Chapter Nine Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I discuss some of the implications of a linguistic theory that takes into account the role of evaluation in its own theorizing. I have argued that to do this we need to rethink the concept of theory. If we take the view that a change of wording brings a change of meaning – that linguistic form is motivated and functional, not arbitrary – then one way to change the meaning of theory is to change its wording. To re-label is to re-construe. Some alternative linguistic terms have been mentioned in 3.3.2: *resource* in place of *rule*, for example, which puts the language user in control of language, rather than the authorities or the genetic code. If we refer to linguistics as a *metalanguage* rather than as a *theory*, this puts the emphasis on interpretation rather than discovery: we focus on *the linguist talking about language*. No doubt we will not get rid of the prestigious word *theory*,[1] but the occasional use of *meta*language as an alternative could obviate much error, and the change of viewpoint could give new meaning to linguistics.

Cameron observes that 'By adopting a different concept of a language... we would inevitably commit ourselves to asking quite different questions and proposing quite other solutions' (1990:80). Adopting a different concept of a *metalanguage* should have similar results: we would get away from the associations that come with *theory* – hypotheses to be falsified, laboratory experiments, and so on – and start asking different questions and arriving at different answers. This change of direction is the answer to Cameron's question (1995:223) which I have quoted as epigraph to this thesis. It is not a direct answer – it is 'something different' rather than the 'something between' that she was looking for – but it is the only way we can begin to deal squarely with questions of value in language.

The fear that admitting metalinguistic evaluation would make linguistics less 'scientific' seems to me ungrounded; on the contrary, it could allow the discipline to get a grip on its own special disciplinarity, bringing about not just a change in meaning but an explosion of new meaning. As Halliday suggests, a change in ideology would mean that

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1 Although not everyone is impressed by it: Bulley's opinion is that 'language does not even belong to the category of things to which theories accounting for them are appropriate' (1998:50).

> we will see linguistics developing as the new "science of sciences", replacing physics, to cope with the interpretation of the universe in terms of exchange of information, rather than of cause and effect. (Halliday, in interview with Thibault 1987:626)

Halliday was talking here about the advances in the discipline that computer technology enables, but information is not just something exchanged between computers: its senders and receivers are human, with human values which will have to be recognized by the new science: the observer *inside* the thing observed. If we are to deal seriously with matters of value and evaluation, then rather than relegating them to the outskirts (as Roy Harris observes, the social aspects of language are not the marginalia but the '*sine qua non* of language', 1987:141) we need to bring them into our theory, as an integral part of it. Cameron points out that sociolinguistics is 'in need of a theory linking the "linguistic" to the "socio"' and that 'in the absence of a well-thought-out theory of the relation of language and society, sociolinguists tend to fall back on a number of unsatisfactory positions' (1990:84). The answer to her question lies in 'thinking grammatically' (Halliday 2000:225), that is, thinking in terms of a theory/metalanguage/grammatics that does have well-thought-out ways to connect language and society (as I have argued in Chapter Seven that Halliday's does).

Returning to the question I set aside in 8.1, above – whether evaluation should be considered a *welcome* as well as simply an inevitable feature of linguistic theory, I will suggest that the answer is 'Yes'. Davidse observes that

> In doing linguistics, we are using language as its own meta-language. As Halliday (1992:32) pointedly observes, there is nothing else we can do! Where people go wrong, in my opinion, is to view this as a limitation. (1996:391)

and I would say that the anti-prescriptive doctrine goes wrong in viewing evaluation as a limitation on what linguistics can do. We can take advantage of the reflexivity of language, as Davidse does in producing a clear description of identifying clauses in linguistic discourse. But experiential grammar is not the only kind of grammar we can turn on itself: we can do this with all the metafunctions, including the evaluative resources of the interpersonal, with interesting and revealing results.

We would need, of course, to be clear that recognizing evaluation does not mean that all opinions are equally valuable; this would make linguistics meaningless. Just as some kinds of language are more valuable than others – there are valued texts and there are trivial texts – so there are some kinds of metalanguage that are more valuable than others. (The anti-prescriptivists already hold this opinion, strangely at odds with the 'all languages are equally good' dogma: the expert's metalanguage is valuable; the lay person's is not; formal description is more valuable than functional; an explanation of how a child learns language is more valuable than a description of corpus data or an analysis of a text.) The test for valuableness would be how well an instance of metalanguage works for a particular purpose: 'Does it go? Does it facilitate the task in hand?' (Halliday 1994a:xxx).

In the remaining sections I discuss six implications of the new view of theory, all of which seem to me beneficial to linguistics: becoming aware of our own language (9.1), bridging the gap between layperson and linguist (9.2), introducing linguistics to beginners differently (9.3), moving on from a position which has perhaps had its day (9.4), applying linguistics in a real sense (9.5), and restoring value to language (9.6). The quotations in this last chapter are intended to indicate that these ideas are 'in the air', as it were: most are the opinions of linguists who believe the current orthodox style of linguistic theorizing is detrimental to the discipline.

I am aware that this final chapter takes the standard academic line: making a plea for things to be done differently; to which the response is often to point out that many linguists are already doing things in the ways the author is recommending. My point, however, as I stated at the end of Chapter One, is that we need to be able to do these things *with the backing of theory*, not as makeshift. This would obviate the need for the joking apologies that are currently *de rigueur* when a linguist expresses a preference, as for example when a panellist on the *SAfm* radio language programme mentioned in 2.2.4, above, refers to himself as a 'closet prescriptivist'.

9.1 Watching our language

One obvious implication of considering theory as metalanguage is that we would find ourselves 'watching our language'. Focusing on the grammatical resources of our metalanguage should have positive results for the linguist's self-knowledge and consequently for applications of linguistics. Cameron comes very close to answering her own question:

> if linguists are to engage more productively with non-linguists, we need to think seriously about our own use of evaluative terms: both about the fact that we do actually use them, in spite of protestations to the contrary, and also about which terms we use and how. (1995:233)

Watching our metalanguage means we would not only become aware of its evaluative terms: we would gain a thorough understanding of all its evaluative resources. This does not necessarily mean we would do detailed analyses of it, but that we would become aware of it in terms of our own grammatics, recognizing its reflexivity and putting this recognition to use, making it a source of insights aimed at improving the theory – a benefit which we deny ourselves if we pretend we are somehow outside language. With this understanding, we would be unlikely to forget that metalanguage works like language. For example, theorizing Appraisal in the data we study should at the same time alert us to its presence in our own language. This process of monitoring our metalanguage would constitute the built-in critique that Hymes recommends when he says that 'use of linguistics must include a critique of linguistics' (1983:183, quoted in Chapter One). He also makes it clear that his idea of *linguistic competence* (in the title of his article) includes *metalinguistic* competence: 'it refers to the abilities that scholars must have, if they are to be able to study such competence' (1983:192), foremost of which, I would suggest, must be a thorough understanding of the functions of their own language.

This awareness of language will show up in the choices the linguist makes in his own language: Halliday, for example, construes his grammatics as ways of thinking about language, as the following examples from the interview with Thibault show:

> the notion of metafunction is simply <u>an attempt to capture</u> this relationship between the internal forms of the language and its use in contexts of social action; we're talking about the low-level sense of grammatical functions; <u>using notions like</u> Theme, Actor, Medium and so on; The metafunctions <u>are the theoretical concepts that enable us to understand</u> the interface between language and what is outside language; I find it <u>useful to talk in terms of</u> the three concepts of field, tenor and mode. (Thibault 1987:607-619)

Such awareness of language should ensure that linguists will be less 'in danger of understanding the data too readily and underestimating their involvement in producing them' (de Beaugrande 1991:343). In place of the disingenuousness of the anti-prescriptive approach, we might achieve 'the clarity about the status of its own methods which is surely one mark of any intellectual discipline' (Robinson 1975:5). The result would be enhanced credibility for the discipline.

9.2 Bridging the gap

Cameron refers to 'the damaging polarization of lay language users and linguists' and observes that 'linguistics in the course of its short history has produced a state of mutual distrust between experts reluctant to speak to lay concerns and lay speakers with no interest in listening to linguists' (1995:227-8). The following are some other expressions of concern. R.A Harris says that 'There is, most unfortunately, a widespread ignorance and trepidation about linguistics – peculiarly so, since language is unutterably fundamental to our humanhood', and he quotes Auberon Waugh,[2] who wrote that

> Linguistics [has been] reduced by Chomsky and his disciples to a positively mind-boggling level of stupidity and insignificance. If ever [the Prime Minister] wants an excuse to close down a university, she has only to look at its department of linguistics. (R.A. Harris 1993:vii)

Nunberg explains the reason for the trepidation:

> It is tempting to see the decline of general interest in grammar as a casualty of the success of modern linguistics in establishing its authority. In recent years, the academic growth of the field and the spate of popular writing about the "Chomskian revolution" have succeeded in persuading a large portion of the intellectual community that the study of grammar is a dauntingly technical discipline, with closer connections to logic and mathematics than to the study of literary texts. It is no longer commonly assumed that the logic of grammar is accessible to the reflection of ordinary folk.
>
> But in its rarified form the study of grammar has always been somewhat arcane; what is new is the sense that it is also irrelevant. (1990:474)

and Taylor criticises the linguist's lack of social commitment:

> In spite of years of anti-normative rhetoric on the part of academic linguistics, the political significance of normative linguistic issues has not faded. Still, all the linguists have to say about this is *that they have nothing to say*. ... [this] leaves the

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Harris is quoting from a review by Waugh of Chomsky (1987), *The Chomsky Reader*, a reference I have not seen. Waugh's remark is intemperate, but we need to take into account his educational background and what he would value about language, and remember that the point of view creates the object. For someone who is sure to have read Fowler, Chomsky's 'systematic ambiguity' would simply be a case of 'legerdemain with two senses', resulting from 'a want of clear thinking' (Fowler 1988[1926]:328-9).

> crucial political decisions about language in the hands of politicians who cannot be informed and advised by those who devote their professional lives to the study of language and who therefore should be expected to provide some knowledgeable advice on linguistic issues. (1997:15; original emphasis)

The three paragraphs reproduced in **Appendix 4** are recent expressions of concern about the situation. These form a counterpoint to the three in **Appendix 3**, which were discussed in 4.3.1, above, and they support my contention that the anti-prescriptive stance has had damaging effects on the discipline. To repair the damage, we need to reconnect linguist and lay persona; as Martin says, 'The real question is: how do the linguists in question use their theory to live?' (1996:370), a complete rejection of the advice in the three paragraphs in **Appendix 3**. Linguists must be licensed to evaluate language and to address social concerns, otherwise the situation will continue as Hymes saw it twenty years ago:

> The lack of academic employment increases the number of linguists working in practical circumstances, where social life comes into play, but that does not provide an intellectual framework or coherence for the experience. (1983:184)

The lack of an 'intellectual framework' suitable for dealing with problems of language in society springs, I believe, from the failure to think clearly about what kind of science linguistics is (discussed in Chapter Five). For a start, it is a mistake to think of it as something of a different *kind* from the ordinary person's metalinguistic capability:

> It would be illusory to suppose that in any culture there is ever a break of continuity between 'popular' and 'technical' concepts of what a language is. (Roy Harris 1980:31)

Linguists' talk about language should rather be seen as one end of a continuum, stretching from lay to expert metalanguage. One reason for seeing it thus is that the latter must develop out of the former. As Halliday observes, there are three facets of child language development: 'learning language, learning through language, and learning about language' and points out that 'In a sense, and from a child's point of view, these three are all the same thing' (1979-80: 1). Learning to articulate our unconscious understanding of language is part of the natural process of learning language. The one springs from the other; it is not a special ability possessed only by the linguist, and the linguist does not have a monopoly on the facts:

> Folk linguistic notions, like other folk ideas enshrined in our semantic system, can be wildly wrong. But they are often right, and sometimes contain significant truths which in our more contrived wisdom we have lost sight of.'(1978:207)

Another reason is that it is in the nature of a social and behavioural science to be both based on and concerned with the layperson's experience. Roy Harris observes that in medical research the expert 'is in no way restricted by a need to keep within the bounds of what the layman understands or believes about cancer' but

> Other areas of science have just such an interest in the layman's view. These are areas which may be described as 'essentially lay-oriented', in the sense that it is the layman's everyday experience of the world which provides both the point of departure and the ultimate explicanda. ... In such disciplines, many key terms and concepts are calqued upon familiar terms and concepts used in the ordinary business of discourse concerning everyday experience. (1981:90)

or, as Robinson puts it

> Though the biologist must not be a frog, the linguist must be a speaker before he becomes a linguist. (1975:70)

Quite apart from the basic misunderstanding about its own nature, a linguistics that continues to insist on its separation from lay concerns will find itself out of step with the current drive in the 'real' sciences to reconnect with the lay public:

> Post-normal science requires science to expand its boundaries to include different validation processes, perspectives, and types of knowledge. In particular, it requires the gap between scientific expertise and public concerns to be bridged. (Sardar 2000:64)

The acknowledgement of evaluation in metalanguage, as part of a move to acknowledge the continuity between our own language and the layperson's, can only be beneficial to the discipline. On an individual level it will allow for linguistics to become lay-oriented, a 'basis for lay linguistic therapy' (Harris 1997:310), or what Halliday has referred to as 'logotherapy' (2000:225), meaning 'using the grammar to think with', a technique which can be applied on many levels, from Davidse's explanations of the Token-Value clause (1996) down to the simple 'headache' example Halliday discusses (2000). On a broader scale it will restore humanity to the discipline. Pullum has observed that

> language is simultaneously the stuff of art - the fabric of which poetry is wrought – and a puzzle for social and biological science. It spans the alleged gulf between the humanities and the sciences... And it is genuinely humanizing, it seems to me. The process of examining analytically the complexities in one's own language and in others seems inherently likely to increase one's sensitivity to ways of expressing thought, and one's awareness of the mystery of human intelligence and its intriguingly diverse channels of expression. (1991:27)

This is an atypical passage for a formal linguist, and I find it ironic that he should apparently not be aware that formal linguistic theory, because it omits to build in the evaluative element that is 'the stuff of art' and so on, is more likely to fall between two stools than bridge the gap. On the other hand, a theory that does build in evaluation has the power to make the connection:

> Across the gulfs that are supposed, often wrongly, to divide the scientist from the arts student, one of the most important bridges that we can build is a common enjoyment of a body of good literature. (Smith and Mason 1961:3)

The SFL literature contains many analyses of literary and other valued texts, dating from the seminal example, Halliday's study of *The Inheritors* (1973). The value of these is that they show how literary criticism can benefit from an explicit technical metalanguage designed to talk clearly about aesthetic appreciation and judgement

> What is important is that we should be able to use the same theory and method of linguistic analysis – the same 'grammatics' – whatever kind of text (or sub-text) we are trying to interpret, whether Tennyson or Darwin, Mother Goose or the *Scientific American*. Otherwise if we simply approach each text with an ad hoc do-it-yourself kit of private commentary, we have no way of explaining their similarities and differences – the aesthetic and functional values that differentiate one text from another, or one voice from another within the frontiers of the same text. (Halliday1990:103-4)

The benefit of this approach should be evident in the classroom. For the student, learning to talk about valued texts would be less of a mystery exercise in which success is dependent on guessing what the teacher wants: values would be made more explicit and therefore more challengeable, and value judgements would have to be supported with evidence. This is the kind of improvement Christie suggests (1999a). Again, terminology would become important: respect for the value not only of language but also of metalanguage. (It may, however, be some time before the literature department accepts this contribution from linguistics.)

9.3 Teaching linguistics differently

In contradiction to the approach taken by the introductory texts discussed in 2.3, I believe that it would benefit the discipline if the standard anti-prescriptive framework was done away with. This omission would allow for a more realistic approach to evaluation and obviate the danger of inducing the split personality syndrome referred to in 4.3, above, and in **Appendices 3** and **4**. Introductions to SFG, such as Butt et al. (2000), Bloor and Bloor (1995), Thompson (1996), Halliday (1994a), and Matthiessen and Halliday (1997, **Appendix 1**, analysed in section 3.3.2), do not seem to find it necessary to include this kind of regulative framework (though I note that Eggins, 1994, atypically, does). A more beneficial framework, in my opinion, would be one which would ensure that students start with a clear understanding of what kind of science linguistics is; to replace the misconception that it is a natural science like physics or biology and the linguist an objective scientist. This new regulative context would emphasize three aspects of linguistics: *reflexivity*, *terminology*, and *personality*.

The first, *reflexivity*, would be the obvious starting point. Instead of taking a view only of language, the student would learn that *the view from linguistics includes the viewpoint*: it is about language seen through language, and the linguist is an interpreter of language. This understanding would be kept in mind even when looking at formal aspects of grammar. The student would learn to view the reflexivity of language as the foundational understanding of the discipline rather than as an oddity that we give a thought to now and again (and which some people react to with indignation, 'as if linguistics was a form of intellectual incest', Halliday 1996:1).

It would be necessary to stress the importance of the second, *terminology*, because if we believe that change of form means change of meaning, then terminology is never 'just' terminology. One term is *not* as good as another. The most important term to be careful with would of course be *grammar*. To ensure that students became aware of the tricks metalanguage can play on us, we would occasionally unsettle the habitual patterns, as Halliday does when he says he should have 'created the appropriate metagrammar and written: 'The Theme of an English clause is been by the element that is put in first position' (1988a:33-4), and as Reddy did, getting his students to try to talk about language without using the 'conduit metaphor' (the idea that meaning is something we send in parcels to each other, via conduits of various kind), for example, replacing 'Did you get anything out of that article?' with 'Were you able to construct anything of interest

on the basis of the assigned text?' (1993[1979]:177). Departure from habitual ways of meaning shows us that language is not an invariable object but takes shape according to the way we talk about it.

The third new aspect would be an emphasis on *personality*, by which I mean that a linguistic theory would be taught as the creation of a *theorist*, not as a collection of facts anyone might have discovered. In physics it may not be important to know about the theorist – the boiling point of water is not affected by the personality of its discoverer – but in linguistics the character, background and values of the theorist will affect the shape of his or her 'discoveries'. Because linguistic theory is made out of language, the student should become acquainted with at least a sample of the theorist's actual language, rather than only the introductory writer's version of it; again on the principle that to change the wording changes the meaning. For example, in the four small texts quoted in 6.2, Chomsky introduces a degree of modal caution: *purports to be*; *we can say*; *proposed as*; *perhaps less familiar; constructs as a hypothesis*; *No confusion should result ... if*, but this modality disappears in Fromkin and Rodman's simplifications (1993:13), so that his theory is presented not as a conjectural approach, but as the unexceptionable methodology of modern linguistics. De Beaugrande, however, in examining the discourse of fundamental works, produces a very different picture of theory:

> Focusing on works as discourse helps to see them not just as documents, but also as 'performances' with characteristic 'discourse moves'. These moves include claiming scientific status for linguistics; estimating the state of the discipline with its strengths and weaknesses, and situating it in respect to other disciplines; selecting certain aspects for investigation and rejecting others; proposing criteria for constructing theories or discovering data; setting degrees of precision or delicacy; determining what counts as the same or different within one language or among several; deciding how many levels of structure should be postulated for language sequences; presenting and justifying terms or notations; and so on. (de Beaugrande 1991:343)

An introductory text based on his approach would give a much more realistic picture of what linguistics is about.

In this section I have imagined what an introductory text would be like if it was based on the idea that linguistics is a metalanguage. Along with the new kind of *text* would go a new kind of *teaching*. Instead of making a feature of the technicalities of linguistics, in the way the grammar-

translation method makes a feature of the technicalities of a foreign language (and in so doing perhaps exaggerates their difficulty and slows down the process of acquiring fluency), we might make the acquisition of metalanguage easier by getting students to acquire familiarity with its terms through *use*, in the way the direct method and communicative language teaching do, building up a substantial passive vocabulary and later moving on to active use in a variety of contexts and for a variety of real-life rather than just classroom purposes (keeping in mind Halliday's belief that 'a theory is a means of action', 1994a:xxix, which means that, like a language, it makes sense to *use* it rather than just talk about it).

I am encouraged to think that this might be feasible since my experience of being part of a seminar group that was taught by this method (Martin 2002). Martin made a brief remark at the start of the seminar to the effect that the focus would be on the discourse, not the grammar, but I do not know whether he consciously formulated his method as being like teaching a language rather than teaching linguistics. It remains to be seen how effective such a teaching method would be, but initial response to the seminar was positive. Follow-up in a style more like grammar-translation would be necessary to sharpen the focus of terms the group initially absorbed in their lay meaning. For example, *elaboration*, *extension* and *enhancement*, which in lay usage are fairly loose terms all meaning 'expansion', would be separated out into their specific usages in SFG to denote three kinds of logico-semantic relation (Halliday 1994a:218ff.).

The language of Martin's presentation of course contained evaluative elements. Some of the features he noted in the discourse he was analysing were also apparent in his own metadiscourse; for example: the choice of attitudinal lexis (exploiting 'the power of attitudinal words to put us onside or not onside'), the choice of experiential elements ('the way you select your content provokes an evaluation') and the staging of the discourse ('the text is organised to position you with the speaker or writer'); all evidence of 'marshalling the genre to try to align people' and to get them to see language a particular way. Martin himself would no doubt be the first to admit this; as he remarks, 'even in supposedly "faceless" academic discourse there will be some kind of appraising going on'. (The quotations here are from Martin 2002, noted during the seminar.)

9.4 Moving on

There is a perception, particularly evident in the standard introductory texts, that the anti-prescriptive tenet in linguistics is an immutable law, rather than just one way of looking at how linguistics should be conducted. More importantly, what is overlooked is the possibility of seeing it as a response that was necessary at a particular historical moment, to allow the discipline to make progress, but which has now lost its relevance and is in fact *holding up* progress. This is made particularly clear in the following passage, which I will quote at length, because it sounds a welcome note of sanity, and offers hope that linguistics might be able to move on:

> All branches of linguistics are first and foremost descriptive and thus it is no surprise that text linguistics confines itself to describing what *is*, in other words to (selections from) already existing and usually published texts. The past thirty years have seen fascinating and lively debate about the nature and boundaries of linguistics, but one tenet has remained unchallenged: that linguistics is concerned solely with making descriptive and not prescriptive statements. While it is universally agreed that evaluating alternative grammars is a proper concern of linguistics, evaluating the comparative communicative success of two alternative sentences generated by any given grammar is not – despite the fact that both pure and applied linguists, in their role as teachers, are daily involved in telling students how to improve their linguistic skills.
>
> There were, of course, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, important sociolinguistic reasons for emphasizing the validity of difference and denying the inherent inferiority of minority dialects. However, this battle has long since been won, following research into West-Indian English in Birmingham by Wight and Sinclair and into Black English in New York by Labov. Now the advances in descriptive linguistics of the last generation should give us the confidence to re-introduce evaluation, to admit what we have always secretly acknowledged, that some texts and some writers are better than others, and to try to account not simply for difference and for how existing texts mean, but also for quality and for why one textualization might mean more or better than another. (Coulthard 1994b:1)

And yet, it may be that Coulthard is being too kind. It may be that the anti-prescriptive approach to linguistics was of dubious validity in the first place. The wisdom of the 'all varieties are equal' approach was already being questioned as early as 1969. For example, in articles in the same issue of the same journal as Labov (1969), Spolsky warns that 'We must not fall into the old trap, and say: "A linguist does not make value judgements" and then go on to make a value judgement: "All languages and dialects are equally good" (1969:154), and Stewart points out that this dogma risks offending the very people it purports to help:

> the attempts of many linguists to derive Negro-dialect forms from underlying representations which are identical to those which seem to exist for white dialects, while comforting to the social conscience of white liberals and the social insecurity of middle-class Negroes, may nevertheless obstruct accurate analysis. Furthermore, the assumption that superficially similar linguistic phenomena in Negro and white speech are caused by the same factors may lead to conclusions about Negro behavior which are far more unfair than assumptions about linguistic and cultural differences, whether real or imagined, could ever be. (1969:242)

Another contemporary critic was Sledd (1973), who also complains about the inconsistencies and illogicalities inherent in the 'all languages are equal' approach and its likely effects on disadvantaged Black communities in the US. While making it clear he applauds Labov's 'useful corrective' of the 'verbal deprivation theory'(1973:262), he points out 'the conflict between [linguists'] inevitable value-judgements and their rhetorical pose of scientific objectivity' and says that 'One cannot be a detached, objective scientist and a decision-maker (though language-planners pretend to)' (1973:259).

That the linguist's equalizing approach did offend became evident in the 'Ebonics' affair of 1996, when a school board in Oakland, California, decided to recognise black English as a separate language and to legitimize its use in the classroom. After much controversy, it was reported in the media that the board had 'quietly dropped the divisive concept of "Ebonics" as a "genetic" language spoken by African-Americans', and now recommended 'concentrating more effort and money on helping African-American students to speak standard English' (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, South Africa, 9-15 May, 1997). Other press reports were more outspoken:

> Ebonics is a second-class language for a second-class life. ... It's a 'language' defined or invented by people who did not get their PhDs or their jobs speaking it. (A US newspaper columnist quoted in *East London Daily Dispatch*, Eastern Cape, South Africa 3 February 1997)

> Black civil rights leader Jesse Jackson condemned it as 'teaching down' and 'an unacceptable surrender borderlining on disgrace' ... there was outrage among policymakers who argued that teaching children it was acceptable to say 'I be going to work today' would ensure they would have no work to go to once they left school. (*East London Daily Dispatch*, 3 February 1997)

Many linguists, however, continue to imagine that other people think about their own language as an object of study separate from themselves, the way linguists do, and this insensitivity to social values continues to cause offence. In April 2000, for example, the electronic mailing list

of the Linguistics Society of Southern Africa (LSSA) was asked to vote on the appropriateness of the label 'Black South African English' (BSAE),[3] and the following was one response, from a black South African professor of linguistics:

> I am not sure whether the idea of "Polling" to determine the appropriateness or otherwise of BSAE is a good one. I am not sure how many of the colleagues who object to the use of this label will actually participate in the polls.
>
> The issue of BSAE is no longer an academic issue but is rather a social one. How about a laisser-faire approach. By this mean you should perhaps simply close the debate on BSAE and let people use whatever label they feel comfortable with. I don't think the label "BSAE" will disappear or survive simply because the "polls" have disapproved/approved its continued use.
>
> What I am simply saying is that I will not participate in the polls. I, instead, propose that you close the debate and adopt a LAISSER-FAIRE APPROACH to the issue of BSAE. (6 April 2000)

Reactions like these suggest the discipline should tone down its attempts at impartiality and rather allow people to make the value judgements that seem sensible to *them*, on the basis of *their* understanding of language in society. Admitting evaluation to linguistic theory would help make this a viable proposition. Provisos would of course have to be built in, to protect against abuse of this freedom. We would not want to forget what linguistics *has* gained. We have come a long way from the days when a novelist could write about 'tongues clicking against filed teeth in unsyntactical dialects'[4], and when a linguist could remark that 'The Bantu languages of Africa illustrate features common to the speech of backward and relatively static cultures throughout the world' (Bodmer 1996[1944]:209) (although it is still possible to be asked, as I have been, 'whether Xhosa has any grammar').

One reason linguists hesitate to question the anti-prescriptive doctrine may be the fear of strange bedfellows: we do not want to align ourselves with the 'linguistic fascists' (Pullum 1991:111), or 'play into the hands of Neanderthal conservatives' (R.A.Harris 1993:vii). However, to suggest that the 'opposition' may have got some things right about language does not imply that we ally ourselves with their ideology, as a remark by Cameron makes clear: 'I find myself in agreement

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3 Such a poll is an example of linguists' willingness, even eagerness, to be involved in prescriptive language activities – the label 'BSAE' being of course a piece of language.

4 Evelyn Waugh, 1944, *Black Mischief*.

with [a right-wing commentator]'s critique of descriptivism. Yet this in itself does not make us allies' (1995:10). Another reason for holding back is the perception that to offer advice means to 'dumb down' linguistics, but this is surely not a necessary consequence of the consultant role; on the contrary, such a role would oblige linguists to sharpen up their descriptions so as to construe language more believably.

9.5 Applying linguistics

The anti-prescriptive approach drives a wedge between theory and application, but once we license evaluation it becomes possible to apply our theory substantively rather than as window dressing. Moving away from the discussion of social problems, I will briefly consider another benefit of evaluative grammatics: the way it broadens the scope of discourse analysis, enabling us to talk about the text on an additional level. The following is an important affirmation of the evaluative approach:

> In any piece of discourse analysis, there are always two possible levels of achievement to aim at. One is a contribution to the **understanding** of the text: the linguistic analysis enables one to show how, and why, the text means what it does. ...This is the lower of the two levels; it is one that should always be attainable provided the analysis is such as to relate the text to general features of the language ...
>
> The higher level of achievement is a contribution to the **evaluation** of the text: the linguistic analysis may enable one to say why the text is, or is not, an effective text for its own purposes – in what respects it succeeds and in what respects it fails, or is less successful. This goal is very much harder to attain. ... Whatever the ultimate goal that is envisaged, the actual analysis of a text in grammatical terms is only the first step. ... What it is important to point out, however, is that even the first step, the analysis of the text in terms of its grammar, is already a work of interpretation. (Halliday 1994a:xv-xvi; original emphasis)

A similar statement sums up Halliday's 'silver text' analysis:

> An analysis of this kind has two aims, one being a higher variant of the other. The first aim is to show why the text means what it does. The second aim, more difficult of attainment, is to show why it is valued as it is – why it is effective, or not effective, in relation to its purpose, or as a specimen of its kind.
>
> It is impossible to achieve the second aim without the first: evaluation rests on interpretation. (Halliday 1994a:390-1)

The direction of Halliday's model is interestingly similar to Roget's (discussed in 3.2.5): treating *intellect* as a base from which we move to *affect* (appreciation and judgement): the opposite of the direction of orthodox theory, which takes *affect* as the first step, and regards it as a response to language that we need to reject in favour of *intellect* and science. This about-face for the discipline opens up possibilities for application that the anti-prescriptive approach closes down.

Education must be the most obvious beneficiary of this change of direction in linguistics, but the the relationship between the two has been problematic, particularly since Chomsky's statement denying the feasibility of *any* application (quoted in a footnote in 5.3.5). Spolsky records the reaction to 'Noam Chomsky's address to the 1966 Northeastern Conference on Language Teaching':

> Here he shocked the applied linguists in his audience, and obviously confused many of the language teachers, by stating that neither the linguist nor the psychologist yet knew enough about the process of language acquisition to tell the language teacher what to do. Shocking and confusing, because for the last twenty years, people had been standing up and saying 'These are the linguistic principles of language teaching'. Where can we go now, if we are left without principles? Who will tell us what to do if the linguists won't? (1969:144)

Thirty years later the belief persists in some influential quarters that it is not the linguist's business to tell teachers what to do. As space does not permit adequate discussion here, I have included in **Appendix 5** my analysis of a remark made by Pinker in his popular introductory text (1994), a remark which suggests to me that there is still cause for alarm about the credibility of the discipline vis-à-vis education. In contradiction of Pinker, Matthiessen and Halliday make it clear that linguistics *should* have something to say to teachers, and to anyone who needs to evaluate language:

> It is a feature of semiotic systems (since they are social ...) that an instance carries value. Thus a given text may be particularly highly valued: for example, a political manifesto, or a literary artifact. It falls to grammatics, therefore, to interpret a text not only as a "window on the system" but also as an object in its own right – explaining not merely why it means what it does but also why it is valued as it is. In contexts of language education, for example, the analysis should show why one piece of a learner's writing is more effective than another. (1997:22)

These issues are currently very relevant in South Africa, where education is in crisis and language education is a particularly fraught issue. In a recent article in a South African journal, Van Rooy and Butler discuss the role of linguistics in language teaching and point out that, because Outcomes Based Education (OBE) requires that language teaching make visible the results of learning, there is a need for 'a more functionally oriented version of grammar'. They argue that the formalist paradigm, which is 'an impoverished view of grammar, and ultimately of language itself', still underpins language curricula in South Africa, although it fails to offer any help to the language teacher (Van Rooy and Butler 2000:196-197). Three articles in response to this article (Kilpert 2001a;b; Kilpert 2002) expand on the issues raised, and illustrate how SFG can be applied to teaching academic writing, especially for second language learners, and focusing in particular on textual organisation and how it relates to evaluation.

Informal education of the interested layperson is an application which has received less attention than it perhaps deserves. I believe it needs taking more seriously, along the lines of campaigns to improve public understanding of science. Pinker's popularization (1994) achieves part of what is needed: it supplies a large quantity of entertaining information in the manner of the 'curiosity' literature described in 2.1.1, but it fails to address the need for *advice*; in fact, the chapter on the 'grammar mavens flies in the face of the ordinary language user who values language for reasons other than merely to be informed about the facts.

Appendix 2, the text referred to in 4.2, seems to me a believable representation of the kind of evaluation an educated layperson concerned about language is likely to make; of which examples can be heard regularly on the *SAfm* radio language programme referred to in 2.2.4. It is the kind of response to language that invites scorn from linguists, but I would suggest that this is an unproductive response. The flaws in Inspector Morse's description would be obvious to any discourse analyst but, while we might find nothing much to build on there, we *can* build on Morse's evident *need to evaluate language*, which we, as ordinary language users, share. Instead of condemning this as the wrong way to view language, we could show Morse how to evaluate with more insight, technical knowledge, and circumspection. Far from not being able to 'support a technology of language teaching', systemic functional linguists could talk about Morse's two texts in many illuminating ways. To start with, we could compare the two texts to demonstrate the characteristics of the genres they exemplify. The choices in experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual metafunctions would reveal the functionality of these genres. A comparison of the

lexical intricacy and grammatical density (Halliday 1989) of the two texts would be particularly revealing, and Appraisal theory would enable close analysis of the lexis.[5]

With this groundwork complete (Halliday's *grammar/interpretation* level), we could move up to the higher level and *evaluate* each of the texts as an example of its genre, on a scale ranging from 'rhetorical ideal' to 'total flop' (Halliday 1994a:391), and of course point out that to compare the two does not really make sense: it is not a matter of good or bad English per se, but of good or bad English for a particular purpose. We would have to tell Morse that his evaluation is not worth much, because it skips the groundwork, and we might persuade him to add some new technicalities to his repertoire, which does not go beyond the traditional grammar one of spelling, punctuation, correct use of personal pronouns, and so on, and the 'Plain English' variety of complaint. We might well agree with him that his sociology text is a poor specimen of its kind, but we would qualify this assessment by pointing out the functionality of some of its features, such as nominalization. All this instruction would be underpinned, we hope, by the regulative impetus Morse himself provides: *the need to evaluate*.[6] If the linguist can teach the layperson some new ways of talking about language, by appealing to this shared need, both sides should benefit.

I have offered the above as a not entirely serious example; nevertheless, a fictional text can provide the kind of data about language and language users that is hard to come by in real life, and can spark insightful commentary (Halliday 1973; Martin 2000a), because it gives a magnified image of typical features. It is also important, I believe, not to be over-solemn about language. Humour in language is functional (though it remains largely an unanalysed concept), and perhaps it has a function in metalanguage too.

5

These ways of analysing were dealt with in Kilpert 2001c.

6

For this exercise we would have to imagine a *co-operative* Morse, which is not very plausible, as his admirers will know. But we might be able to get him interested in linguistics by appealing to his needs as a detective inspector, in the way that Gregory and Asp convinced a judge and jury of the value of linguistics for assessing the authenticity of allegedly verbatim confessions (Asp 2000; Gregory 2000).

9.6 Revaluing language

I believe that in recognizing the place of evaluation in linguistic theory there is much that we can celebrate. Hitherto there has been a tendency, when the discipline *has* permitted itself to evaluate language, to focus on things to condemn, for example, the 'hidden' ideologies that Critical Discourse Analysis has shown us how to uncover. Valuable though this kind of work has been in drawing attention to the deceptive power of language, it has perhaps, as Martin has pointed out (2001), been excessively negative, and given the impression that the function of some forms of language is exclusively to serve unjust causes. In this I would suggest linguists have aligned themselves with the traditional grammarian and the complainer in the Orwell tradition, who, like Morse, are inclined to overdo the negative appraisal (*incomprehensible twaddle*; *pompous polysyllaby*; *sprawling, spawning, sociological nonsense*). It would be a pity if linguistics were to continue to endorse this depressing tendency, focusing on the *don'ts* of language rather than the *dos*. The constant critique that Hymes calls for does not mean constant criticism.

But even worse is the tendency Roy Harris observes (in the passage quoted in 2.2.3, 1987a:173): not to appraise at all, but to echo the depressing tendency of today's globalized world to devalue language by treating it as all equally valuable, which in the end amounts to 'equally valueless': mere surface noise, signifying nothing much. A linguistics that took a positive evaluative approach to language might do something to combat the anomie induced by the mechanized view of language. It is perhaps time for linguistics to move on from the universalizing of language and to revalue different ways of saying and meaning. However, this should not mean valuing only the previously disadvantaged varieties.

Halliday's term *celebrate* (1994b;1996;1997) puts a positive spin on the evaluation of language. By allowing ourselves to evaluate, taking advantage of the resources language offers for doing this, we might move on to *valuing* language, not for what lies 'behind it, or 'beneath its surface', but *for itself*: language brought back into the spotlight and celebrated. Gregory (1988b:233) reminds us of Hjelmslev's goal for linguistics: *humanitas et universitatis*, 'humanity and wholeness'. The most important task for linguistics today is restoring this wholeness and revaluing language.

Appendix 1 **Regulative introduction to an instructional text** (Section 3.3.2)

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR: A FIRST STEP INTO THE THEORY

Christian Matthiessen & M. A. K. Halliday iii/97

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1. Into systemic-functional theory of grammar

1.1 General: [lexico]grammar & the study of grammar ('grammatics')

§1 This is an introductory account of a particular theory of grammar, namely systemic-functional theory. Grammar is one of the subsystems of a language; more specifically, it is the system of wordings of a language. It is a phenomenon that can be studied, just like light, physical motion, the human body, and decision-making processes in bureaucracies; and just as in the case of these and other phenomena under study, we need theory in order to interpret it. So for instance, the physical phenomenon of the atom has been interpreted theoretically in terms of Democritus' theory, Rutherford's theory, Bohr's theory, and so on. We distinguish between the phenomenon itself (the atom) and various theoretical models of it. What kind of thing the atom is thought to be will of course vary considerably as we move from one theory to another. Democritus' atom was very different from Bohr's atom, in that it was indivisible, not a configuration of subatomic particles; that is, Democritus' theory allowed us to see much less of the atom than Bohr's theory does. A well-known example of the way theory determines how we interpret phenomena is light. Light can be interpreted either as particle or as wave; there are two alternative theories. In this case, the alternatives turn out to be complementary, in the sense that each reveals something about light that we need to account for. This situation is quite typical in science: we need complementary theoretical perspectives to account for the rich diversity of properties we uncover in the phenomena being studied.

§2 Grammar as a phenomenon of study is thus interpreted according to different theories. So as to maintain the distinction between grammar and theories of grammar, we shall call theory of grammar **grammatics**. The distinction is analogous to that between language and linguistics, or between society and sociology. The difficulty is that people often use the same term for both the phenomenon and its study: e.g. we speak of the "grammar of English" (the phenomenon) but also of "traditional grammar" (one theory of the phenomenon). We could clarify this situation if we called the second "traditional grammatics". Our concern here is thus with **systemic-functional grammatics**; and we shall illustrate how it can be used in the study of **grammar** with examples from the grammars of Chinese, English, and Japanese.

§3 Grammar (as a phenomenon) is part of language; it is the "system of wordings", as we put it above. But how it is conceptualized will depend on our grammatics. In the history of thinking about language in the West, there have been two somewhat different theoretical perspectives. Both have their origins in Ancient Greece; there have been many variations, but we can still trace these two strands of thinking today. In one, language is a set of rules - rules for specifying structures; so grammar is a set of rules for specifying grammatical structures, such as the construction of a transitive sentence with 'verb + object'. This perspective is that of logic and philosophy, e.g. in the foregrounding of the sentence as the basic unit of language, organized on a logical model into Subject + Predicate. Since the sentence is the basic unit, it is studied in isolation. In the other view, language is a resource - a resource for making meanings; so grammar is a resource for creating meaning by means of wording. This perspective is that of rhetoric and ethnography, e.g. in the foregrounding of text (discourse) as the basic unit of language, organized according to the rhetorical context. Since text is the basic unit, the sentence is studied in its discourse environment.

§4 The kind of grammatics that is usually presented in school is a diluted version of the 'grammar as rule' type of theory. It presents rules of grammar in terms of words in sentences, with words serving functions such as Subject, Predicate, Object, and Adverbial. As a theory, it falls far short of the demands that are now being made on grammatical theories. On the one hand, it takes over too much from the European languages it was first applied to, starting with Greek and Latin; hence it is of limited value in interpreting the grammars of non-European languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese or the languages of other regions and continents. On the other hand, it builds in too little of the overall grammatical system of language. It allows us to see only a small fragment of grammar and does not provide us with a way of interpreting the overall organization of the grammar of a language as a system of information. At this stage in history we need a richer theory of grammar to meet the challenges of the age of information - e.g. in education (how to organize and give access to knowledge) and in computation (how to achieve the automatic processing of text). We are also in a position to learn more about grammar thanks to technical innovations: the tape recorder allows us to store and examine spoken language, and the computer allows us to manipulate vast amounts of text (spoken or written) for the purpose of grammatical study.

§5 Systemic-functional theory is one response to these demands. The theory was first developed in work on the grammar of Chinese; and it has been used in educational and computational contexts from an early stage. Unlike the theory of grammar that is still the received tradition in school, systemic-functional grammatics takes the resource perspective rather than the rule perspective; and it is designed to display the overall system of grammar rather than only fragments. We hope to bring this out in the discussion which follows.

1.2 Grammar as resource; systems & their realization in structure

We use language to interact with one another - to construct and maintain our interpersonal relations and the social order that lies behind them; and in doing so we interpret and represent the world for one another and for ourselves. Language is a natural part of the process of living; it is also used to 'store' the experience built up in the course of that process, both personal and collective. It is (among other things) a tool for representing knowledge - or, to look at this in terms of language itself, for constructing meaning.

Grammar is 'part of' this resource. But the relation of grammar to other 'parts' of the linguistic system is not a part to whole relation; rather, it is a symbolic one. Grammar is a resource for creating meaning in the form of wordings. Let us illustrate this point by reference to one broad area of semantics and grammar - an area that we shall characterize as interpersonal: this is one of three such general areas, the other two being ideational and textual.

In interacting with one another, we enter into a range of interpersonal relationships, choosing among semantic strategies such as cajoling, persuading, enticing, requesting, ordering, suggesting, asserting, insisting, doubting, and so on. The grammar provides us with the basic resource for expressing these speech functions, in the form of a highly generalized set of clause systems referred to as MOOD. This is the grammar as system - its paradigmatic organization.

A system, in this technical sense, is a point of choice. In the grammars of Chinese, English, and Japanese, the most general choice in mood is that between 'indicative' and 'imperative' clauses. These two are the options or terms in the system. The following examples illustrate the contrast between 'indicative' and 'imperative' in English ...

http://minerva.ling.mq.edu.au/Resources/VirtualLibrary/Publications/sfg_firststep/SFG%20intro%20New.html
(Last accessed 26 September 2002.)

Paragraph numbering added.

Permission to quote received from C.Matthiessen, July 2001.

Appendix 2 **An example of lay metalinguistic evaluation** (Sections 4.2 and 9.5)

Detective Inspector Morse is in hospital and is whiling away the time with various reading matter friends have supplied. The first book he picks up is *Scales of Injustice: A Comparative Study of Crime and its Punishment as Recorded in the County of Shropshire, 1842-1852*:

> Morse reached for the book from his locker, and skimmed through its first paragraph:
>
> > *Diversity rather than uniformity has almost invariably been seen to characterize the criminal behaviour-patterns of any technologically developing society. The attempt to resolve any conflicts and/or inconsistencies which may arise in the analysis and interpretation of such patterns (see Appendix 3, pp.492 ff.) is absolutely vital; and the inevitable re-interpretation of this perpetually variable data is the raw material for several recent studies into the causation of criminal behaviour. Yet conflicting strategic choices within heterogeneous areas, starkly differentiated creeds, greater knowledge of variable economic performances, as well as physical, physiological, or physiognomical peculiarities – all these facts (as we shall maintain) can suggest possible avenues never exhaustively explored by any previous student of criminal behaviour in nineteenth-century Britain.*
>
> "Christ!" muttered Morse (for the second time that evening). A few years ago he might possibly have considered persevering with such incomprehensible twaddle. But no longer. Stopping momentarily only to marvel at the idiocy of the publisher who had allowed such pompous polysyllaby ever to reach the compositor in the first place, he closed the stout work smartly – and resolved never to open it again.

The second book Morse picks up is *The Blue Ticket*, a pornographic paperback:

> Morse opened the book and skimmed (though a little more slowly than before) a second paragraph that evening. And he was immediately aware of a no-nonsense, clear-cut English style that was going to take the palm every time from the sprawling, spawning, sociological nonsense he had just encountered:
>
> > *She surfaced from the pool, and began to unbutton her clinging, sodden blouse. And as she did so, the young men all fell silent, urging her – praying her! – in some unheard but deafening chorus, to strip herself quickly and completely – their eyes now rivetted to the carmined tips of her slimly sinuous fingers as they slipped inside her blouse, and so slowly, so tantalizingly, flicked open a further button ...*
>
> "Christ!!' It was the third time that Morse had used the same word that evening, and the one that took the prize for blasphemous vehemence. ...
> ... As Morse nodded off once more, his brain was debating whether there was just the one word mis-spelled in the brief paragraph he had just read. He would look it up in Chambers when he got home.' (1993:207-8)

Further comment from Morse, when he does pick up the first book again, is:

> The author was still most horribly enmeshed in his barbed-wire style, still quite incapable of calling a spade anything else but a broad-bladed digging-tool, but the message was clear enough... (1993:265)

(*The Wench is Dead*, Colin Dexter, 1993)

Appendix 3 **Introductory texts recommend the separation of theory and practice** (4.3.1)

As a *user* of language, the linguist is bound by the conventions of his society just as everyone else is – and is allowed the same degrees and kinds of freedoms within those conventions. In using language, he may be a purist or not. But this has little if any relationship to his special concern, which is *analyzing* language.

As an analyst of language, the linguist is bound to observe and record "incorrect" forms as well as "correct" ones – if the language with which he is working makes such a distinction. A particular linguist may become interested in the whole phenomenon of correctness, and may study this in the same objective way in which he might examine Greek verbs, or French phonetics, or the child's acquisition of speech. If he does, he may soon discover that he needs help. The sociologist or anthropologist, for example, is better prepared than he to explain the special secondary values attached to certain patterns of behavior, be they ways of speaking or points of table etiquette. (Hockett 1958:5)

For a linguist, then, considering two alternative usages, one is not 'right' and the other 'wrong' – the two are merely different. He must describe both in his study, and leave others to decide which is socially more appropriate to which situations (and thus to be used in teaching, translating and so on, where prescriptions are essential). He is not advocating irresponsibility in language use; he is not saying to the teacher, 'It doesn't matter. Anything goes!' On the contrary, his whole point is that anything *doesn't* go – that different uses of language are geared very tightly to different occasions ...and that people ought to be aware of this correlation between language and social use, and build this awareness into their teaching, translating, or whatever. ... a great deal of time and money can be wasted in maintaining the naïve, egocentric purism which colours so many judgements about language. One of the main tasks of the linguist is to combat these attitudes. But this is sometimes difficult, for often it is not at all clear on what grounds these attitudes are based. (Crystal 1971:73)

[The linguist] concedes that it might be possible, in principle, to evaluate dialects and languages in terms of their relative flexibility, range of expression, precision and aesthetic potential; and he certainly accepts that the use that is made of their dialect or language by individual speakers and writers may be more or less effective. However, he cannot but report, on the basis of the more scientific work that has been done on language and languages in recent years, that most of the judgements that are made about such matters are extremely subjective. As an individual member of a language-community, the linguist will have his own prejudices, either personal to him or deriving from his social, cultural and geographical background; and he may be either conservative or progressive by temperament. His attitudes towards his own language will be no less subjective in this respect than those of the layman. He may find a particular accent or dialect pleasing or displeasing. He may even correct his own children's speech, if he finds them using a pronunciation, a word or grammatical construction that is frowned upon by purists. But, in doing so, if he is honest with himself, he will know that what he is correcting is not inherently incorrect, but only incorrect relative to some standard which, for reasons of social prestige or educational advantage, he wishes his children to adopt. (Lyons 1981:53)

Appendix 4 Linguists worry about the consequences of separating theory and practice (Section 9.2)

Although language is so intricately involved in human affairs, linguistic theorists have never (with the possible exception of Humboldt) had any great reputation for practical wisdom. Governments rarely consult them on matters of linguistic policy. Business executives do not solicit their views on the wording of contracts or advertisements. Scientists do not ask their advice about terminology. Parents do not call on their services for the naming of children. Nor is all this surprising, for the pronouncements of linguistic theorists make little if any contact with the communicational world of daily life. And although the learning of foreign languages and other branches of so-called "applied linguistics" flourish in universities, what they "apply" is the method of trial-and-error rather than any coherent set of principles drawn from general linguistic theory. (Roy Harris 1997:242)

In Australia this split personality disorder reveals itself most clearly in the marginalised communities of Australia, South-east Asia and the Pacific where the linguists trained by the A[ustralian] N[ational] U[niversity] and its satellites do fieldwork. Inevitably, these linguists become involved with the social and political aspirations of these communities, and are strongly motivated to help where they can. But for the most part they cannot help professionally, as linguists, because their linguistics does not lend itself to either reasoning about or acting on social affairs ... . So when they act, they act as amateurs, who with all the best will in the world are not in a strong position to intervene effectively unless they re-train themselves to do something useful on the go. (Martin 1997:434).

Theory and practice are often kept elaborately distinct in social life. The formulation of explicit theories is reserved for specialised "authorities" and "experts", such as priests of a church, counsellors of a state, or philosophers or scientists of an academy ... In exchange, ordinary citizens are encouraged to consider themselves purely "practical" people who do what they're supposed to and leave "complicated" matters of theory to the "experts". ...formalism has been sponsored most resolutely where linguists are housed in separate academic departments whose function is to train more linguists in formalist theories... – as contrasted with linguists housed in other departments and engaged in their practices, such as teaching "written composition" and "discourse analysis"... . Formalist departments constitute socially and discursively exclusive mini-societies like decorative academic commodities ... . Their discourse disconnects them from their social responsibilities.... In sum, formalist theoretical linguistics has been obstructed by its own non-dialectical relations between theory and practice from achieving any truly dialectical connection to applied linguistics. Of course, theoretical linguists could protest that their work was never designed for application. But ... linguistic theories unsuitable for application are also unsound on theoretical grounds insofar as they lack a productive dialectic between the construction of theory and the practices of investigation. (de Beaugrande 1997:101-126)

Appendix 5 An analysis of disguised evaluation and shifting perspectives in Pinker (1994) (Section 9.5)

Pronouncements on matters where the linguist's view of language has consequences for education need to be worded unambiguously and in challengeable form. A one-sentence example, similar in its ambiguity to the one from Labov (1969) that was analysed in Chapter Four, will suffice to illustrate my concern. The example I have chosen is Pinker's statement that

> The complexity of language, from the scientist's point of view, is part of our biological birthright; it is not something that parents teach their children or something that must be elaborated in school – (1994:19).

Two possible interpretations of this statement are:

(i) 'because children develop language naturally, or instinctively, parents and schoolteachers do not need to do anything to help them learn it',

or, unexceptionably,

(ii) 'the scientist's concern is with what is going on in the brain when we produce language, and not with the ways children learn language from their parents and in school (i.e. those are someone else's department)'.

The ambiguity arises because the central proposition of the sentence, instead of being realized congruently by a clause, is downranked to a prepositional phrase: *from the scientist's point of view*. The central proposition does not seem to be that *the complexity of language is biological and is not something parents or schools teach children* but that *the scientist views it thus*. If we expand the prepositional phrase into a full clause with a mental Process then we have something like *The scientist <u>sees</u> the complexity of language <u>as</u> part of our biological birthright; he or she does not <u>see</u> it <u>as</u> something that parents teach their children or something that must be elaborated in school*, or perhaps *The scientist <u>believes</u> the complexity of language <u>to be</u>* .... It is, however, also possible to interpret *point of view* as the nominalized form of a behavioural Process, which would expand to *When the scientist <u>looks at</u> language, he or she is <u>looking at</u> the biological element of the process (the complex operations that are assumed to be going on in the brain when we produce language) and not <u>[looking] at</u> the social process by which children learn language from their parents and are taught its refinements in school.* Such expansions produce the second, less controversial, interpretation: a simple statement that scientists (linguists) are a separate department from educationalists. Besides making the meaning ambiguous, Pinker's grammatical metaphor also makes the evaluation less noticeable and therefore less challengeable. Summed up, it works as follows:

clause	is realized as	prepositional phrase
mental/behavioural Process	"	nominalization
evaluation	"	proposition

The contestability of Pinker's statement is downplayed by his use of the identifying relational Process (*is*, *is not*), the favoured Process of science. If a proposition is expressed congruently as an evaluation it is more easily challengeable: it is easy to respond to the statement *the scientist*

sees language as ... with 'Well, *I* don't see it that way'. Further protection is provided by the use of the term *scientist* rather than *linguist*, and *complexity*, which is too non-specific to argue with.

Pinker's grammar in effect allows the reader to decide what he means.[1] The second, weaker, interpretation works to sow a little doubt in the reader's mind and deflect protest: Pinker *could* be saying nothing more than that language education is not the linguist's business. And indeed, in a later section of the book he does say just that, as a sop to those who might worry about the implications for clear expression, mastery of written genres, etc. (This is discussed below).

But at this point in the text his statement is plainly intended to be interpreted the first way, and the whole of his book, with its animadversions on people who worry about language ('The Language Mavens' 1994:370-403) and purportedly scientific material ('Language Organs and Grammar Genes' 1994:297-331), supports the first interpretation. Indeed, the immediate co-text suggests a contempt for the idea that language can be taught. The sentence continues: – *as Oscar Wilde said, "Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught*" (1994:19).

Nominalization and identifying relational processes are the backbone of the language of science (Halliday and Martin 1993; Halliday and Matthiessen 1999) and the effect of this language is to make the uninitiated reader lose confidence in his/her right to challenge the author's claims. The danger is of course that educationalists who respect the pronouncements of the linguist as scientist may take them as a guiding principle, with deleterious effects on language education. Linguists are inclined to dismiss such worries as a foolish misreading: 'The descriptive point of view is sometimes misinterpreted as advocating "linguistic freedom"' (Akmajian et al. 1995:217), but a writer such as Pinker cannot disclaim responsibility for such 'misinterpretation' when his own language clearly fosters it. Should the layperson become aware of the extent to which the scientificness of linguists' claims is a rhetorical construct, linguists would have to worry about losing their credibility with the public.

In apparent contradiction of the statement analysed above,[2] Pinker in a later chapter admits the importance of learning to write and explains that: 'Expository writing requires language to express far more complex trains of thought than it was biologically designed to do'. He admits that writing is 'a difficult craft that must be mastered'. It would then be natural to ask what the descriptive linguist can contribute to helping students to master this craft, as he or she of all people should be trained to describe the features of the written variety. However, mindful no doubt that this is not the linguistic scientist's business – he or she does not prescribe – Pinker confines himself to pointing out the availability of the 'excellent manuals of composition that discuss these and other skills' (1994:401). One of the two he recommends is Strunk and White's

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1

This is once again the principle of the *enthymeme*, referred to in a footnote in 4.1: trusting the well-disposed reader to fill in a step in the argument that is not directly stated.

2

It is difficult to be sure whether it is a contradiction, because in the earlier chapter (1994:15-24) Pinker talks about 'language' and does not differentiate between spoken and written modes.

The Elements of Style.[3] As this work does not appear in his list of references, the reader might not be aware that it has been used by students, first in the original form and later in the revised version, since 1918. It hardly needs the linguist to offer this advice.

The advice is at any rate strangely at odds with the rest of the chapter on 'language mavens', which expresses considerable hostility towards people who worry about language, and belies the admiration he professes for Strunk and White. No doubt a distinction is implied between legitimate and illegitimate worries; as he observes: 'What is most relevant to my point is how removed their practical advice is from the trivia of split infinitives and slang' (1994:401). He seems not to have paid very close attention to the book he recommends: Strunk and White did not in fact consider the split infinitive too trivial to mention. In this little 70-page book they discuss it twice:

> There is a precedent from the fourteenth century downward for interposing an adverb between *to* and the infinitive it governs, but the construction is for the most part avoided by the careful writer. [They prefer, for example, 'to inquire diligently' to 'to diligently inquire'.] (1962:46)
>
> The split infinitive is another trick of rhetoric in which the ear must be quicker than the handbook. Some infinitives seem to improve on being split, just as a stick of round stovewood does. "I cannot bring myself to really like the fellow". The sentence is relaxed, the meaning is clear, the violation is harmless, and scarcely perceptible. Put the other way, the sentence becomes stiff, needlessly formal. A matter of ear. (1962:64)

Nor would they have approved of Pinker's light-hearted dismissal of the correct use of *disinterested*. They devote a whole chapter to 'words and expressions commonly misused' (1962:33-51), among them *disinterested* – 'Avoid in the sense of uninterested. Today chiefly used to mean impartial' – and observe that 'If every word or device that achieved currency were immediately authenticated, simply on the grounds of popularity, the language would be as chaotic as a ball game with no foul lines' (1962:36;42).[4]

It is difficult to understand how Pinker can endorse a book which on its very first page directly contradicts the whole anti-prescriptive approach of his chapter on the 'language mavens': 'Professor Strunk was a positive man. His book contained rules of grammar phrased as direct orders' (1962:v). Pinker is recommending a book that insists on points of correctness he has just spent thirty pages ridiculing. An observant reader might be forgiven for concluding, among other things, that linguists should not be trusted with educational matters.

3

The other is 'Williams's *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*', but as I am unacquainted with it and it is not listed in Pinker's References I cannot comment on it.

4

My concerns about Pinker's book relate to his ill-conceived position on matters of language and value, but the inattention to accuracy is worrying in itself. Sampson also points out factual errors in Pinker's book, in particular in his accounts of a family of 'language mutants' and the acquisition of language by a deaf subject, Chelsea (Sampson1999:88-96).

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