more generally, at times when there is a feeling that social totality has been 'dissipated into a series of randomly emerging, shifting and evanescent islands of order' (Z. Bauman 1992: 189), the move to 'communities of practice' as a key unit of analysis tunes well with late modern uncertainty about grand theoretical totalisations (Z. Bauman 1992: 65). There are firmer limits than before on the level of abstraction to which the analyst can take the term 'community', and an orientation to the lived texture of situated experience prohibits its extension to cover to all forms of social organisation, as intended in the formulations of 'speech community' by Gumperz and Fishman. 'Community' as a concept is also much less likely to slip towards the folk/vernacular side of the tradition–modernity divide, and in fact notions from the discourse of 'communities of practice' (and 'situated learning') are not only used to analyse workplace interaction but also have currency in 'fast capitalist' management theory (Barton and Tusting 2005; Gee et al. 1996: 65 et passim).

However, even though the ongoing production of community involves the partial coordination of heterogeneous strategies and resources, as well as an unending process of improvisation within micro-contexts that are continuously shifting (Hanks 1991: 16, 20), there is a temptation in CofP research to prioritise relations *within* groups rather than *between* or *across*. If one steps back from the micro-scopic flow, 'community' puts

principal emphasis on the repetitive affirmation of relatively durable social ties in practical activity, rather than their collapse, rupture or irrelevance. Although there is nothing that makes them mutually exclusive (see for example, Bucholtz 1999, this volume, Chapter 15), attention tends more to be given to movement inside the horizons of a particular type of institutional activity (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98), to its evolving reproduction, to the local use of resources, and to the socialisation, 'prime' and 'eventide' of its *members*, than to commodity exchange between communities, their plans for territorial expansion, their treatment of intruders and the construction, policing or invasion of their boundaries. The relationship between different communities of practice is certainly identified as an important issue, and there is extensive recognition that particular communities of practice are affected by larger social and historical processes (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999; Goodwin 1994; Lave and Wenger 1991: 70, 92, 122). Even so, of itself the CofP perspective says relatively little about how language and social life are influenced by, for example, a fear of outsiders, a longing for elsewhere, or more generally by the profile that particular groups and communities might have when seen from outside or far off (Bergvall 1999). Putting it a little differently, 'community' can't only be seen as co-participation in locally embedded practice – analysis also has to extend to the way in which 'community' (and other notionally collective entities) serves as a symbol and sign itself, and at this point it is worth referring to the work on language ideologies.

Language Ideologies

There has been a steadily growing recognition in linguistic anthropology that the tools of face-to-face analysis are limited when it comes to

> the ways in which linguistic practices contribute to the reproduction and legitimation of hierarchy in larger social institutions such as the state, or about the ways in which speech communities are linked to broader political economic structures ... Similarly, within this framework it has been difficult to analyze adequately the processes of mass-mediated communication that often connect disparate communities and that are increasingly of interest in social theory. (Gal and Woolard 1995: 134–135)

This is a view that has fed into the development of research on language ideologies (see Blommaert 1999; Gal and Irvine 1995: 987; Kroskrity 2004; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), and one of the main aims here is to examine the ways in which a spread of

people gets constituted as a 'community' in the first place, how 'linguistic units come to be linked with social units', languages with peoples (Gal and Irvine 1995: 970).

Anderson's (1983) work on the role that mass-produced print genres played in the 'imagining' and production of nation-states as communities has been a major inspiration, and in this way, late modern sensitivity in Sociolinguistics to the problems of 'totalising' over-generalisation about communities and social groups take an important step further than the CofP perspective. In the CofP perspective, presuppositions about the reality and force of generalised categories like 'man', 'woman' or 'society' are treated as a source of contamination to avoid in rigorous empirical analysis, but in the work on language ideologies, totalising ideas are actually treated as focal objects of analysis themselves, and there are accounts of the social, political and discursive processes involved in both the historical and contemporary institutionalisation of 'communal' entities like nation-states and autonomous languages.

Within this, the political history and dynamics of language scholarship itself are a major interest. The role that language scholarship and its 'philological incendiaries' (Anderson 1983: 81) played in the development of the nineteenth-century European nation-state has been long and widely recognised, as has the important role that it has played in the expansion and organisation of empires (Anderson 1983; Blommaert 1999; Collins 1998: 5, 60; Gal and Irvine 1995; Hymes 1980; Pratt 1987; Robins 1979: Chapters 6 and 7; Said 1978). Within these processes of language and identity construction, research and politics – knowledge and power – have often been mutually endorsing. The idea of autonomous languages free from agency and individual intervention meshed with the nineteenth century differentiation of peoples in terms of spiritual essences (Gal and Irvine 1995; Taylor 1990), while much more recently, the post-war British and American commodification and export of English has been aided by models which treat language (a) as an isolable structural entity that is much more aligned with the universals of mind than anchored in the specifics of culture, but that is nevertheless (b) guaranteed authentic only in and by 'native speakers' (cf. Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994).

Although the processes and settings addressed in language ideology research are typically more macro – larger, slower, longer or more wide-reaching – than those studied within the CofP framework, both seek to provide accounts of activity that are properly situated, and in this regard, they are clearly compatible. Furthermore, ideology isn't just confined to policies, media texts and public documents and so on – it also lives and breathes in everyday activity (Rampton 1995: Chapter 12; Vološinov 1973: Part II Chapter 3; Williams 1977). So it is worth considering the ways in which these perspectives come together.

Language Ideology in Everyday Practice

Beyond the sketch of it provided above, language ideology research differs from the CofP approach in emphasising boundaries of exclusion and the ways in which representations of the 'other' contribute to the ideological construction of 'us'. Some of the stereotyped 'others' portrayed or implied in discourse, or evoked, for example, through stylised code-switching, may be constructed as objects of fear, contempt and/or charity (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Hinnenkamp 1987), while others may be produced as objects of desire, fashion accoutrements and/or marketised life-style options, with 'authenticity' becoming as much an issue of commodity branding as a matter of ethnic roots (Hill 1993, 1995; K. Hall 1995: 201–203, this volume, Chapter 16; Urciuoli 1996). Indeed, pushing this a little further, as well as 'them for you', discourse can also construct 'us for you', as revealed in critical discourse analyses of conversationalisation in advertising and official communications (Fairclough 1995). But this kind of interest in the (more and less) explicit ideological *representation* of identities, ingroups and outgroups need not exclude attention to the (more and less) tacit interactional *enactment* of identities and groups emphasised in CofP, and indeed, among other lines of work (for example, Barton and Tusting 2005), this combination of perspectives is often entailed in the research on code-switching just alluded to above.

Studies of code-switching have shown that when someone switches to a different language in everyday interaction, they often conjure a different group identity or persona, altering their relationship with the other participants. These shifts are inextricably bound into the interactional enactment of specific activities and social relations, but at the same time, the symbolism of the change of code often works ideologically, 'serv[ing] as the rallying point for interest group sharing', 'act[ing] as [a] powerful instrument... of persuasion in everyday communicative situations for participants who share [the] values [of the group that is thereby indexed]' (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). Traditionally, research on code-switching has looked at how bilingual speakers move between the different language-marked identities that they bring to the interaction from their prior experience growing up in minority communities amidst dominant institutions, but if we follow the logic of social constructionism, the interplay between practice and representation in code choice may carry further, challenging or reshaping inherited perceptions of community and developing new forms of solidarity, temporarily at least. This can be seen in research on 'language crossing' (Rampton this volume), which is centrally concerned with the manner and extent to which prevailing ideologies of language, ethnicity and race do or don't get contested when members of the dominant group switch

into minority speech varieties in interaction (Cutler 1999, this volume; Hewitt 1986; Rampton 1995, 1999, this volume). In fact, this interest in communicative practice destabilising traditional/established perceptions of belonging coincides with some rather general experiences of transnational globalisation:

> everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, *in transition* between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world ... [People with experience of living in two places] are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and to no one particular 'home'). People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated*...'. (Hall 1992: 310)

From the 'Linguistics of Community' to the 'Linguistics of Contact'

So neither contemporary social experience nor contemporary social theory provide a warrant for the overwhelming priority that linguistics has traditionally accorded to the idea of a speech community as a group of people – 'native speakers' indeed – producing systematic language and coherent discourse as a result of their early socialisation into consensual norms. Even though linguistics can itself be said to have emerged through the experience of contact with other groups and languages (Hymes 1980: 55; Robins 1979; Vološinov 1973: Part II, Chapter 2; Williams 1977), disorderly hybridity and mixing have been overwhelmingly repressed, either regularised and idealised out (as in Chomskyan approaches), or analysed in ways that discovered system and rationality beneath the surface (modernist Sociolinguistics). Recent research, however, interrogates these ideas about community: in the CofP approach, a real but relatively limited concept of 'community' is empirically instantiated in fairly small-scale, local activities; in language ideology research, 'community' is analysed as a political construct; and the two come together in sociolinguistic studies of how the symbolic connotations (or 'indexical' meanings) of the language that people use in everyday interaction do and don't connect with prevailing assumptions about social identities, positions, groups, hierarchies and so on.

This problematisation of the traditional notion of speech community certainly doesn't signal a loss of empirical interest in the larger social, historical and geographical arenas in which language circulates (see Blommaert 2004; Scollon and Scollon 2004). But for this, 'speech community' drops from its traditional position as the most general entity in sociolinguistic description, replaced by a more differentiating vocabulary which includes 'institutions', 'media' and 'networks', this latter term being a particularly flexible concept capable of describing the social links involved in, for example, quite tightly clustered activities of the CofP-type, much more widely dispersed transnational diaspora, and the very varied paths through which language, texts and practices circulate.

In fact, the conceptual re-tooling now required in Sociolinguistics stretches much further than the replacement of 'speech community' with 'networks' and 'institutions'. As already noted, although they are certainly not the 'whole story', randomness and disorder have become much more important in recent social theory, and instead of trying to define the core features of any social group or institution, there is major interest now in the experience of being in transition between places, institutions and groups, in the flows of people, knowledge, texts and objects across social and geographical space, in the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, in fragmentation, indeterminacy and ambivalence (Clifford 1992; Hannerz 1990). In fact, following Pratt (1987), we could describe the reorientation that this demands as a move from the 'linguistics of community' to a 'linguistics of contact'.[6]

So, for example, with the experience of anomalous social difference now treated as a central rather than subsidiary characteristic of contemporary life, there are grounds for questioning the significance of 'negotiation' as the central principle in interaction. In Barth's view, for instance,

> '[n]egotiation' suggests a degree of conflict of interests ... within a framework of shared understandings[, but ... t]he disorder entailed in ... religious, social, ethnic, class and cultural pluralism [sometimes ...] goes far beyond what can be retrieved as ambiguities of interest, relevance, and identity resolved through negotiation. (1992: 27)

Therefore, instead of treating shared knowledge and common ground as something that interactants simply fall back in moments of difficulty, the initial identification of any common ground available as a starting point itself needs to be seen as a major task (Barrett 1997: 188–191; Gee 1999: 15ff). In line with this, the traditional priority given to 'competence' looks over-optimistic, and instead, ignorance itself becomes a substantive issue for theory and description, not just a technical problem contracted out to the applied

linguistics of language teaching. The salience of *non*-shared knowledge increases the significance of 'knowing one's own ignorance, knowing that others know something else, knowing whom to believe, developing a notion of the potentially knowable' (Hannerz 1992: 45; Rampton 1997), and as well as not being able to take cooperation and mutual understanding for granted, winning and holding attention – having 'a voice' – also needs to be seen as a challenge.

When hegemonic assumptions about smooth cooperative negotiation being the normal condition for interaction are disrupted in this way, attention necessarily also turns to the different ways in which people reflect metalinguistically and meta-culturally on the shape of their own discourse and its reception by others (Bauman and Briggs 1990, this volume, Chapter 41; Gal and Irvine 1995: 973; Urciuoli 1996; Hannerz 1992: 44). In fact, linguistic reflexivity (or 'metapragmatic awareness') is increasingly seen as a crucial feature in all language use, and an interest in *stylised* and *artful performance*, where there is heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer (Bauman and Briggs 1990, this volume, Chapter 41; Rampton 1999) is now moving from the margins to the centre of Sociolinguistics. In the process, tacit, *unself-conscious* language use is unseated from the throne it has occupied in Sociolinguistics for the past 30 years,[7] and the premium that variationist Sociolinguistics has always put on the unconscious and the repetitive looks rather 'Fordist'.[8] In fact, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that in late modernity, '[s]ignificance and numbers have parted ways ... statistically insignificant phenomena may prove to be decisive' (1992: 192), and if he is correct, then our focus needs to extend beyond regularity, consistency and system to the unusual and *spectacular*. To analyse this, we need a conceptualisation of language in psychological and social process that is rather different from, for example, Labov's, but in fact there are resources quite close at hand, first in the linguistics of practice rather than in the linguistics of system, and second in the shift from 'variation' to 'transposition' as a way of envisaging linguistic movement across settings, time and space.

The linguistics of practice has a considerable pedigree (Hanks 1996; Verschueren 1999), but the key point here lies in the priority given to situated action in the relationship between language and language use. Instead of seeing language use simply as system output, *language* as a set of social conventions or mental structures is reduced to being just one among a number of semiotic resources available for local text production and interpretation. Instead of the system itself being viewed as the main carrier of meaning, meaning is analysed as a process of here-and-now inferencing, ranging across all kinds of percept, sign and knowledge. By definition, spectacular texts rup-

plugging holes with whatever we can gather from the contingent links between different semiotic modes and levels anyway, that is obviously not fatal.

Once one treats language as playing only a subsidiary part in meaning, and once one says that local and historical context play a constitutive rather than ancillary role in communication, then it is also difficult to see *variation* as an adequate frame for analysing communicative processes across social space and time. Modernist sociolinguists have taken the systematicity of language for granted, and seen it as their task to describe the parts and properties of the system that adjust to different situations. But if you're interested in situated meaning and you see people as getting to this through immersion in all the contingent particularities of a given context, then the first thing you have to do if you want to understand communication across time and space is to try to work out how people construct semiotic objects that will hold together long enough to carry over from one context to the next, going on after that to look at what people make of it the other end. The key words here are entextualisation, *trans*position and *re*contextualisation (Bauman and Briggs 1990, this volume, Chapter 41; Silverstein and Urban 1996), and again, these are concepts that one can usefully use to study the spectacular. If a spectacular practice or event is actually significant, then obviously it can't be just done once and forgotten, and there has to be some record or memory of it which gets circulated over time and space. With transposition rather than variation as a conceptual framework, one looks beyond the producer's communicative competence and their flexible-but-durable underlying disposition to (a) the multiple people and processes involved in the design or selection of textual 'projectiles' which have some hope of travelling across settings, (b) to the alteration and revaluation of texts in 'transportation', and (c) to their embedding in new contexts. Overall, there is a major expansion of sociolinguistic interest here, from the *production* of language and text *within* specific settings to the *projection* of language and text *across* settings or from the 'use-value' to the 'exchange-value' of language practices.

As flourishing interest in 'communities of practice' clearly demonstrates, late modern Sociolinguistics certainly hasn't abandoned the interest in the kind of regular and consensual phenomena and processes that were brought together under the banner of 'speech community' and that preoccupied its modernist forebears. But these can no longer be taken for granted or prioritised, neglecting the potential sociolinguistic significance of what's hybrid, disorientating, uncertain, unusual or in transition, and Sociolinguistics is now engaged in developing concepts, topics and methods that can do justice to both the expected *and* the exceptional. In doing so, Sociolinguistics is upgrading its capacity to understand the dynamics of language and commu-

NOTES

1. The liberal tradition is complex and contested, but among other things, it can be characterised as involving:
   a. a strong sense of reason as impartiality, with the reasoner standing 'apart from his own emotions, desires and interests ... abstracting ... away from the concrete situation' (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 48);
   b. a belief that public and private realms should be clearly separated, with state activity limited to the public sphere and human diversity and difference regarded as private (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 47);
   c. an a-historical and 'disembodied' view of the individual, seen as having a 'moral primacy ... against the claims of any social collectivity' (Gray 1986: x) and grounded in the 'presocial or transcendent features of human beings' (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 45);
   d. an insistence that the legitimacy of the state be based on consent and on a public and universal conception of law committed to rationality (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 49–50);
   e. a conviction that social reality is knowable, and that social policy and technology might be used to ameliorate poverty, unhappiness and other ills (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 50).

   Within Sociolinguistics, these values have been at issue in the debates about concrete vs. abstract etc. modes of expression, in disputes about the extent to which school and other institutions should recognise different home cultures, in the argument with Chomsky, in the prioritisation of system and coherence, and lastly, in sociolinguistics' commitment to social intervention. (For fuller discussions of liberal modernity relevant to Sociolinguistics, cf. Scollon and Scollon 1995: Chapter 6; Collins 1998; Heller 1999; Rampton 2006).
2. In an account of Sociolinguistics and other social sciences, Bernstein discusses the influence of ideas about 'competence', which he characterises as follows:

   The social logic of the concept competence may reveal:
   1. an announcement of the universal democracy of acquisition. All are inherently competent. There is no deficit.
   2. the individual as *active* and *creative* in the construction of a *valid* world of meaning and practice. There can only be *differences* between such worlds, meanings and practices
   3. a celebration of everyday, oral language use and a suspicion of specialised languages
   4. official socialisers are suspect, for acquisition is a tacit, invisible act, not subject to public regulation or, perhaps, not primarily acquired through such regulation
   5. a critique of hierarchical relations, where domination is replaced by facilitation and imposition by accommodation. (1996: 150)
3. Late/post-modernity is generally interpreted in at least two ways (cf. Frazer and Lacey 1993; Rampton 2006: Chapter 1). One line argues for the emergence of a *new perspective*, abandoning the liberal project of rationality together with the hope that social science can understand and harness the laws of social life – the values of individuality, freedom and equality are themselves regarded as biased in the interests of powerful groups, and 'grand theories' which make claims to 'truth' are either treated sceptically or seen as repressive instruments of power. The other perspective proposes that Western societies are actually *in a new globalised era*, profoundly affected, for example, by information technologies, by cheap travel and migration, by a decline in traditional political institutions, by the rise of new social movements.
4. There is a strong case that this actually has rather deep roots in Sociolinguistics (Bauman and Sherzer 1974: 8, 1989: xvii–xix; Halliday 1978: 169–70; Sapir [1931] 1949:104), though it is only relatively recently that agent- and practice-centred perspectives have become mainstream orthodoxy.
5. Although they did not become central to Sociolinguistics at the time, precedents for both of these conceptions of community can be found in the 1960s and 1970s – on the former, see for example, Hymes (1972: 54), this volume, Chapter 39; Fishman (1972: 23), and on the latter, see for example, Gumperz (1962: 34); Fishman (1972: 23).
6. See also the paradigm-shifting work of LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985).
7. In Bakhtin's terms, 'direct unmediated discourse, directed exclusively towards its referential object, as an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority', loses its supremacy, making way instead for 'doublevoicing', where there is an uneasiness in speech produced by its penetration by other people's talk (1984).
8. Gee et al. characterise Fordism as follows: '[w]orkers, hired from the head down had only to follow directions and mechanically carry out a rather meaningless piece of a process they did not need to understand as a whole, and certainly did not control' (1996: 26).

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