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Speech and Language Community

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'Language community' and 'speech community' are constructs developed by scholars of language to refer to a social aggregate within which language is used. Over a century or more of discussion, scholars have differed as to whether the two terms referred to the same type of social formation or two different types. They have also differed as to whether the 'community' is to be understood as an empirically describable object in the world, or as an abstraction or idealization; whether to focus on speakers' knowledge or on their practice – or some combination; whether the aggregate should be considered from the perspective of its homogeneity or its internal diversity; and, most recently, whether the aggregate can be understood as a social whole – a bounded social universe – or whether it can only be understood as part of some larger field of social (and linguistic) relationships. Within these debates lurk different ontologies of language, society, and their relationship.

Briefly put, then, the problem of defining and identifying the speech community (and/or related terms) is both a theoretical and a methodological problem. The problem is theoretical because it concerns the locus and nature of the forces that shape language(s). What kinds of social relationship or grouping are implicated in what kinds of linguistic system, subsystem, or practice – and vice versa? Do the specifics of social organization matter, or is society no more than a prerequisite and general constraint on what really counts, a neuropsychology of language? The problem is methodological because it concerns where to locate and focus one's research. What is the arena within which to investigate how language is structured? Where should one look, to see how language takes form as social action?

Large though these questions loom in linguistic anthropology, outside this field they are not always seen as problematic. To some commentators it has seemed obvious that the 'speech community' must be an ethnic group that 'has' a single common language. This view is associated with the romantic nationalism of the late-18th-century scholar Johann Gottfried Herder, who maintained that a language is the natural hallmark, and the most precious possession, of a people (*Volk*) or nation, reflecting its special spirit and identity. To Herder's heirs, scholarly and lay, it has seemed natural to suppose that language itself creates – or automatically reflects – community: that there is always some aggregate of people who could be said to 'share' a language and who must, by virtue of that fact alone, share a cultural tradition, feel that they 'belong' together, and participate jointly in a social formation of some specifiable type – a people (or ethnic group, or nationality). In contrast, many linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists problematize these connections, resisting the assumption that there is any 'natural' relationship between language and community that maps linguistic facts onto social groupings in some universal way. In arguments that have been foundational to our discipline, Franz Boas maintained that language, race, and culture are independent classifications of humankind, and that the distribution of particular linguistic forms does not necessarily predict the distribution of

other social and historical facts. Since Boas's time the issues under debate have become more subtle, but the central theme remains. How languages and linguistic varieties map onto people, activities, and social relations – and how the social constructs may depend on linguistic practice – are the central problems we must address, along with their constituent terms such as 'community of speakers.'

This article first traces two threads in the history of 20th-century scholarly writings on 'speech community,' up to approximately the 1970s. During this period scholarly debate turned on the relationship between individual and society, and on whether to focus attention on what members of a community have in common or on how they differ. I then turn to some more recent discussions and issues, such as the notion of 'communities of practice,' language's relation to social networks, distinctions between 'language community' and 'speech community,' and debates about the relevance of conflict-based (as opposed to consensus-based) social theories. Finally, I consider whether 'communities' can be conceived as wholes or only as parts.

The Homogeneous Speech Community

Let us begin with Ferdinand de Saussure's 'mass of speakers' (*masse parlante*, rendered as 'community of speakers' in the widely distributed Baskin translation of the 1916 *Course in general linguistics* [1966: 77, 78]). The *masse parlante* is the social collectivity that is necessary for language (*langue*) to exist in the real world. This collectivity is the foundation of the 'social fact,' the social conventions that establish linguistic signs as vehicles for semiosis. In emphasizing the social nature of language, and the importance of the 'social fact' for linguistic theory, Saussure moved away from the individualistic focus of some prominent earlier linguists such as the Neogrammarian Hermann Paul. For Saussure, language as a structured system is collective rather than individual, and because it is collective it is not subject to personal will or the vagaries of individual action. (The history of intellectual links between Saussure, Paul, and other scholars, particularly William Dwight Whitney, is actually more complex but need not concern us here.)

As a collectivity, Saussure's 'mass of speakers' is neither structured nor internally differentiated, and it has no social properties that would lead to differentiation in its participants' language (*langue*, the representation of linguistic structure). Instead, the collective consciousness exerts pressure on individuals to conform. All representations of language in individual brains are essentially alike, so that a language is like a book whose (virtually) identical copies are deposited in the minds of its speakers. According to the *Course* (Saussure, 1966: 13–14), "[language is] a grammatical system that has a potential existence in each brain, or more specifically, in the brains of a group of individuals. For language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity." As the locus of a synchronic collective consciousness, imagined as if extracted from time and action, the 'social mass' can only be an abstraction, a virtual community rather than a real one. (Later in the *Course*, Saussure suggests (1966: 223) that the 'linguistic community' is generally an ethnic unity. This passage stands quite apart from his discussion of linguistic structure, however.)

Readers today may find that Saussure's discussion of linguistic systematicity as a matter of mental representations in an abstract, undifferentiated virtual community has much in common with a well-known statement in Chomsky's *Aspects of the theory of syntax* (1965: 3): "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly..." Like the *masse parlante*, Chomsky's speech community is an abstraction, not a misperception of an empirical world in which human communities are not perfectly homogeneous. In this view the speech community is little more than a precondition for language, whose locus – and here Chomsky departs from Saussure – is not in the collectivity but in the 'mind/brain' of the individual speaker. So strong is this emphasis on the biological individual, and so downplayed is the speech community, that linguistics is to be conceived as a branch of cognitive psychology.

In contrast to these views of the speech community as an idealization, Leonard Bloomfield's classic definition (in *Language*, 1933: 29) places the speech community in an empirical world of economic practicality that makes it homogeneous: "A group of people who use the same system of speech-signals is a **speech community**. Obviously, the value of language depends on people's using it in the same way" [emphasis original]. The value, that is, for a social division of labor where producers with different skills rely on a common code to coordinate the exchange of their products – or so Bloomfield supposed. Notice that this community is envisioned as socially and economically diverse, but uniform in (monolingual) language. Bloomfield's statement is about society as well as about language, and it makes an empirical claim.

How would this linguistic conformity come about? People who interact frequently will tend to speak alike, Bloomfield believed, because language acquisition is based on imitation and behavioral

conditioning. Arising out of the density of communication, which has made participants speak alike, a speech community would be distinguished from its neighbors by breaks in the frequency or intensity of interaction. (In practice, Bloomfield seems usually to have identified the speech community with a tribe or ethnic group – though not, incidentally, with a culture-bearing group, which he suggested was broader.) Within the community there can be 'lines of weakness,' slight differences in the frequency of interaction, corresponding to subgroups with slightly different forms of speech. As an example, Bloomfield cited Sapir's work on male and female speech in Yana. But although he mentioned that the differences between male and female speech in Yana are systematic – a point Sapir had stressed – Bloomfield did not discuss how 'lines of weakness' might give rise to differences that were systematic or conventional, rather than random. To propose that differentiation might be conventional would require the linguist to distinguish between the knowledge of linguistic forms and their use in acts of speaking, a distinction Bloomfield's behaviorist psychology did not easily support.

Anthropologists and linguists have long since discarded Bloomfield's behaviorist psychology of language. More durable, however, has been his notion that the speech community – the social site for linguistic description – is defined by interaction frequency. In his early works, John Gumperz identified the 'speech community' (or 'linguistic community' – in the early 1960s the terms were interchangeable) with some large social unit having a definite boundary around the outside and dense, frequent interaction inside. Unlike Bloomfield's, however, Gumperz's speech community could be multilingual. Its presumably dense interaction did not automatically produce homogeneity. So, in a study of a north Indian village, Gumperz (1958) suggested that Bloomfield's concept needed to be refined so as to distinguish between different kinds of communicative interaction: those that lead to behavioral convergence and those that do not. Despite regular patterns of interaction, the residents of this village did not all speak alike, and the study dealt with the social setting of these linguistic differences.

Similar lessons can be drawn from his work on convergence and creolization (Gumperz and Wilson, 1971), a study of language repertoires in a Maharashtran village whose population included speakers of Kannada, Telugu, Urdu, and Marathi. As a result of long-term proximity, the local varieties of these languages had changed, the authors concluded, in ways that made them more like each other. While the paper is justly known for this argument about grammatical convergence – even utterly unrelated languages may converge in several areas of linguistic structure if their speakers happen to live together for long enough – the convergence can only be described because other aspects of language have remained distinct. In fact, the villagers considered it important to maintain the linguistic distinctness of population subgroups in their multilingual community, and to differentiate between contexts of language use.

The Speech Community as the Organization of Diversity

As Gumperz's work illustrates, a new focus on linguistic diversity within communities began to emerge in the 1960s in studies of language contact, dialectology, and change. Led by Gumperz, Dell Hymes, Uriel Weinreich, and William Labov, the new work attacked the identification of structuredness with homogeneity (Weinreich *et al.*, 1968: 101). The speech community was now redefined as "a field of action where the distribution of linguistic variants is a reflection of social facts" (Gumperz, 1968: 383). Structure in the speech community rested on the organization of diversity, not merely on the replication of uniformity; its linguistic variation was not just random (Hymes, 1974: 75). The perspective recalls Durkheim's discussions of organic solidarity, where it is precisely people's complementary differences that bind them together, as opposed to mechanical solidarity, where social cohesion rests only on similarity. Thus multilingualism is not chaos, nor is it necessarily a transient or abnormal condition. Instead, it can represent an orderly social consensus.

This vision of speech community places multilingualism, multidialectalism, and communicative repertoires on center stage for observation and analysis, not on the periphery. The repertoire and its deployment in communicative practice are now seen as the crucial place where the relationship between language and social organization lies. Here we might observe how ways of speaking are linked with, and constitute, social groupings and identities, and how ways of speaking are situated in social activities. 'Community,' in the sense of sharing and commonality, lies in the interpretation, not the production, of behavioral forms (including speaking). What is shared is knowledge of how the differences in ways of speaking are organized.

As one of many examples, Hymes pointed to Paraguayan multilinguals who switch between Spanish and Guaraní according to the intimacy or distance of the communicative context. Gumperz (1964), meanwhile, compared the repertoires of two communities, one in India and one in Norway; the two communities' quite different social structures were

reflected in the different ways their linguistic repertoires were organized. In each community, members did not equally command all varieties, yet they understood when and where a code might be used – what its social implications were. Elsewhere, the Vaupés region of the northwest Amazon basin offers a particularly compelling example of the organization of linguistic diversity, since the social organization of the region has traditionally depended on a principle of linguistic exogamy: language is a badge of membership in one's patrilineal descent group, within which one may not marry. The marriage relationships that connected these groups and organized them in communities had to be contracted with persons whose linguistic 'badges' differed (see Jackson, 1974). Residential communities necessarily included spouses having different linguistic affiliations, and individuals were highly multilingual.

Notice, however, that if linguistic diversity does not prevent the formation of community in a social sense, then – by the same token – using the same language does not automatically create it. Illustrating this point, Gumperz (1979) described the communicative difficulties faced by a South Asian immigrant and a British interviewer. Despite the fact that their English was grammatically quite similar, the two interlocutors never succeeded in interpreting one another's responses, or in establishing a common understanding of the interview's purpose. As the example showed, using the same language (in the sense of 'denotational code') does not guarantee shared interpretation of the discourse's social import. Hymes (1968), meanwhile, in a survey of linguistic and anthropological literature, assembled a massive array of counterexamples challenging the Herderian assumption that common language reveals common ethnicity. Only in ideology must linguistic and ethnic boundaries coincide.

In the course of these arguments, Hymes and Gumperz sifted through some aspects of language and speaking that had often been assumed to coincide, yet (as they showed) could vary quite independently of one another. These distinctions must remain important in any adequate account of the social setting of linguistic practice:

- knowledge of a code (or, linguistic variety); i.e., the ability to interpret the denotational and predicational value of a symbolic system;
- behavior – the deployment of that code;
- claims to affiliation with a code, and claims to knowledge of it;
- knowledge of 'rules of use,' i.e., understanding the social distribution and appropriate deployment of codes.

Thus one might claim affiliation with a language one does not speak, as did an Italian-American student of mine who wrote a paper entitled 'Why can't I speak my language?' The Yana woman of Sapir's day could interpret all the forms of 'male speech' even if she never uttered them. (Actually, she might utter them if she quoted a male character while telling a story; but she would not produce these forms while speaking in her own social persona.) And rules of use may distinguish among addressees and contexts, even if the addressee does not reply in the same code – as when I reserve a special way of speaking for my pet cat's ears alone.

The recognition of linguistic diversity and its engagement with the structuring of social relations opened up vast areas of sociolinguistic research. As that research proceeded, however, and the sociolinguistic conception of speech community was to be operationalized, new questions arose. In particular, if speech communities are supposed to be objects of empirical description, how are they to be identified? If the community is delimited by some radius of shared knowledge, exactly what is shared? How much knowledge must be shared, and by whom? Recognizing that 'shared knowledge' can never be all-inclusive, Gumperz proposed that what the speech community shared was knowledge relevant to some significant number of social situations. But what is a significant number, and what makes a social situation significant? Consider, for example, gender-segregated initiation systems where initiates learn special linguistic varieties – such as male initiates in Walbiri and other societies of aboriginal Australia. Perhaps Walbiri women were aware that such varieties existed, but they were in no position to control them, or even to know the details of the appropriate situations of use. Some kinds of knowledge depend on a person's position in a social structure and access to situations in which a particular code is used.

To address this problem, one might envision a hierarchy of speech communities, or overlapping communities, depending on the scope of shared knowledge. In a study of creole language use in Guyana, Rickford (1986) pointed out that the ability to recognize linguistic indices of broad social categories was shared not only within the community of Cane Walk but also within larger communities, even in the whole country, while more subtle sociolinguistic meanings were known only more narrowly. The difference in social scale involved not only a difference in the amount and delicacy of sociolinguistic knowledge but also a difference in evaluative schemata. But if the 'speech community' is taken to delimit the social unit within which linguistic diversity is socially constituted and accounted for – an

empirical object that is also the locus of its own explanation – rather than marking the bounds of a particular study with specified goals, then speech communities may well **seem** to be discrete units, although it is only the researcher's approach that makes them so. It is tempting, moreover, for researchers to slip back into older notions of 'community' and to take a village, or an ethnic group – or a village as localized instantiation of ethnicity – as the sole unit of description.

Finally, how does one investigate knowledge, and how does one determine whether knowledge is shared? To what extent is the relevant knowledge available to conscious articulation, or is it embedded in practice? It is all too easy to take a few informants' claims as being an analysis of the relevant groups, varieties, and uses of language – and so to mistake a particular participant's ideology of language for a description and analysis. One solution has been to abjure informants' explicit analyses, except insofar as they identify some locality or grouping, such as a town or a neighborhood, within which to describe linguistic practices. This is the approach taken by Labov and his followers, who emphasize empirical reliability via consistent interview protocols and representative samples of community members. Labov's speech community (1972: 120–121) is defined not by members' producing the same linguistic forms in the same way, but rather by "participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage." While 'shared norms' may suggest shared ideas and values, what looms larger in Labov's work are norms of use (statistical norms). It is the patterns of linguistic variation – i.e., overlapping patterns of usage, within a controlled sample of contexts – which he puts forward as the crucial evidence of participation in the speech community.

The speech community described in Labov's most recent book (2001) is Philadelphia, represented by samples of speakers from five neighborhoods and a random sample from the city telephone directory. These samples do not actually represent the city, however, because they were purposely restricted to American-born whites. Other speakers, including Philadelphia's large African-American and Latino populations, are excluded because, Labov argues (2001: 506), they do not share in the same patterns of linguistic variation. The purpose of the study, and rationale for the sampling decisions, was to explore linguistic change in the local vernacular English, not to describe all linguistic practice in the city. The question remains, however, as to whether the presence of nonwhite and nonnative speakers is or is not relevant to currents of change.

Observe that this 'speech community' is defined in terms of sharing in a particular pattern of language use – a single 'local vernacular' whose manifestation varies principally in whether a speaker is leading or lagging in its ongoing currents of change, and whether the speech situation is such as to reveal the vernacular most clearly. These variations distinguish among genders and socioeconomic classes within the set of native white Philadelphians, but it is only in that sense that they describe linguistic diversity. Whatever analysis one might envision of the linguistic practices of the city's broader ethnic and racial composition – an analysis that would need to consider multilingualism, multidialectalism, and the social organization of exclusion and avoidance – is precluded from this approach and this conception of 'speech community.' (One might ask, however, whether 'community' is the best rubric for the larger analysis.)

These questions about boundaries, sharing, and the relationship of meaning to practice have given rise to some alternative formulations of the object(s) of study. By the mid-1980s, ethnographically oriented scholars were beginning to reconsider the social theory underlying then-current analyses of linguistic repertoires and social actors, and to rethink concepts such as 'community' and 'class.'

Speech Networks and Communities of Practice

In a large city it cannot be taken for granted – as indeed it should not anywhere – that the social ties most relevant to linguistic practice are geographically concentrated. Residence, work, recreation, and other activities may be dispersed, and one person's set of social contacts may differ from another's. Network analysis, an approach first developed in urban anthropology and sociology, tracks the webs of personal relationships wherever they occur, starting from an individual and that person's interlocutors. The analysis collates and compares such person-anchored networks and considers how they may reflect or influence linguistic practice. For example, networks may be relatively closed (members have more contacts with each other than with outsiders) or relatively open (less overlap among individuals' social ties). In an early use of the network approach, Gumperz (1964) argued that these properties of networks accounted for differences between the linguistic repertoires of two communities, one in India and one in Norway. Another way to compare networks concerns whether ties are strong (multiplex – an individual has many kinds of relationship with the same

person) or weak (relating to the other person in only one situation). Lesley and James Milroy (1992, and elsewhere) have proposed – initially from research on linguistic variation in spoken English in inner-city neighborhoods in Belfast – that close-knit networks with many multiplex ties foster linguistic conservatism, while weak ties are vehicles of linguistic change. Emphasizing close-knit networks' importance as the site of (emergent) shared experience, Gumperz and the Milroys have linked them with notions of 'community,' although Gumperz also calls open networks 'communities' and maintains they still hold something in common.

A related construct is the 'community of practice,' a grouping that is based on participation in some activity or project. As with network analysis, the point is that any 'shared' understandings are accounted for as products of joint experience and coconstructed relationships. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet write (1992: 464), "ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor." Participation in the activity, and members' definition of it, distinguish this grouping from older notions of community. This approach is especially useful, the authors find, for studying gendered language practices. Because activity-based groups such as football teams, armies, and boards of directors are likely to have a predominantly male membership, while secretarial pools and aerobics classes mainly draw women, these groups' distinctive linguistic practices easily become associated with gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 472). A focus on community of practice asks how an activity, a group, an individual as participant, and the meanings of linguistic practices mutually constitute one another.

Both these constructs, speech network and community of practice, suit a social theory in which 'community' is not assumed *a priori*; instead, it has to be achieved. Recently, Duranti (1997: 82) defined the speech community itself in this vein, as "the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people" – and the work of Ochs, Duranti, and their associates has emphasized the detailed study of activities and social interactions as communicative practices. This emphasis on the emergent character of social relations and the understandings connected with them resembles the ways many anthropologists have rethought the concept of 'culture.' Where older concepts of speech community, in their focus on the distribution of knowledge, presented a relatively static picture in which knowledge was unaffected by the action that applied it, discussions of community of practice and speech network permit a view of culture as public, negotiated, and located in interactional space rather than in a sort of mental museum.

Ideologized Representations and Imagined Communities

Eckert's mention of meaning and beliefs reminds us that sociolinguistic 'knowledge' is not just a tape recording of utterances, but an ordered, cognized, and filtered set of representations. Our interpretations of the linguistic practices around us depend not only on what is actually said, but also on stereotypes we have built up out of our experience – built and (re)configured (Agha, 1998; Irvine and Gal, 2000; Silverstein, 2003). Thus, in a discussion of honorific language in Tibetan, Javanese, and elsewhere, Agha shows how speakers' ideologies of deference, social hierarchy, and linguistic 'purity' lead to asymmetric distributions of linguistic forms across social categories – aristocrats and peasants, for example, deploy different constellations of forms – and these usages yield, in turn, stereotypes of speaker identity and rank (Agha, 1998: 166). Although Agha and Silverstein emphasize that the stereotypes are based on evidence – grounded in participants' discriminable experiences of language use – the stereotypes can also overwhelm the input, influencing the interpretation of utterances that do not precisely conform to them. Since people's experiences differ, and since interpretations also reflect the interpreter's position in society – and these differences pertain even to coparticipants in a particular activity group – cultural stereotypes and sociolinguistic knowledge cannot be perfectly 'shared.'

The object of study in this line of research reaches beyond the immediate. Distinguishing between representations that are experience near and those that are experience far, we must explore the latter in their own right. The people I imagine as co-inhabitants of my social world, including those I envision as past and as potential interlocutors – as well as those I know I will never meet and those I hope to avoid – are a population not limited to the history of my actual contacts. A recent strand of research on speech communities has considered these distant and imagined relationships. For example, Spitulnik (1996) examined the role of Zambian radio programs, whose audience may imagine itself a community of shared listening practices. In the circulation of 'public words,' such as catchphrases from well-known programs and announcers, listeners repeat the expressions that show their familiarity with the broadcast, and so constitute a colistenership with people they have never met. 'Hello Kitwe?' – a channel-checking expression with which the broadcaster based in the

Zambian capital tries to transfer operations to a broadcaster based in the provincial city Kitwe – when repeated in a crowded shop by a customer trying to get attention, arouses knowing smiles in other customers who recognize the phrase (Spitulnik 1996: 168).

The social groupings defined by the circulation of 'Hello Kitwe,' and by a radio broadcast's audience (actual or potential), are perhaps more often counted as 'publics' than as 'communities.' The terminological difference stems from the impersonal character of the 'public,' which is linked to its potentially large scale as an arena of communication and signals its connection with political institutions. As Gal and Woolard (2001: 1) wrote, "the work of linguistic representation produces not only individualized speakers and hearers as the agents of communication, but also larger, imagined social groupings, including . . . publics. Such representational processes are crucial aspects of power, figuring among the means for establishing inequality, imposing social hierarchy, and mobilizing political action." Our lives, including many aspects of linguistic practice, are affected by these representational processes and the actions they lead to, sometimes at a considerable distance.

Notice now that the publics imagined from different social standpoints may not define the same sets of people, and may fail to coincide with any concretely traceable social network. Zambian policy makers, like many others in Africa, distribute radio broadcasting – schedules and topics – among seven 'official Zambian languages' plus English, according to a model that equates language with ethnicity and region. Since most listeners are multilingual and some languages far outreach the ethnic populations they supposedly identify, actual audiences for a program are often quite different from the ethnic communities imagined in radio policy. Of course, the propensity to identify (homogeneous) language with ethnicity and region has a wide distribution and a long history, taking us back at least to the Herderian formulations mentioned early in this article. The same kind of equation underlies Benedict Anderson's otherwise brilliant discussion (1991) of the nation as 'imagined community' – imagined as the readership of newspapers and novels published in standardized languages and distributed via the mechanisms of print capitalism. As if it were an ethnic group writ large and mediated by print capitalism, this 'community' resembles the Saussurean homogeneous speech community in that Anderson assumes the population is monolingual in 'their' language, whose slight phonetic variations do not interfere with reading. This community is doubly imaginary, then – in its members' imagination and in Anderson's. It exists only in an ideology that imagines the standardized language of the nation-state as the common natural resource of its citizenry, so that linguistic diversity is interpreted either as something trivial, or as deviance and inadequacy. Images of the nation, and of the 'authentic' citizen, are at stake.

A good example is the debate over an orthography for Haitian Créole/Kreyòl (Schieffelin and Doucet, 1998). The spelling of the language's name illustrates the problem: the contest between those who see 'Créole' as fundamentally French – and speakers of standard French as the most authentic citizens – and those who see 'Kreyòl' as fundamentally other. The authors ask (1998: 303): "What is the real, authentic kreyòl? Thus, who is the real, authentic Haitian – the dominated 'Africanized' masses or the dominant 'Frenchified' elites? Is there a 'pure' kreyòl? . . . The sound system leads directly into the core of the debate about social classes, legitimacy, and authenticity."

Those who reject the Herderian formulation of language-based community must nevertheless recognize its prevalence in many parts of the world as the ideological grounds for political, territorial, and other kinds of claims. Silverstein (1996, 1998) therefore distinguished between 'language community,' which is based on its population's allegiance to norms of some 'shared' specified denotational code (such as a prescriptive standard) – conceived as 'their language' – and 'speech community,' based on indexical facts of repertoire deployment and their associated norms of use. The distinction recalls our two earlier threads in the conception of 'speech community,' the Saussurean and the sociolinguistic, but it places the former in the realm of ideologies of allegiance and the latter in the realm of situated experience. Although this pluralistic view of community is appropriate for many kinds of analysis, Silverstein (1996) showed its particular utility in understanding the dynamics of language contact in North American ethnohistory. The spread of European languages and their eventual dominance over indigenous ones took place within local settings which had varying social histories and shifting allegiances.

This analysis depends on looking at social (and linguistic) relationships of different kinds and on different scales. In the contact zone, indeed anywhere, 'language community' and 'speech community' do not identify the same population. Yet, the social dynamics of each kind of community affects the other. As Silverstein (1998: 401) put it, they are dialectically constituted cultural forms. Moreover, localized forms of speech and local social ties are in a similarly dialectical relationship with larger-scale, even global, currents. The proponents of *francophonie*, for example, must contend with local social dynamics and

multilingual scenes, while populations in localities as disparate as Québec and Rwanda contend, in turn, with *francophonie*'s language-based claims to their allegiance. The 'local' is itself an emergent construct, produced in relation to larger-scale processes. In sum, speech communities and language communities are different; neither stands alone; and an account of either must look outside its bounds.

The View across the Boundary

Questions about the speech community's boundary have already been raised with respect to the scale of analysis – a gradient in which face-to-face social groups, where everyone knows a great deal about everyone else, are embedded in larger settings where people are less well acquainted or not actually encountered at all. The question of boundaries is not just a matter of scale, however, but also of opposition. If, for example, boardrooms and Tupperware parties define different communities of practice and if they are associated with gender, then their relationship is one of opposition, not merely of random difference. And while it could be argued that gendered practices, however divergent they might be, are nevertheless part of some larger 'community' whole, any community X is only identifiable in relation to some population that is not-X. Even in face-to-face interaction, the participants establish their distinct identities as well as their commonalities.

Interaction is thus as much a process of differentiation as of accommodation. The crucial question is what kinds of differentiation and accommodation are produced, and by what semiotic means, in each empirical case. A similar question was asked decades ago about the signs distinguishing different ethnic groups. In *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, Fredrik Barth argued (1969: 10) that "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance." Instead, the persistence of an ethnic boundary depends on people's defining themselves in opposition to others whom they know. Similarly, Labov's classic research on Martha's Vineyard showed that the residents' speech forms were being reconfigured because – after the island's economy shifted away from fishing and toward the tourist trade – the contrast between native islanders and visiting mainlanders increasingly outweighed the islanders' internal divisions. Apparently, the Vineyard dialect was diverging from mainland speech because of, not in spite of, increased contact.

Following these precedents, Irvine and Gal (2000) argued that attention to boundaries and processes of differentiation should replace the concept of 'speech community,' which was overburdened with problematic baggage. Descriptions framed in terms of the 'speech community' tend to privilege a particular scale or type of social organization and to preclude exploring relationships that extend beyond its boundary. Moreover, many scholars now disavow the consensus-based social theory that underlay much earlier sociolinguistic and linguistic discussion of 'community' and discouraged attention to processes of exclusion, conflict, and domination. Rickford and the Milroys, for example, have proposed that conflict models of social class account better for the observed patterns of sociolinguistic variation than the consensus model can. In a related vein, Morgan (2003) argued that "speech communities are recognized as distinctive in relation to other speech communities.... They come into collective consciousness when there is a crisis of some sort, often triggered when hegemonic powers consider them a problem... Speech community represents the location of a group in society and its relationship to power." This emphasis on crises and power relations external to the community is borne out in Morgan's writings on the discursive practices of African-Americans, especially women.

Social life includes both agreement and conflict, sometimes both at once. In our joint work, Susan Gal and I have tried to capture this complexity by focusing on (linguistic) differentiation as a semiotic process that accommodates, but does not in itself entail, contestation. This complex process, we argue, includes a principle of fractal recursivity: an opposition that has been understood at one level of relationship can be projected onto other levels, yielding subcategories and supercategories. Thus the same process accounts for the possibility that linguistic varieties, social identities, or any other sociolinguistic formation may sometimes be seen as (sub)divided, but sometimes as unified. For example, in research on rural Wolof speech patterns I have proposed (Irvine, 1990) that a principle which (ideologically) distinguished the speech of high and low Wolof castes applied recursively. Applied within the high caste it marked subtler distinctions of rank; applied between languages it distinguished Wolof from French, to the latter's disadvantage.

We focus on differentiation because difference and distinction are what makes possible the logic of relations on which society and language depend. Just as Jakobson and Sapir showed for language, society too consists in relations and fields, not things. A focus on 'community' that does not look across the grouping's boundaries tends to obscure the relational logic that organizes a social field, by overemphasizing what people have in common and treating its object of study as an autonomous thing, rather than an artifact

of the researcher's approach. No community is an island.

Conclusion

Researchers investigating the relationships of language, culture, and social life need ways to think about the social aggregates in which those relationships are located. Most authors refer – whether loosely or rigorously – to some sort of 'community.' As we have seen, however, definitions of 'speech community' have varied widely, and many scholars now argue that it cannot be entirely self-contained as an object of study. Just as most anthropologists no longer see 'culture' as a homogeneous object that can exist in isolation (and should not be treated as if it did), we realize that speech communities are related to other social formations that intersect with them, or are incorporated within them, or contrast with them, or include them. A crucial step away from the speech-community-as-ethnic-island approach is to see language community as distinct from speech community, and the two in dynamic relationship – a step that puts the Herderian formulation in its (ideological) place.

Nevertheless, the word 'community' invokes an aura of consensus and common cause, even if you try to define it in some other way. It is tempting, therefore, for 'community' – whether researcher's or participant's construct – to conflate, or slide among, at least three quite different axes of relationship: homogeneity and difference, consensus and conflict, solidarity and distance. Just as difference is not the same thing as conflict, so any conflation of homogeneity, consensus, and solidarity under the rubric of 'community' is misleading. It is all the more so when language is added into the mix, as if languages were based upon – or could produce – these qualities of community. These issues ought to be disentangled.

Even if its technical utility is limited, however, 'community' is a term it is hard to do without. Its various formulations each address something of interest as to how the practices that make social relationships rely on systems of signs. Although the scholar who looks for standardized off-the-rack technical terms will not find one here, there is much to be gained from exploring the surrounding debates.

See also: Communities of Practice; Ethnicity; Linguistic Anthropology; Linguistic Ethnonationalism; Society and Language: Overview; Speech Community.

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Speech and Thought: Representation of

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Introduction

This article addresses the *Representation* of Speech and Thought (henceforth RST). The overwhelming focus will be RST in literature, but many of the principles can be extended to the representation of speech – and even of thought – in other varieties and genres: journalism, records of parliamentary debates, commissions of inquiry and committees, police interviews, etc. Still it is worth noting at the outset that literary representation of speech and thought emerges from the potential in all written languages – a potential of inestimable value – to record ('capture', render inspectable) in semipermanent form (hence usable at later times and in different places) what someone said at one particular time and place. More remotely yet, written records of speech must derive, as a counterpart, from the reporting of others' communicative acts that is so important a part of spoken and sign languages.

RST is therefore bound up with writing rather more than is always acknowledged. Younger readers, fully of the digital age, may be puzzled that these opening remarks about the power to record or represent speech are not focused on audiotape recording and digitized sound files, now very widespread means of representing speech. But this article is about an affordance of the much earlier and more culture-changing technological breakthrough, the development of writing, and literary authors' rich repertoires of means for presenting characters' words on the page. Little further mention will be made of Internet literature or Web-based fiction; but it may be noted in passing that modern technology is such that there is nothing to stop a Web-based fiction writer from using sound files for some or indeed all of the discourse categories shortly to be described (characters' direct speech, indirect speech, narratorial discourse, etc.). One literary format of increasing importance that might here merit further comment is the audio novel, widely used by travelers and the print-weary: typically using just one performer as teller, they deserve fuller study to see how they resolve the tricky problem of conveying direct speech and the narratorial forms distinct from each other. And then how do they cope with those passages of FID or combined discourse (to be described later), where the voices of narrator and a character are impossibly mixed or calqued? Nowhere do Bakhtinian ideas of the polyphony or clash of voices seem more palpably applicable. The potential 'reoralization' of the written genres of the novel and the short story, triggered and sometime perhaps prompted by the spread of audio-books, may come to require extensive scholarly treatment.

RST, then, comprises some processes for the partial simulation of speech or thought that have emerged in written language. A general caveat at the outset: this article focuses on and takes its examples from