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On the power of language and the language of power

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"On the Power of Language and The Language of Power"

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Introduction

I would like to introduce my subject this afternoon by offering the floor to two speakers for whom the English language means something different from what it means to many of us. One speaks English as a second language, and the other speaks Standard English as a second dialect. The first of these speakers is an Indian poet. She says:

> ... I am Indian, very brown, born in
> Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
> Two, dream in one. Don't write in
> English, they said, English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like? The language I speak
> Becomes mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
> Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.
> It is as human as I am human, don't
> You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
> Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
> Is to crows or roaring to the lions...
> (Kamala Das, quoted by Crystal, 1988:261)

The second speaker is a Black American woman, Calpurnia, in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She can speak Standard English, but sometimes she chooses not to, and she is being quizzed about this.

> " 'Cal', I asked, 'why do you talk nigger talk to the-to your folks when you know it's not right?'
> 'Well, in the first place I'm black-'
> 'That doesn't mean you hafta talk that way when you know better', said Jem.
> Calpurnia tilted her hat and scratched her head, then pressed her hat down carefully over her ears.
> 'It's right hard to say', she said. 'Suppose you and Scout talked coloured-folks' talk at home- it'd be out of place, wouldn't it? Now what if I talked white-folks' talk at church, and with my neighbours? They'd think I was putting' on airs to beat Moses'.
> 'But Cal, you know better', I said.
> 'It's not necessary to tell all you know. It's not ladylike- in the second place, folks don't like to have somebody around knowin' more than they do. It aggravates 'em. You're not gonna change any of them by talking' right, they've got to want to learn themselves, and when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language'."
> (Lee, 1963:129-130)

There are two aspects to the use of language that are clear to both these speakers: one is that we can and do control language; the other is that language, or society, through language, controls us. Language is, as the Indian poet is aware, something which becomes ours in a most intimate way - even when it's our second language - and which serves us to express our humanity: at the same time, it is something which constantly brings us face to face with the matters of identity and power relationships which are a part of living in society. So it is ours, yet, like Cal, we select from its resources at the behest of others, because we are female, or black, or a part of a group, or excluded from it.

My argument this afternoon, then, is, first, that language is an awesome resource for humankind, one which, like the best things in life, is free to all. However, like most human resources, it is controlled in a way which elevates some human beings over others, limits the life chances of some in relation to others, perpetuates false stereotypes and favours the acceptance of discriminatory treatment of some members of society as natural. Education, including higher education, can be a party to all this, but it can also stand against it.

The Power of Language

The Poet, Das, said of her acquired language, "It is as human as I am human". This is wherein lies the power of language. It has the power to express the gamut of human thought and emotion. Its system of options is powerful enough to accommodate to the almost unlimited and unpredictable demands which any of its users can make of it. Language makes finite for us the immeasurable domains of the self, others and the environment, so that we may have some control over them. The power of language is seen, in the widest sense, in the communicative competence with which it endows each one of us, and by which it unites us with every other human being. It is the task of the linguist to try to understand this astonishing resource.

How can we come to grips with it? One influential approach to language has emanated from the field of linguistic philosophy, and, in particular, the writings of J.L. Austin and J.R. Searle. This approach, which we call speech act theory, is appropriate for our consideration today, because it incorporates a concept of power, or "force", which can be associated in different ways with the use of language.

Speech act theory makes a major distinction between what we say with words (that is, locutionary force) and what we do, or seek to do, with words (that is, illocutionary force). A further, less developed, distinction identifies what effect we achieve, or seek to achieve, on a listener with what we say (perlocutionary force). It is not my intention here to develop or to employ speech act theory further, but I would like to use these three ideas of force as a basis on which we can consider the power of language.

First, there is the power of the linguistic system. Linguistics helps us to see how language is a multi-layered system. It can be segmented at one level into sounds, or letters on the page, and at successively higher levels, into words and morphemes, sentences and discourse units. Supposing we start at the bottom, and look at the sound, or phonological, units out of which the English language is composed. How many different words could we make with the phonological resources of English? It would take a linguist who is also a mathematician to work that out, and that I don't claim to be. However, William Moulton (1973:9) has worked out, on the basis of 40 phonemes, or distinctive sounds, in English, and words of anything up to 6 phonemes in length, we have the potential to make over four billion different words in English. In fact, estimates as to the actual number of words in English vary between half a million and over two million (Crystal, 1988:32) (The inexactness allows for the fact that there are different ways in which you can define a separate word). Now, supposing we have half a million words, will that provide us with a powerful enough resource for communication? I think it will. If you knew all the words in a medium-sized dictionary, you would know about 100,000. But do you? It is said that Shakespeare had one of the largest vocabularies of any English writer, and he used about 30,000 words (Crystal, 1988:44). And, of course, there isn't a one-to-one relationship between forms and meanings. Often our language economises on the use of different phonological forms, so that we use homophones like, for example, "hip". (Now, I wonder what that word brought to mind when I used it. Was it a part of the body, or was the fruit of a rose, or perhaps the thought of trendiness!) And, in English we are able, as it were, to recycle words. A past participle like, say, "broken", in "I have broken the window" may reappear as a deverbal adjective in "the broken window". Supposing we think we have isolated the referential or dictionary meaning of a word, we may be only scratching the surface of its meaning. The semanticist Geoffrey Leech (1981) has shown that, depending on how it is used, a word may take on 6 additional alternative meanings to that which it carries in its basic referential sense. The power of the system is staggering - and I have not considered the most productive part of the system: the syntax, which permits speakers of the language "to say and understand quite literally an unlimited number of sentences" (Moulton, 1973:5). This power is at the disposal of every normal human being. We know it without being taught it. We know it so well that, even when it is interfered with, as in the kind of distortions experimented with by Professor Stanley Unwin, we still understand it. Michael Stubbs illustrates and comments on Unwin's work as follows :

> The most importaload and fundermold principle to come out of Professor Unwin's work, is that all languishing have a very high redundaload faction, so that even though the world of mouth is twisty and false, with many a slip twixt club and limp, neverthelesson is that this does not needly preventilate us from grasping at a crow and following hard on the wheels of what someone is trying to [say]".
> (Stubbs, 1986:76)

The second aspect of the power of language is the power it gives us to make things happen. This is what has been called "illocutionary force". It is evidenced in such utterances as "I declare this conference open" and "I pronounce you man and wife", where the very fact of speaking the word accomplishes something non-verbal. The most interesting cases of illocutionary force are those which are not as obvious as this. The illocutionary force of the child's utterance "I'm hungry" is of course that of a request or demand, rather than, as its linguistic form would suggest, a statement. The shift from considering the linguistic form of utterances to considering their pragmatic force has enabled us to obtain a better idea of the dynamics underlying ordinary interactions. Take, for example, the interaction in Figure i, which is an everyday-type exchange between a teacher and her Year 6 class. We see the illocutionary force of the teacher's opening question when, in line 4, she follows it with "Come on". Clearly, there was an assumed interactional obligation on the part of the hearers to act in response. In other words, the one who asks a question is exercising, or laying claim to, power over the one who receives it. If we dwelt longer on this passage, with the help of the identification of the speech act functions which I've given at the side according to a system I've developed, we could see a number of other ways in which the teacher's superior power is exercised. She is selective in the way she responds to what the students say to her (lines 8,17,22,30). Stephen's contribution generates a sustained follow up, David's the bare minimum and the unnamed child, none at all. The students, for their part, exercise the power they can within the system, withholding responses which the teacher is dependent on (lines 7,31) and trying to usurp the place of the teacher's nominated respondent (line 29). Language, in interaction, can be a kind of verbal negotiation for the ascendancy.

Figure i

Extract from Oral English lesson with Year 6

1	Teacher:	What sort of situation could you have	TE1 Eliciting
2		where you were angry or someone	
3		was angry at you?	
4		Come on,	TN3 Coaxing
5		someone who hasn't had a turn.	TN2 Determining Priority
6		What about you, Lionel?	TN6 Nominating
7	Lionel:	(no response)	CR5 Declined Replying
8	Teacher:	Who can think of some time when	TE1 Eliciting
9		they've been really angry?	
10		I don't know what happened, *you* know.	TN3 Coaxing
11	David	(hand raised)	CB1 Solicited Bidding
12	Teacher:	David.	TN6 Nominating
13	David:	When somebody starts giving you cheek	CR1 Replying
14		and you really get angry and they	
15		start teasing you and then	
16		you bash 'em.	
17	Teacher:	Do you?	TA1 Acknowledging
18	Stephen:	(hand raised)	CB1 Solicited Bidding
19	Teacher:	Yes, Stephen.	TN6 Nominating
20	Stephen:	When you walk out at playtime	CR1 Replying
21		and you have to walk back.	
22	Teacher:	Do you feel angry, walking back?	TE7 Multiple Eliciting
23		Angry - what were you angry at?	
24	Stephen:	The class.	CR1 Replying
25	Teacher:	Can you be angry for very long?	TE1 Eliciting
26		I wonder if Stephen was still angry	TE1 Eliciting
27		when he got back to Port Hedland.	
28		Were you?	TN6 Nominating
29	Child:	I wouldn't. I wouldn't, Mrs B.	CR6 Unsolicited Replying
30	Teacher:	Or were you just (unclear)	TE1 Eliciting
31	Stephen:	(no response)	CR5 Declined Replying
32	Teacher:	All right, now look.	TD13 Marking Boundary
33		I'll just quickly tell you the idea.	T14 Commentating

Figure ii is a brief extract from a press conference held by the Hon John Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training, in which he wants to talk about the Language and Literacy Program which he has just announced, while the journalists want to talk about the leadership crisis in the Government. The journalists know that a question has the illocutionary force of requiring the receiver to respond on the subject it introduces. The Minister counters this first by a metalinguistic directive (lines 3-4, "we're talking about language and literacy") and then, when the journalists persist, by twice (lines 10 and 12) countering a question with another question - i.e. countering a bid for power over the interaction by an equivalent bid.

The same kind of force may be discerned in written communication. This has been well expressed by the French linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle in his book *The Violence of Language*, in which he says:

> "When we read the first sentence of a novel, we are addressed by a narrator who must establish his place, the place of the master of the game, and who must also ascribe a place to us, the place of the recipient of imparted knowledge, of the sharer in commonsense values and reasonable ideas, of the object of narrative manipulation. Our 'you' must answer the summons of the narrative 'I'."
> (Lecercle, 1990:249)

Figure ii

Extract from Department of Education Employment and Training Media Release, 2nd September 1991

1	J:	Mr Dawkins, when does the Prime Minister face his next test,
2		or has Caucus now got him under continuous assessment?
3	JD:	Well, Jim (Middleton), we're talking about language and
4		literacy, I don't think there are any other 'L' words that I
5		want to mention today.
6	J:	'L' for longevity?
7	J:	What do you think about Simon Crean succeeding Mr Hawke as
8		the next Prime Minister?
9	JD:	I've read about that, it's a very interesting proposition,
10		isn't it?
11	J:	Do you think Methuselah was an apt parallel?
12	JD:	Have we finished on the Language and Literacy Program?

There is more than this, though, to the power of language. Social psychologist David Hays has said "... nothing else on the face of the earth has the same effect as conversation between human beings" (Hays, 1973:206). Language in face-to-face interaction serves the individual as a means of arriving at self-knowledge, release of tension, achievement of inter-personal solidarity, as well as knowledge about other people and the world. In an interesting recent work, Sri Lankan American linguist R.S. Perinbanayagam has brought together earlier symbolic interactionist theory with recent theories of language and discourse, and presented a theory of the self as both signing and interpreting itself in relation to others through mutual semiosis.

> "The human being", he says, "is blessed, or cursed as the case may be, with language and uses it to occupy his or her relationships with others. The stories he or she tells others, he or she tells himself or herself and the stories he tells himself or herself only, constitute the sum and substance of a life".
> (Perinbanayagam, 1991:1)

Perinbanayagam, then, shares the view of many text linguists that human beings are themselves discursively constructed, as is the life that surrounds them. This, in a sense, is the ultimate statement of the power of language.

We said that the power of language is also seen in the capacity of the speaker to achieve an effect on the listener. This kind of power is exhibited perhaps preeminently in poetry, which, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "teaches the enormous force of a few words" (Korg, 1966:ii), but also in advertising, propaganda and the media. I shall not comment further on these substantial fields of inquiry, as time does not permit. We could, perhaps, note, though, how we find a recognition of the power of language to influence others in the number of attempts that are being made to change attitudes through changing language, either by providing alternatives for sexist or other biased linguistic forms or expressions, or by employing euphemisms. The use of euphemisms in medical contexts has recently been the subject of an exchange of letters in the West Australian, in which the users of the new language were called "pretentious" and those of the old were called "paternalistic". How readily we use language as a basis for judging character! Another case of euphemism coming to my attention was that of the student working part time in a hotel as a porter who told me, "They've changed my title to a 'guest relations aide', but my pay is still the same". More serious is the use of euphemism with respect to modern warfare and weaponry, where, for example, "demographic targeting" means "killing the civilian population", and an "enhanced radiation weapon" means a bomb which "destroys people, not property". Michael Montgomery, who has listed these and many other examples, describes them as having "the effect of anaesthetizing one to the full reality being referred to" (1986:179).

Summing up, then, what I have been trying to say about the power of language, I see it as exhibited in every human being, in the endowment they have received from earlier generations which enables them to control a system of extreme complexity for the expression of verbal and pragmatic meanings. This power is ours simply by virtue of our being human, and as such it unites us with all humankind. I wish this were the end of my story, but I am only half-way.

The Language of Power

The other side of the story is that this free human resource is everywhere being hijacked by those who would dominate others. It is a sad fact that, though we are all equal in our inheritance of communicative competence, some seem to be more equal than others. The poet Das said, "The language I speak becomes mine, mine alone", and I think every human being could identify with this. But, for many of us, what makes our language most our own gives it least currency in the wider world; that which binds us with our roots, which gives us our deepest sense of belonging, may be used by the world beyond as a sign of our not belonging.

There is something that goes far beyond language here. I could call it the garden wall principle. Years ago, when my wife and I were having our house built, we had to fit it onto a corner block, and we wanted to make the most use of the land for living area, so we chose a design which allowed the house to front onto one street and have a long, high garden wall down the other. The main rooms of the house were thus able to have doors opening onto a private courtyard. Shortly after we moved in, our neighbour from across the road asked me how we could have decided on a house design with such an uninteresting aspect. From where he was situated, all he could see was a high garden wall. What gave us a courtyard gave him a wall. What gave us a sense of belonging within the family gave him a sense of our not belonging within the neighbourhood. To the extent that you get one thing, you don't get the other. In language, as in everything else, that which carries the power of inclusion carries an equal power of exclusion. It is like the within skin/between skin distinction talked about in attribution theory, and it is reflected in almost every aspect of life: kin versus non-kin, in-group versus out-group, nationalism versus internationalism. Language is the garden wall which either keeps you in or keeps you out, depending on your perspective. And, of course, there is more power outside the wall closest to us than inside it, although the communication which is, humanly speaking, more basic, takes place within that wall. A part of every child's experience is to learn that what seemed normal at home makes him or her feel, as Das put it, "funny" when he or she ventures out. Einar Haugen has expressed it this way:

> "As children we have all felt the taunts that were directed at us when we deviated from the valid norms of speech. Children are cruel in applying laughter and ridicule to those who speak 'differently'. As they grow older, they become aware that linguistic deviation is an index to social distance".
> (1973:34-35)

Using language always involves choosing from a set of options, and the language of power is revealed within a society by those options which are recognized as valid as opposed to those that are not. I want to go on to consider three areas of selection: selection of variants, of varieties and of strategies.

Linguists call "variants" the alternatives between which we can select in the course of using language. For example, a speaker can say "man(y)ufacturing" or "manufacturing", "homosexual" or "gay", "could of" or "could have". The concept can also be extended to include paralinguistic and interactional behaviours. A classic sociolinguistic study (Brown and Gilman, 1972) looked at the variants available in many European languages as pronouns of address, such as the French more intimate "tu" and more polite "vous", both of which we would translate "you" in English. People of equal status normally mutually use either the intimate form or the polite form, but, the traditional pattern, where statuses are unequal (though this is in the process of change) is for the higher status person to address the lower status person with the intimate form but to receive back the polite form. In other words, there are two principles: one that the use of the same, and, in particular, the more informal, form, expresses the closeness or solidarity between the users, and the other, that the use of different forms expresses the social distance between people, and follows an established relationship pattern where one is inferior in status or power to the other.

There is a great deal of evidence now that power or status on the one hand and solidarity on the other are systematically contrasted in the ways in which variant forms are selected in language use. I would like to make four observations on this phenomenon.

First, we see in many studies that the linguistic selections reflect a social context in which the asymmetrical power relationships favour males over females, whites over blacks, teachers over pupils, parents over children, professionals over non-professionals and middle class people over working class people. (I should point out that most of the work I am referring to has been carried out in Western countries). As soon as two people in our society address one another, their language re-enacts, to some degree, their perceived relationships to the powers that be. This is not necessarily a sinister matter, in that there are good reasons why, for example, parents should be deemed to wield more power than children, or teachers than their pupils and it is to be expected that this will show in language. Moreover, in some contexts, there is a reasonable consensus that some people, like the "law men" in the traditional Aboriginal context, or the medical specialists in a hospital, should command a language to which others do not have access, and should be accorded appropriate respect. But sometimes a garden

wall may be used to conceal a fortress rather than a garden. Perinbanayagam argues that "the oppression of the larger society is manifest in small conversations" (1991:93), and there is evidence that some people linguistically put themselves down, or are put down, as a matter of course. Jenny Cheshire and Viv Edwards carried out some interesting sociolinguistic research among non-standard dialect speaking children in the U.K., in which the children's expertise on their own dialects and on their social evaluation was recognized. A representative comment they quote from one of the children surveyed was: "When I am talking to posh people, I feel terribly common" (Cheshire and Edwards, in Malcolm, 1991). Wetzel (1988) reports research which shows that in male-female conversations, it is more commonly the males who subject the females to interruptions, challenges, to direct declarations of fact and opinion, and ignoring of what is said back to them, and the women who ask more questions, work to maintain the conversation, make positive responses, silently accept interruptions and use the pronouns "we" and "you" more often, acknowledging the existence of the other speaker (Wetzel, 1988:556). As Cal said, "It's not necessary to tell all you know. It's not ladylike". Studies of impression management in court trials reported by Kasper (1990:208) have shown that Blacks and Alaskans consistently have suffered longer sentences than Whites for the same kinds of offence, and that the culturally biased evaluation of the way they talk (i.e. their politeness behaviours) has underlain this. The selection of variants then clearly works against some people in society, and in particular those who have, or are perceived to have, inferior power.

My second observation, though, raises the obvious question: if the way people use language disadvantages them, why don't they change it? For, it is a fact that, as Milroy has said, "although general public attitudes to low status varieties may well be as negative as ever, the use of these varieties appears to be increasing" (1982:215). The key to the answer lies in another comment reported in the children's dialect survey of Cheshire and Edwards: "I like it because it doesn't sound posh". We are back to solidarity versus power again. The power motive is balanced by, and will not eradicate, the identity motive.

Indeed, my third observation is that, if we did not have a language of solidarity with those with whom we identify, we would need to invent one. The linguistic literature abounds in examples of "anti-languages" (Montgomery, 1986), or "counter-language varieties of resistance" (Stubbs, 1986:85), which have been developed to meet such a need. For example, it was found that British born children of families of West Indian origin grew up speaking British English, but, at a particular stage, consciously adopted from their peers and those whom they admired a "patois", which differentiated them, as a group, from outsiders (Smolins, 1978). Before CB radio transmission was legalized in Britain, there was an anti-language employed by its users, which provided alternative expressions for certain areas of discourse. For example, a police station was called a "bear cage", an ambulance a "blood wagon" and a truck without a trailer, a "bobtail" (Montgomery, 1986:95-6). In the University of California in Berkeley in the 1960s some young people, as an assertion of an equality they considered belied by the usual courtesies of speech, formed a "Free Speech Movement" (FSM), in which such courtesies were not observed. Their opponents dubbed the FSM the "Filthy Speech Movement" (Bolinger, 1980:55). This year one of my students set out to describe two speech communities, her own, which was predominantly middle-class professional, and that of the adjoining suburb, where few of the people owned their homes and many were unemployed. She found that in the latter community her communicative initiatives were almost entirely unsuccessful. "People in 'X'", she observed, "use language to express their solidarity and to keep outsiders out. In many cases, language ... can be seen to function as a weapon". Eventually, she had to seek assistance from somebody who didn't speak her variety of English in order to obtain her data. There are, then, contradictory pressures operating on members of a speech community: those from the wider culture and those from the sub-cultures. The oppression that people are under is not, perhaps, as unidimensional as Perinbanayagam's statement would lead us to expect: it operates in more than one direction.

My fourth observation is that one of the offshoots of the higher evaluation of certain variants than others in the wider society is a tendency of certain persons within the community to appoint themselves as watchdogs, guarding over our language to preserve its "purity". These people, who find a ready vehicle for the propagation of their views in the daily press, usually invoke certain folk-linguistic principles to support the cases which they argue, like the assumption that the use of a word today is governed by the meaning that it once possessed according to its etymology, or that our language is fixed in its form and any linguistic innovation must necessarily be deterioration, or that language must operate according to logical principles, and so on. Bolinger has called these watchdogs 'shamans', in contrast to serious linguists, and lamented the fact that they are the only ones who make the news with language (1980:1). He has also observed that the "harm they do comes in promoting local preferences into a universal code of ethics" (1980:7). The latter point can be illustrated by the fact that a British politican recently (reported by Stubbs, 1990:239) related the growth of crime in Britain to the community's relaxed attitude to grammar! The existence of the defenders of the language bears added witness to the symbolic significance, in the equilibrium of power within our community, of the most apparently trivial features of variation.

The second main way in which the language of power is exhibited is in the selection of varieties, that is, essentially of languages and dialects, for recognition or use within a community. Individuals may, up to a point, decide what linguistic forms they will select in the course of their everyday interactions, but the society decides what language(s) or dialect(s) will be selected for public purposes and funded within education. The way in which this is achieved is by language planning.

There is, then, the potential within language planning for significant power to be exercised over the life chances of people, since, in terms of their communicative competence, and of the linguistic patterns of their sub-cultures, they will exhibit much greater variation than a Government is likely to recognize through educational funding. The crucial question is one of language rights: who plans whose language? "The reality ... is that planners come from particular backgrounds and operate under social, cultural, economic and political constraints. They also must operate within the bureaucratic structures and resources available to them" (Baldauf, 1990:15). Language planning, at least at the official level, is initiated by Government. In Australia, the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts produced a Report on a National Language Policy in 1984, after extensive community consultation, which served as a basis for the writing of the National Policy on Languages by Joseph Lo Bianco as a specialist consultant to the Commonwealth Department of Education in 1987. These documents were landmarks in the modern history of language planning and provided an informed and equitable basis for the maintenance and use of English, Aboriginal languages and other languages within the Australian community. However, to some extent the Policy has been pre-empted by a later initiative of the present Minister for Education in producing a White Paper with the significantly narrower title "Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy". I shall have more to say on this in a moment.

On the wider scene, it has been observed that language planning has often been used "to disenfranchise some segments of the population" (Kaplan, 1990:5), whether by failing to plan for their languages within the educational system, treating the linguistically different members of the community as linguistically handicapped, giving lip-service to multilingual education and services but failing to provide the funds to make them a reality, or imposing some non-native language on the population for essentially nationalistic and political purposes. What we typically find is that the power-holders in a society see it in their interests to impose, insofar as they are able, linguistic uniformity on the society. One of the most eloquent arguments against such a practice has been made by Professor Jay Lemke, former physical scientist, turned linguist, who has pointed out that:

> "All our knowledge of complex systems, from machinery to forests, from viruses to ecosystems, from individuals to communities, tells us that diversity is the basis of resilience... Uniform, homogeneous systems show remarkable efficiency in the short-run, but they are necessarily over-adapted to prevailing conditions. When these conditions change ...[,if] such systems have no reservoir of alternatives..., they and their kind will not long survive".
> (Lemke, 1990:159)

We could say, then, that linguistic uniformization works against nature, as well as contradicting social realities. However, uniformization is the contemporary direction of language planning both in Australia and overseas. Three main patterns of domination can be observed: English over other languages, standard over non-standard, and written over spoken. Written standard English is the language of power.

In Australia, the White Paper, released in August 1991, replaces the "National Policy on Languages" with an Australian Language and Literacy Policy called "Australia's Language". The shift of emphasis has not gone unnoticed by linguists. It is clear, as Helen Moore of La Trobe University has argued, that one guiding principle (multiculturalism, with its emphasis on pluralism and minority rights) has been displaced by another: the new economic assimilationism, according to which worth is measured in terms of usefulness to the economy (Moore, 1991).

What have we got to lose by moving in this direction? As Ezra Pound has said, "the sum of human wisdom is not contained in one language" (Ratzlaff, 1980:ii). The National Policy on Languages *balanced* the emphasis on English and non-English languages; the White Paper, and the Minister's reported astonishing claim "we are a monolingual nation", upsets the balance and casts a slur on the linguistic competence of those Australians whose first language is not English. Take speakers of Aboriginal languages, for example. As Brian Gray has expressed it, "Aboriginal languages are organised to record Aboriginal knowledge and thought while English is organised to record White Australian knowledge and thought" (1990:106). Typically, Aboriginal people have sought what they call "two way" education, where English and their own languages get due recognition: they have not sought to replace English with Aboriginal languages. Such two-way education is made possible by bilingual education programmes such as operate in many schools in the Northern Territory. However, there is evidence that these programmes are being changed in their focus "to one more closely aligned with the educational values held by the dominant English speaking culture" (Eggington and Baldauf, 1990:96-97). The means of achieving this is simple. The Government provides funding for the programmes on the basis of their success based on the evaluations it carries out. Such evaluations include objective

proficiency measurements of English but not of the Aboriginal languages, pay scant attention to matters of language use and language attitudes, and attribute operational problems which might be common to all schools to the fact that the schools have bilingual education programmes. The outcome is, of course, a foregone conclusion.

The push for the dominance of English is equally strong overseas. The U.K. newspaper *International Express* in October carried a front page headline "Let My Child Speak English", with a picture of a determined English mother clutching her five year old daughter Katrice. The mother had removed her child from a school where she had learned some Punjabi nursery rhymes and been taught about Eastern cooking. The mother reportedly "feared her daughter would be unable to learn to speak properly in her own mother tongue, English" (MacGregor and Qualtrough, 1991:1). Such linguistically unfounded fears are obviously influential in these times. It is significant that the Cox Report on *English for Ages 5 to 16* (1989) deliberately excluded questions of mother tongue maintenance. Professor Michael Stubbs, himself a member of the Cox Committee, comments on it:

> "The Report was destined inevitably to be read against a background where linguistic and cultural homogeneity are officially valued, where an assimilationist policy is taken for granted, though never explicitly stated, where language diversity highlights social and cultural diversity which would rather be denied, and where discrimination against language diversity is all the more powerful because it is hidden (perhaps even to the perpetrator) in an empty liberal rhetoric". (Stubbs, 1990:245)

Not surprisingly, in the U.S.A. we find a similar contemporary movement. A body calling itself U.S. English has been formed and is proposing an amendment to the Constitution designating English as the only official language of the United States. The fear is that linguistic diversity will lead to disunity. Little account seems to be taken of the fact that the Union was formed out of states speaking diverse languages: French (Louisiana), German (Pennsylvania), Spanish (California) and Russian (Alaska). As Professor Robert Kaplan, who brought this information to the Annual Congress of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia this year, said, "the issue is power and the preservation of privilege". The fact that one in five Americans is not a native speaker of English has been distorted into something to be afraid of. So far, 12 states have passed English Only legislation.

Equally contentious, and equally power-laden are the arguments over the form of English to be recognized in Education. We have already noted that standard English is not used natively by many English speakers, and that it carries negative associations for them. Lemke has claimed that:

> "Middle class institutions of mass education today are over-reaching themselves in trying to impose standards for the use of written language that are essentially grounded in upper-middle-class culture on those whose cultures are essentially different from, and in most cases, also in conflict with upper middle-class interests". (1990:160)

Sledd has argued that to educate non-standard dialect-speaking American children in standard English is to alienate them from the group which gives them identity (1986:66). There is also a body of opinion which sees standard English education as designed to exclude people from the education for which it is a prerequisite. Luke, McHoul and Mey have described language education as " 'exclusive club' membership: to become a member one has to qualify, but the only way to obtain the necessary qualifications is through membership of the club" (1990:30).

On the other hand, many of those who do come from non-standard dialect speaking groups are asserting their right to an education in standard English, and would regard a modified education system in which Creole or non-standard English had a place as a means of keeping them in subservience to the standard-English speaking majority. The key to language planning in this area lies in the aspirations of the people concerned. Imposition of standard English would be likely to be viewed negatively. However, access to standard English within an education system which allows for the "two way" principle should have a greater chance of success.

What is justly criticized by Sledd (1986) and others is the apparent manipulation of the education sector by corporate and political interests which would make an endemic "literacy crisis" a means of justifying the non-employment of graduating students when the unemployment has other causes, and also a means of diverting educators away from concentration on "the qualities of language which befit free citizens" (Sledd, 1986:65) towards those qualities which favour conformity.

The language of power is exhibited not only in the selection of certain variants and certain varieties over others, but also in the *ways* in which language is taught and approached. Traditionally, grammar has been approached as a prescriptive study in which people learn what they *should* do with language, but often don't. In other words, it has shown the student's inferior power relationship to the grammarians. There is another way, however. Grammar can be seen (as in Stubbs, 1990a) as a means of giving a student the capacity to analyse how language is being used by those in power, so that he may discern attempts to control his reactions. For example, the grammar of a headline "Demonstrators clashed with

police" leads to quite different assumptions from that of "Police clashed with demonstrators", although superficially they are both saying the same thing. The power of language to affect people's attitudes is, as we have said, a part of everybody's communicative competence, but society puts a relative few on the giving end and many on the receiving end. Grammar, rightly employed, can serve the needs of those who *receive* the language of power rather than those who *give* it.

Similarly, there are ways of using speech acts which can bring about disempowerment. It is normal, in interactional encounters, at least among English speakers, for a kind of buffer of ambiguity to be afforded to each other by the speaker and the hearer. This way we acknowledge one another's freedom to pick up hints or to drop them and we operate according to mutually agreed maxims of co-operation by which we know one another's face will be protected. So we say, for example, "You made some good points there", and leave the respondent to probe for what we haven't mentioned. However, recent studies of people in "unequal encounters" (Thomas, 1985, Malcolm, 1991) have shown that the person with the power may well exploit the situation, stripping bare the illocutionary force of his or her and his or her respondent's utterances. There are signals of such acts. They may be introduced by expressons like "I put it to you..." or "Let me make myself perfectly clear ..." or "So what you're saying is that ..." and many more. The use of these represents a power claim on the part of one speaker which robs the other of the face-saving cloak of indeterminacy. The powerless one may be left, as Cal was, with "nothing to do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language".

I have tried to demonstrate that the power of language is shown in the communicative competence of the individual, something which is essentially a natural endowment of every human being. I have argued that the language of power, in a sense, works against that, in that it effectively robs individuals of their communicative competence, whether by denying them the use of their most familiar variety or by denying them reasonable opportunity of acquiring the variety which does give access to power, or by employing communicative strategies which, overtly or covertly, reduce the options of the other person to respond.

Implications

Finally, I would like to draw some implications for applied linguistics and for higher education.

Applied linguists have in the past operated to a large extent within the tradition of linguistics as a descriptive science. They have been interested in the power of language, but not in the language of power. Increasingly, I see a more responsible social role falling to them. Applied linguistics has been largely concerned with providing an input into language teaching which will enable it to be done more effectively. But is it enough to focus on producing better practitioners if that will simply make these practitioners better at furthering conditions that favour inequality? (Cf. Pennycook, 1990). Every applied linguist must evaluate the language planning decisions - overt or covert - by which he or she holds a job. Applied linguists are necessary to Governments involved in language planning, but there is a danger that they will be "used" to provide legitimacy to policies which are determined essentially on economic and political grounds, or to produce plans which look good on paper but which will never be implemented. In short, applied linguistics needs to develop and maintain a simultaneous focus on the power of language and the language of power.

As to higher education, it has a particular responsibility to disseminate the results of scholarship about language. We have noted that shamans abound in the community and that the assumptions of folk linguistics often run counter to the truth. As Stubbs has put it, "A major role for linguistics is the steady unpicking of unreflecting beliefs and myths about language, especially where such beliefs affect the lives of all children in schools" (1986:83). A university which has committed itself to "freedom through knowledge" must take this role seriously.

Secondly, an institution of higher education like Edith Cowan University is in the ambivalent situation of serving two masters, funded as it is both by individual students and by Government. It is necessarily involved both with the power of language and the language of power since, on the one hand it is assessing and developing the communicative competence of students, and on the other hand it is used as a gatekeeper for entry to professional life.

It is, I think, important that these two functions and these two accountabilities be kept in awareness and kept distinct.

With respect to the power of language, the university has a role of nurturing the linguistic powers of its students, providing opportunities of research and scholarship which will make them more aware users of the linguistic repertoire which they bring with them to the university, and extending that repertoire.

From the point of view of the language of power, universities should critically examine their practices with respect to their gatekeeping functions. The sacred cow of literacy in Standard English should not escape critical examination. Policies should be developed to view non-standard dialect speakers and non-English speakers more in terms of their enablement for, rather than of their exclusion from, further study.

There is also a need for universities to monitor their use of the language of power in their teaching and administration functions. Teaching for a year in the People's Republic of China made me aware of how remote lecturers often are from their students in the Australian setting. Too many staff operate behind the defences of linguistic garden walls. If a university is to be a community of learning there needs to be more openness, more vulnerability, less mystification. There also needs to be a bridging of the gap between academic and practitioner. I have been to more than one linguistic conference where the academics and practitioners have been on different sides of a wall of academic jargon. At one, a practitioner was brave enough to tell the conference "I learned what it felt like to be a member of the working class, as a subject of oppression and exclusion by language" (Giblett and O'Carroll, 1990:14).

Wherever there is a concentration of power there is, I believe, a potential to change things for the better, but there is also a human propensity to value the power more than the change it can bring. Herein lies the responsibility of universities. We have been empowered by society to produce the clever country. I hope what I have said so far reveals that that in itself is a superficial goal. We need not to abandon it, but to transcend it. To borrow a metaphor from linguistics, we need to attend to the deep structures and effect some transformations.

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