The SOCIAL
and PSYCHOLOGICAL
CONTEXTS of LANGUAGE

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Contents

Introduction

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The various essays that comprise this volume are an outgrowth of an Interdisciplinary Conference on Linguistics organized by Robert St. Clair. The rationale for the conference was to provide a forum in which scholars from a wide range of language-related sciences could openly speculate about the intellectual frontiers of their disciplines, impart their insights regarding language to others, compare experimental data, investigate methodological differences, and attempt to develop a nascent synthesis about the interdisciplinary nature of language from a metatheoretical level.

The conference, and consequently the structure of this volume, was predicated on several assumptions about how interaction develops across autonomous disciplines. The first assumption is that academic disciplines emerge through a dialectual process that results in the development of a scientific paradigm (Kuhn, 1970). The implications of this model for linguistic historiography and for interdisciplinary research, in particular, are numerous and merit recapitulation. According to this framework, science is not to be equated with the mere accretion of data and laws. Scientists do not add new theories or discoveries to their existing repertoire of accomplishments. What normally occurs in the history of science, Kuhn argues, is a change of intellectual commitments to a new theoretical perspective: that is, scientists participate in theoretical revolutions. This transition from the old model to a new one is initiated, Kuhn notes, with normal science—that is, a state of affairs within a scientific community in which nearly all the members share the same theoretical persuasions and dedicate themselves to the same research interests. During normal science, it should be noted, anomalies in theory and application are considered to be exceptions and are either patently dismissed

or overtly suppressed as being of no interest. Though working within the paradigm of normal science, however, some scholars continue to report glaring discrepancies in their research. They find it disturbing that the results of their experiments are not concomitant with their theories and that some of their underlying postulates are threatened. As these anomalies continue to mount, there is a feeling of anxiety within the scientific community that eventually lead to *anomie* and precipitates a crisis. At this time, theories proliferate as new solutions are sought to alleviate or resolve acute problems within the fragmented paradigm of normal science. When the paradigm or model ceases to pervade the community and there is an absence of shared values, the result is one of eclecticism. As these theories struggle for supremacy, one theory will emerge as the dominant problem solver. When this occurs, a new paradigm of shared values will develop around the revolutionary theory. This new theory is considered revolutionary from the point of view of the normal scientist, because it involves a realignment of research interests, a different interpretation of the data, and a new framework of activities.

The concept of scientific paradigms holds many interesting implications for interdisciplinary research as espoused in this volume. First, it appears that only those disciplines that are in a period of crisis are amenable to productive interdisciplinary research. This is because scholars who are working within the transition from normal to revolutionary science have a predilection for new horizons and a quest for new insights. This attitude of intellectual altrisum, however, is not a random affair. It is directed rather specifically by the kinds of acute problems they are facing in their own disciplines. Nevertheless, the normal and revolutionary science paradigms both deter rather than enhance communication across disciplines. The former hinders interaction because it consistently considers innovations in theory as a threat to reality maintenance; and the latter is not conducive to interdisciplinary research because it is actively involved in the ritual of paradigm confirmation, where the major emphasis is one of proselytizing the uninitiated.

Second, Kuhn's philosophy of science clearly demonstrates how data are not autonomous but intrinsically related to theory. What are data to the advocates of one paradigm, for example, may remain outside or beyond the research interests of another theoretical model. Under these circumstances, then, what is recognized and actively pursued as data from the point of view of one discipline may be clearly marked as merely uninteresting exceptions or even nondata within the framework of another discipline.

The third implication from Kuhn's spiral theory of scientific interaction involves the feasibility of task-force management. The interdisciplinary approach that attempts to integrate disparate research traditions into a coherent paradigm must be contrasted with multidisciplinary research where a conglomeration of disciplines are united under the rubric of an area studies

program or emergency problem-solving process that is characteristically associated with task-force management. This distinction is important because many organizational conflicts and intellectual misunderstandings can be averted if the participants in such groups are aware of the nature of their paradigm conflict. Unfortunately, most governmental and civic approaches to task-force management are a random affair in which built-in conflicts are created and in which the resolution of problems is not based on rational means but results from compromises in power and status. What is needed under these circumstances is a more integrated scientific community (Hagstrom, 1965) that is theoretically oriented toward a negotiated synthesis characteristic of revolutionary science. The various chapters of this volume have been organized with such a synthesis in mind.

The final implication of this model deals with the importance of journals and other research media. As Kuhn (1970) notes, journals reflect the various stages of transition from normal science to revolutionary paradigms in the kinds of articles they accept, reject, or encourage. During a period of normal science, for example, it is not unusual to find only traditional and nonthreatening research in the major scientific journals. Scientists who continuously point out anomalies and other paradigm inconsistencies find it difficult to make their findings known through the regular official journals and books. When a period of crisis arises and there is a lack of consensus within a community, the editorial policy of journals becomes more lenient and encourages articles and books dealing with innovations and problem solving. Finally, when the period of revolutionary science appears, the books and articles reflect an intellectual arrogance in which the superiority of the new model is reiterated in almost ritualistic fashion (St. Clair, 1975b). What is important about this last implication is that it provides a more rational approach toward the analysis of publications across disciplines. One must be cognizant of whether the evidence cited from another discipline is obsolete, theoretically revolutionary, or paradoxical. The chapters of this book were carefully chosen to represent the normal science approach with regard to the methodology of social psychology, but the content of all these articles is aimed at the creation of a new paradigm of sociolinguistics.

Another factor that shaped the interaction among those at the interdisciplinary conference and that is partially resolved in this volume is the fact that the administrative structures of departments are not only arbitrary, they are largely accidental (Campbell, 1969). As a matter of fact, departments are also ethnocentric. In order to function as decision-making units, they must arrive at a consensus of priorities and preferences. This consensus provides numerous problems of compatibility for those specialities that are peripheral to the historical evolution of the tradition. As a case in point, in many departments of linguistics, the study of sociolinguistics, psycho-linguistics, ethnolinguistics, ethnomethodology, bilingualism, language

planning, and language education is considered to be of minor interest, and all these areas are relegated to a lower status or priority. Those who claim these areas as their specialities are treated with suspicion, and their accomplishments are given marginal evaluation. However, these peripheral areas are eventually taken into the mainstream of the discipline. An example of this can be found in the field of social psychology when it began as a specialty within the dominant behavioral tradition of psychology and was not considered to be an inherent part of that discipline (Allport, 1968); a similar case can be made for the rise and development of symbolic interactionism within social psychology (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

The implications of marginality that have been discussed work against interdisciplinary studies within national organizations (Hagstrom, 1965; Kuhn, 1970) and within disciplines on the departmental level (Campbell, 1969). However, another factor that structures and channels communication across disciplines is accessibility and compatibility of research among the language-related sciences. In any academic society, there are a wide range of different schools of thought that normally operate as disparate paradigms. This incompatibility is evidenced in linguistics, for example, where the school of structuralism associated with Bloomfield (1933) is based on the postulates of logical positivism (Weinberg, 1960) and is antithetical, in most respects, to other schools of linguistics, which favor a more rationalistic (Chomsky, 1968) or phenomenological approach (Cicourel, 1974; Hymes, 1972b). This disparity of thought can also be found within the domain of psychology. There are those who advocate some form of neo-behaviorism (Skinner, 1957) and whose theoretical persuasions are diametrically opposed by more rationalistic (Neisser, 1967) or phenomenological thinking (Blumer, 1969). What this means, in essence, is that if interdisciplinary communication is to take place, it can immediately result in ideological conflict or a stalemate, because almost none of the perspectives are shared. Hence, the most productive research develops from those subsections of linguistics, sociology, and psychology where a community of interests develop around a metaparadigm. The conference was designed with an awareness of this organizational problem, and as a consequence, those who have contributed to this volume tend to share the more rationalistic, or phenomenological, or both, perspectives on the language sciences. This attempt to match disciplines in terms of ideological compatibility is usually overlooked in books that purport to cross the boundaries of traditional research (St. Clair, 1975b). The concept, it should be noted, is not new. It can be found in numerous fields. In philosophy, for example, it has been promulgated by Wittgenstein (1953) in the form of the family resemblance model. He argued rather cogently that the Aristotelian form of classification produced a strict dichotomy between those members of a class that shared some unique feature and those that were more or less arbitrarily enumerated and classified but that lacked a defining feature.

In the study of langauge games, it occurred to him that when lexical items are classified or used in everyday speech, they do not pattern themselves after the classificatory schemes of Aristotle. As a result of this state of dissonance, he arrived at a new means of categorization—namely, the family resemblance model. He argued that when one looks at the portrait of members of a family, there is no unique feature that can be found in their physical appearances that clearly defines them as a family. The alternative of merely classifying them as a unit is also inadequate and somewhat arbitrary. However, upon closer examination, it becomes obvious that there are resemblances that are shared by the members of the family. Some may have the same color eyes, others may share the same jaw structure, and still others may have a certain characteristic facial bone structure. Although this method of classification may not fully satisfy some methodologists, it does represent an ethnomethodological approach in which common strategies of categorization are employed. Nevertheless, the family resemblance model has emerged from time to time under different nomenclatures. In linguistics, for example, it can be found in the notion of a speech chain (Quackenbush, 1970; St. Clair, 1974a, 1974b); and as a matter of fact, this notion has developed in opposition to the inadequacy of the Aristotelian approach to dialectology. At one time, it was believed that the dialects of a language could be readily classified by means of mutual communication. However, research over the last half century demonstrates that there are dialects in which no communication takes place and others in which the communication is either unidirectional or latent (St. Clair, 1974b). When this dialectal system was investigated from the point of view of the family resemblance model, it became obvious that noncommunication occurred between those dialects that were located and separated at the extreme ends of the spectrum. Those that were spatially contiguous shared mutual communication; and those that were between these patterns of interaction produced either latent or unidirectional communication (St. Clair, 1974a). It is this same framework that makes interdisciplinary research possible. There are disciplines that are, for all practical purposes, separated ideologically at the extremes of a speech chain. It is not that these disciplines have nothing to offer for the study of language but only that their perspectives about what constitutes an issue and what can be considered as evidence are dramatically and substantially different. By way of contrast, there are disciplines among the language sciences in which an active communicative network has been established. The issues investigated tend to be rather similar, and their social historical approaches usually overlap. Somewhere in between these two types of interaction, there are forms of interdisciplinary activity in which one party may comprehend the other but not vice versa (unidirectional communication), or in which there is initially a lack of understanding followed by eventual mutual communication (latent communication). It is important to note that the papers in this volume

have been structured along a communication chain. The point of contact can be found in the sociolinguistic notion of the "context of the situation." This emphasis on the kinds of linguistic codes that appear in different settings is embellished by further defining those contexts in social and psychological terms. Although the methodologies may differ and the research paradigms may vary, a common perspective is shared.

The catalyst for the present volume was Howard Giles, a social psychologist from the University of Bristol. He was not only instrumental in the organization and execution of a highly successful and informative symposium on the social psychology of language but has also been one of the major sources of interdisciplinary research resulting from the conference. The chapters of this book, for example, were not all presented during the interdisciplinary conference. The original papers have already been revised, expanded, and published (Giles & St. Clair, in press). These papers have developed as a result of the interdisciplinary sharing of ideas and represent a second level of interaction. As the new paradigm emerges and the research becomes even more sophisticated and concerted, other volumes will appear.

The first chapter, by St. Clair, attempts to define the limitations of the present paradigm of normal science in linguistics. It finds research in the social psychology of language to be one of the most promising areas of investigation, and considers this to be especially true of the field of symbolic interactionism.

In Chapter 2, Rudolf Kalin and Donald Rayko demonstrate the social significance of speech in the job interview. They present evidence that the ethnic accent of a job applicant can affect the decision of an employer regarding his or her placement. The low-status jobs were given to job applicants who spoke with a foreign accent. Their suitability for low-status jobs was rated very highly, and their suitability for high-status jobs was assessed negatively.

Another study of the social psychology of speech can be found in Chapter 3, by Guy Fielding and Chris Evered. They discuss the influence of a patient's speech during the diagnostic interview; they used regional rather than ethnic accents as the basis for their study of the judgmental process. They found that patients who spoke standard British English [i.e., Received Pronunciation (R.P.)] were diagnosed differently from those who spoke with a rural regional accent. The former were upgraded on perceived competence and diagnosed in psychosomatic terms, and the latter were downgraded as being more emotional and less sensible and were diagnosed in more physical than psychosomatic terms.

The fourth chapter, by Aron Siegman, follows the same line of research. Siegman investigates the study of interpersonal attraction and verbal behavior during the initial stages of an interview. He notes that according to some widely held assumptions in clinical circles, one is supposedly more open

to self-disclosure during an interview in which a feeling of warmth exists and that when resistance occurs, it is allegedly manifested in the occurrence of long silent pauses. Siegman has challenged these commonly held assumptions about interviewer warmth and self-disclosure in relationship to the temporal patterning of speech. He found that when the person conducting an interview is reserved or is of a higher status, significantly higher number of pauses in the speech of the other party will result. But, he adds, this is because the person being interviewed feels the need to be more careful about what is being said and will spend a great deal of cognitive concern on impression management. It is this fact that also explains, he notes, the same kind of pausal patterning among peer interactants and the like.

These studies by Kalin and Rayko (Chapter 2), Fielding and Evered (Chapter 3), and Siegman (Chapter 4) are more empirical in nature and expand on the insights provided by Giles and his colleagues on accented speech (Giles, 1970, 1971b, 1973b; Giles & Powesland, 1975). What is significant about these chapters is that they contribute substantially toward an understanding of language in its social and psychological contexts. Most sociolinguistic research, for example, could be greatly enhanced in explanatory power and in methodological principles by merely incorporating some of these insights into the research paradigm.

Chapter 5, by Walburga von Raffler-Engel, deals with a much overlooked aspect of human communication—namely, the structure of nonverbal conflicts across cultures. Her emphasis on a rational theory of kinesics based on meaning rather than on form merits serious consideration. Whereas the previous chapters dealt with the role that speech plays in the assessment of others, this chapter complements the research by demonstrating how nonverbal judgments are formed across cultures and in different social situations within the same culture. As in Siegman's Chapter 4, where self-monitoring was a crucial factor, von Raffler-Engel discusses how some kinetic cues are under more conscious control than others during an interaction. However, it is the unconscious element that is likely to create misunderstandings in the form of dissonance, mistaken attribution, and communication discomfort.

The complexities of acquiring a second language in a bilingual context is the central theme of Chapter 6, a follow-up study on the St. Lambert Experiment. In earlier research, it had been found that children who participated in early-immersion classes in French were able to achieve extraordinary progress with regard to language skills. They were able to read and comprehend in the various content areas in which French was the medium of instruction. What is significant about this longitudinal study is that it reassesses these same children at the secondary level and elevates their initial accomplishments after a gap of 5 years. The methodology for eliciting the information is discussed, and documentation is provided in the