

The Other Within

Volume II: Aspects of Language and Culture

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Selected Papers from the
Third International Conference of the
Hellenic Association for the Study of English



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Introduction*

Eliza Koutoupi-Kitis

This volume is the second of two volumes containing the essays presented at the Third International Conference of the Hellenic Association for the Study of English (HASE) held at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki in May 1998. Volume I contains all the literary essays, and represents the main orientation of the conference, while this volume contains the linguistics papers.

The general title of the two volumes, *The Other Within*, which was the title of the conference, undoubtedly reflects a pervasive trend in recent literary theory (see the introduction to volume I); one might wonder, however, what its relevance might be in the field of linguistics. In what follows, therefore, I will try to demonstrate the relevance of this general title as a perspective, not only in current trends in linguistics, but also in epochs of orthodoxy and pure scientificity in the study of language.

Put rather crudely, there are two basic ways of analyzing language. One way is to view language as an externalized artifact used by the human being that can be studied in abstraction from other domains of knowledge and in isolation from the human being. Another way is to study it as a body of knowledge within the minds or brains of its users (cf. Jackendoff, 1997). This latter view places the study of language within psychology and other fields. Schematizing in a rather relentless way the whole landscape of the study of language, we can assume that in the philosophy of language of primarily the first half of the 20th century, as well as in linguistics of a structuralist bias, it is the former method of analysis that can be regarded as dominant, while more recent trends in linguistics have adopted a perspective more congenial to the latter view. But firstly, we will turn to the latter view.

Within this latter tradition in the field of linguistics nowadays, there is a widespread assumption that our thoughts and ideas reflecting meaning cannot be literal. The emphasis is on the way the human mind grasps the relationship between language and the world. In accounting for this relation, linguists had to trace the connection between linguistic structures and more general cognitive structures. Understanding language, in this view, is often dependent on mappings of domains: mapping rather abstract structures or domains onto more concrete ones in order to "domesticate" or "tame" meaning. According to Fauconnier (1997),

* Many thanks to Ruth Parkin-Gounelas for comments on this essay.

mappings between domains are at the heart of the unique human cognitive faculty of producing, transferring, and processing meaning (1).

The hidden, backstage cognition that determines both our mental and social life, and negotiates both psychological and experiential aspects of our broader conduct, is a crucial determinant for meaning production and meaning interpretation in language. It is the internal “other” that is mostly concealed from public manifestations and yet is the cornerstone of meaning generation.

If language is not independent of the mind, but reflects our perceptual and conceptual comprehension and accommodation of our experience, then figuration (metaphor, metonymy and, broadly speaking, all tropes) is not just a matter that concerns language only, but can also be regarded as the foundation of thought, reason and imagination (Gibbs, 1994). Although figuration in language is dominant, it is, nevertheless, so deeply entrenched and encrypted in its semantic structure that it has required perseverance and sustained efforts on the part of scholars to bring this underlying figural structure to the fore in at least some aspects of language use (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). An underlying figural structure, or, more generally, perception and conception, then, is an inexhaustible source for sustaining and negotiating meaning; figuration (or cognition, more generally) can be seen as an interior alteriority to language, since it is exterior to language viewed as an object, but also interior as it is an inextricable part of the human make-up and ultimately becomes amalgamated with language.

In yet another recent tradition, which can be grouped together with other views of language study as part of the study of human cognition, language is not focused upon as an object per se, but rather is studied in order to explore the structure of human cognition. If language is instantiated in the human brain, in scrutinizing linguistic configurations we also assume that we can study neurobiological configurations of a human brain. Linguistics, then, is connected not only with psychology, but also with neuroscience and biology. And computational models are being set up to simulate human computation and reasoning. Language, thus, can be regarded as the nexus of converging perspectives in a variety of disciplines: artificial intelligence, cognitive science, philosophy, neurobiology, but also psychology, sociology and behavioural sciences, more generally. All these domains of knowledge can either be departure points in our research or, indeed, within a linguistic paradigm, they are often drawn upon for informing and enriching our linguistic investigation. All these domains are then, in a way, exterior to language proper examined from the point of view of logocentricity and can be seen as alterior external forces shaping its manifestations into various configurations.

But if what is fundamental in human cognition that can be accessed via its linguistic manifestation has to be universal, too, in at least its most rudimentary structure, cognition is also partly sustained by social aspects of communication, since at least some aspects of cognition can be viewed as the inter-

nalization of social correlates governing interaction. On this view, social aspects and experience of life are brought onstage through the back door. Experience and social knowledge, then, are also sources sustaining language use, in general, and can even be conceptualized as constructed in rather discrete idealized cognitive models (Lakoff, 1987), or frames (Minsky, 1975), schemata (Rumelhart, 1975) and scripts (Schank and Abelson, 1977), or mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983) and mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, 1997).

Not only are social knowledge and beliefs structured in tight frames, but also ideologies *qua* mental representations as well, can be seen as structured in such cognitive models, for ideologies are tightly structured belief-systems. As van Dijk (1997) writes: “Ideologies are ... both social systems, while shared by groups, as well as *mental representations*” (28).

If all these domains feed into and sustain one another, then we can represent all these forces in a cyclic diagram, as in figure 1 below:

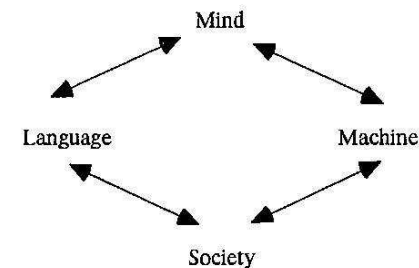


Figure 1.

If, however, we regard language as the focus of our investigation and all other domains of knowledge as having a certain impact on gaining a deeper understanding of it, then language is the nucleus of all these forces, as depicted in figure 2 below:

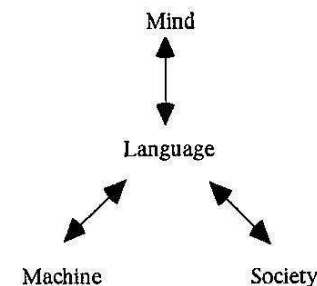


Figure 2.

In whatever configurations, these domains of knowledge are, indeed, alterior forces from without that have contributed to the abolition of the

linguistic closure assumed both by the earliest philosopher of language and the structuralist linguist. With language at the epicentre of all those forces, we look outwards to the mind and its cognitive structures to gain an understanding of linguistic structures, to computer models representing knowledge to inform and supplement our linguistic theories, or to social aspects of life and experience inscribed in various configurations in our linguistic data. Within this broader framework, the analysis of language has broken out of the complacent closure of the sign (structuralism) and the sentence (philosophy of language) and is brought into an arena of undermining and reinforcement; for signs and their meanings are undermined as well as reinforced by exterior forces that may know no limits. All these forces can be reflected as "The Other" in the title *The Other Within*.

As I have claimed, however, in the opening paragraphs of this introduction, I will demonstrate that this title has relevance even within a more conservative or orthodox framework of linguistic analysis: within a perspective that views language as a self-contained system in need of no exterior resources to determine its meaning and function. For there has never been a time when meaning in language, even within a narrow linguistics (where the concern would be with meaning within language rather than with ontology), could be defined as an entity of identity without reference to at least an internal but still alterior denominator. This alteriority is to be understood as trespassing the limits of the sign.

All aspects of structuralism of a Saussurean descent reject the "form/content" dichotomy, as well as the concept of the "full subject", promoting the notion of the structural configuration of the sign. So, the doctrine "No entity without identity" gives its place to the tenet "No entity outside its structural configuration". This is what Jonathan Culler (1976) writes about Saussurean linguistics:

If ... the most precise characteristic of every sign is that it differs from other signs, then every sign in some sense bears the traces of all the other signs; they are co-present with it as the entities which define it. This means that one should not think, as logocentrism would like to, of the presence in consciousness of a single autonomous signified. What is present is a network of differences. (111)

Moreover, the notion of binary contrast seems to be fundamental in human thinking; in the structuralist tradition the antipode of a sign is regarded as sustaining its interpretation. The identity of the sign itself is comprehended as self-divided into two aspects, that of the *signifier* and that of the *signified*. The full comprehension, or interpretation, of a sign consists not just in understanding its meaning abstracted from other signs in the language, but in associating it with, or rather, differentiating it from other signs or units in the linguistic system, which confer on it its full meaning. A *yes* is never fully

understood or appreciated, if it were not for the possibility of its substitution by a *no*, and *good* would have no meaningful existence on its own if it weren't for *bad*. And in a demasculated world, *female* would be devoid of meaning. Even Wittgenstein would concur; for he thinks that the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty. In this connection, the mind has been likened to a digital computer within the "symbolic paradigm" (Bechtel and Abrahamsen, 1992), that is, to a machine that functions on the basis of the presence or absence of one value, the assignment of 0s and 1s and of state transitions between them (Searle, 1992; cf. Harnish, 2002 for discussion). All this amounts to saying that we comprehend the world in opposing categories, by enforcing dichotomies, and the use of members of one category is always haunted by the absence of their counterparts.

Language is not just ink on paper or waves in the air; language is comprised of signs that carry with them an exteriority, an otherness, a Derridaean "trace", which is ubiquitous as the sign's ethereal non-materiality that will intrude into its next material occurrence. But even within a structuralist perspective, the sign has no identity of its own but rather acquires it in terms of differentials from other signs of the same order. The sign is not an autonomous, self-sustained and self-contained, individuated entity in need of no exterior maturation. The structuralist and post-structuralist sign is in a state of constant contention by other homologic signs. But it also contends a space in thought, which for Saussure is more like a cloud or a gas that knows no boundaries, than like a field with determinate boundaries (Holdcroft, 1991: 117). Meaning, therefore, is derived both from within but also from without, its punctuation being dependent on alteriority and differentiability.

At about the same time and within a totally distinct tradition, that of linguistic philosophy, even though the philosopher's concern was with ontology rather than language, Wittgenstein (the earlier) proclaims that an object (or simple) has no meaning outside its configuration with other objects: "The world is the totality of facts, not of things" (Wittgenstein, 1921: 1.1). Wittgenstein does not claim that we can isolate simples or have any empirical knowledge or understanding of them outside their occurrence in a complex. So, in a way, interpretation of a sign or knowledge of a simple derives within the complex in which it occurs. Meaning is derived within the nexus of a proposition and signs can have no sense of their own. Names, for Wittgenstein, are only points, but propositions are like arrows, they have sense (3.144). "Only facts can express a sense, a set of names cannot" (Wittgenstein, 1921: 3.142). We can conclude, then, that even within the philosophical tradition knowledge and interpretation of a simple or a name was barred outside its contracting relations in a complex; reliance, therefore, on the interrelationships with other simples can be regarded as an internal alterior denominator for knowledge and meaning derivation.

In short, even within a tradition of rather stiff scientificity¹ in which language is regarded either as reducible to a mathematical calculus reflecting its true logical structure, or within a tradition of linguistic orthodoxy or logo-

centrism, in which we postulate “unafflicted” internal language systems and language is viewed and analyzed as a self-contained system, it is still true that meaning derivation or meaning interpretation always has recourse to an alterity, be it intralinguistic or extralinguistic. As Johnson (1988) writes:

[T]he logic of the trace is ubiquitous. Just as the present is inhabited by the traces of the past and the future, so, as George Steiner has it, even “the master executant or critic can say *Je est un autre* [I is an other]”.² There is always an otherness, a lag, a deferral, a hysteresis; only a trace (a data-structure, a program) remains: nothing is what or when one thinks it is. Even my own words are not mine. They are (must be) alien to themselves, haunted by the events that produced them, prior usage displacements, concealments, so that between usages, between the writer and the reader, the translation betrays. (4)

As Lacan would put it, the discourse of oneself is always haunted by the discourse of the Other, even if at the subconscious level of *langue*. For *langue* is, indeed, an-Other system with which the self continuously grapples, one which the self longs to tame if not conquer but never will, a system “defamiliar”, if not inimical to the self.

The papers in this volume draw on a variety of exterior factors shaping linguistic configurations or informing their methodology. In Guy Cook’s paper, titled “Less Work and More Play: Towards a Ludicrous Linguistics”, marginalized aspects of social behaviour – language play – that were traditionally ousted from linguistic analysis come on stage under scrutiny. Cook focuses on the factor “play” as an alterior force shaping linguistic performance, and claims that what used to be considered as another facet of social life is actually fused in our linguistic performance giving rise to a new paradigm. He suggests that a reappraisal of the playful use of language, formerly regarded as a merely entertaining aspect of language use, can have a great impact on linguistics. One of his purposes is to suggest that, at least where language is concerned, these boundaries are fuzzier than usually supposed. As he puts it “[c]lear boundaries have been assumed between meaning and form, reality and artifice, authority and freedom, work and play – where in fact no clear boundaries exist”.

Bessie Dendrinou considers the hegemonic impact on language use of factors such as wealth and political power in the context of the European Union. She reviews basic discursive practices of linguistics, of language education and curriculum theory from a critical perspective, and shows that all of them have been based on what Derrida has called an “ethics of sameness”. Dendrinou puts forward the view that they are all based on a “philosophy of the same”, which entails “fear of the Other”.

Elizabeth Mela-Athanasopoulou demonstrates how gender can affect morphological choices, while Sevasti Kessapidou and Marianthi Makri-Tsilii-

pakou, in their paper titled “Gender and Corporate Discourse: In Their Masters’ Voice”, consider to what extent gender can affect the linguistic performance of men and women as members of a business institution. Anna Hatzitheodorou, in her paper on summary writing and the technique of teaching it, stresses the significance of the writer’s and the reader’s differential background schemata as an external to language-use factor that needs special heeding, while Vasiliki Lytra examines code-switching practices of bilingual primary school pupils learning a foreign language. She appeals to macro-level sociolinguistic parameters, such as language users’ preferences, and claims that a discourse-based analytical framework that takes into account both macro- and micro-linguistic dimensions of code-switching is the best interpretive framework to adopt.

Andreas Papapavlou’s paper also focuses on sociological factors influencing language speakers’ attitudes toward their language. He examines bidialectism and ethnic identity as ideology formants and differential correlates between Cypriots’ attitudes and those of mainland Greeks toward a spelling reform. Eleni Vasiliadou takes a more applied stance in her article, focusing on problems related to inter-language; she examines the difficulties incurred for Greek learners of English by the light verbs “make”, “do” and their Modern Greek counterpart “*κάνω*”.

Leo Hickey’s paper on translation situates literary translation within a pragmatic framework, and demonstrates how pragmatic factors are decisive in meaning making and meaning interpretation; he claims that this dimension needs incorporating within literary translation. Based on examples from a recent English novel, he convincingly argues that the translator needs to achieve in the target text equivalence of perlocution, emotional reaction, recontextualization, and that a good grasp of how pragmatics relates to translation is indispensable for the competent translator.

Lastly, Eliza Kitis and Katifenia Zafiriadou, in a paper on the main functions of two connectives, draw on an external frame – dynamical systems – to inform their methodology. They correlate events in dynamical systems and speech events, as there is a direct relation between speech and reality, language and the universe, and they claim that, at a cognitive level, it is apt to have recourse to topological systems that would provide a metaphor to reflect core conceptual meaning of connectives in a differential way.

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NOTES

1. Let’s not forget that the first quarter of the 20th century was an era of rigorous scientific advancement in both mathematics and physics.
2. Steiner (1975: 26).

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