THE CONTEXT OF LINGUISTICS
(1975)

There is a feeling abroad in some quarters that linguists are on the endangered species list. The reasoning seems to be that, when the climate changes, the ones who are most exposed are those who have become so specialized as to live off just one particular kind of tree.

Most subjects have their periods of specialization: moments when the focus is narrowed, the perspective sharpened, and the rest of the world shut out. It is often said that this has to be so, that such specializing is a necessary condition for a great leap forward; and this may well be true, if we are talking about specialization as a posture for research. It is less certain that it need determine the scope of operations of a university department, or of its offerings to its students.

To be highly specialized is in its way a kind of defence, a means of protecting one's identity. We are constantly being reminded of how many others feed on language: philosophers, psychologists, rhetoricians, speech pathologists, communications and media experts, and many more besides. Yet there are significant aspects of language that none of these groups takes account of; so linguists have tended to retreat and to consolidate the terrain that is out of others' reach. How often do we read statements like "Linguists concern themselves only with invariant forms", or "Linguists ignore the cognitive aspects of language", or "Rhetoric is not acknowledged to be a part of linguistics".

It must be said at the outset that there have always been linguists whom this image did not fit. But it is true that during the 1960s the majority, in the United States at least, did adopt a highly specialized work style. Faced with a choice between two ways of being unique, one

that of seeing language in the round, from all angles (where disciplines for which language is an instrument, not an object, see only one or two angles), the second that of seeing what lies at the core of language (to which the other disciplines do not penetrate), linguists chose the second, in this way marking out their own area of specialization and using the discipline 'linguistics' rather than the object 'language' to characterize their domain. Linguistics became the study of linguistics rather than the study of language.

Associated with this specialization was a determination that linguistics should be useless, that it was a theory without applications. It was widely held, for example, that linguistics had no application in language teaching. Now it is true that harm has been done in the past by exaggerated claims about what can be achieved through linguistics – so much so that in some areas of the world students expecting to be taught a second language (which they needed) found themselves being taught linguistics instead (which they did not need). But the other extreme view, one denying that linguistics has any relevance in language teaching, is merely a reflection of the way the linguist conceives of his subject; it is not a considered appraisal of the language teaching process. The effect of this attitude has been to discourage linguists from working in applied linguistics, and to make it difficult for those who do to gain support.

Other instances could be cited; in my opinion machine translation is one of them. It is not unusual to be told now that all the funds spent on this were wasted; but I do not think so. Once it was established that machine translation was a problem in linguistics as well as in computer science, significant progress was made, only to be cut short when the community of linguists rejected the kinds of investigation on which it was based as being of no theoretical interest. So the work was abandoned, when it was just beginning to look realistic. Now there are many parts of the world in which people are not being educated in their mother tongue; and one of the reasons for this is the cost of translating textbooks and background materials. Some form of machine translation – and machine translation is not an "all-or-nothing" kind of activity – might eventually have made a critical difference.

In matters such as these, theoretical linguists refused to admit the social accountability of their subject, and withdrew their expertise from activities that could have been beneficial to large numbers of people. I am not saying that all linguists held aloof. Nor am I implying, in an excess of linguistic paternalism, that miraculous solutions lay around the corner. A massive accumulation of knowledge and experience was

needed, and still is. But to interpret this knowledge and experience requires linguistic theory.

There seems to be a general consensus now that linguistics had tended to become overspecialized and underapplied; the point need not be laboured. I would like to suggest a third characteristic, which I think is related to these two, but whose validity is more likely to be challenged. This is the assumption that a human being is bounded by his skin.

J. B. Priestley, the writer and critic, wrote in 1949: "Art to me is not synonymous with introversion. I regard this as the great critical fallacy of our time." (He later developed this theme at length in his account of "the moderns" in *Literature and Western Man*.) Let me adapt this maxim and say: human science is not synonymous with introversion.

I am not referring to the point, repeatedly made, that the technique of introspection into one's own knowledge as a speaker has tended to be overvalued as a source of facts about language. I have in mind a much more general point: that in recent work in linguistics, all the emphasis has been placed on language as stored within the organism, as "what the speaker knows". A representative formulation is one from Postal (1968): "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that grammar is a description of part of what people **know**, not of what they **do**." What has happened here is that a real and important distinction, that between the potential and the actual – between what people **can** do and what they **do** do – has become conflated with another opposition that is distinct from and independent of it, that between knowledge and interaction – between what goes on 'within' the organism and what goes on 'between' organisms (or between the organism and its environment). And this second distinction is a rather more problematical one.

It is related to the question that has exercised philosophically minded linguists from Saussure onwards: 'where is' language – 'in here', or 'out there'? Pribram (1971) observes that "Language and culture appear to have unique characteristics which are hard to define as either mental or physical"; and he aptly illustrates this by reference to the legal problem of whether a computer program is subject to patent or to copyright. We can try to resolve this issue, as Saussure and Chomsky have done, by making the distinction between knowledge and behaviour and parcelling out language between the two (and likewise with culture). If we do this, we should recognize that behaviour is no more accessible to observation than knowledge is. Behaviour is a potential, and what we observe are instances of behaviour.

But the distinction between knowledge and behaviour is largely transcended in a context such as that of Pribram's "Biologist View". "Consciousness", he says elsewhere (1973), "describes a property by which organisms achieve a special relationship with their environment", and "the basic function of the brain is to generate the codes by which information becomes communicated". Many people now see the "language and culture" complex as an information system. If information is to be located somewhere, no doubt it will have to be at the interface where the organism joins with its environment; but why do we need to localize it by reference to the skin? Meaning inheres in the system: in the information system that constitutes the culture, and in the various semiotic modes (of which language is one) that serve to realize the culture. The system is more general than its representation either as knowledge or as behaviour:

	System	*Instance*
Interaction (*behaviour*)	behaviour potential ('can do')	instantial behaviour ('does') (= "performance")
Introaction (*knowledge*)	knowledge potential ('knows, i.e. can bring to consciousness') (= "competence")	instantial knowledge ('brings to consciousness')

In recent years theoretical linguistic studies have focused predominantly on introaction, to the exclusion of the interactive perspective. As a philosophical standpoint, this has a particular consequence for the description of linguistic systems: either the environment is left out of account, or, if it is taken into account, its role is conceived of as static and as passive. It figures as a decorative background to semantic interpretations, but not as a dynamic element in linguistic processes, or in the learning of language by a child. Riegel (1972) remarked that:

> Both Chomsky and Piaget ... while [their] orientation has set them clearly apart from most American psychologists, ... have failed to assign an appropriate role to the cultural-historical conditions into which an individual is born and within which he grows. ... There is no place in these theories ... for an active role of the environment and for a codetermination of an individual's development by other active organisms.

The child has been represented as learning language in isolation from his environment, instead of as constructing a social reality through interaction with it.

This situation arises when an equation is set up such that what is inside the skin is identified with the potential, and what is outside the skin is identified with the actual. "Competence" is defined as knowledge, and interaction is then characterized as "performance" – the concept of a "theory of performance" cannot, in these terms, be other than self-contradictory. Reality then becomes psychological; meaning is located entirely within the organism, and the social fact is reduced to a mere manifestation. In other words, to idealize is to psychologize.

Here is Lyons' (1968) statement: "... linguistic theory, at the present time at least, is not, and cannot be, concerned with the production and understanding of utterances in their actual situations of use ..., but with the structure of sentences considered in abstraction from the situations in which actual utterances occur". This recalls Chomsky, in 1966: "It is only under exceptional and quite uninteresting circumstances that one can seriously consider how 'situational context' determines what is said, even in probabilistic terms". The impression is given that "situation" and "actual situation" are synonymous, and this being the case the linguist cannot concern himself with interaction and the environment – because interaction is 'what a particular speaker does' and the environment is 'on a particular occasion'. In this way linguistic theory idealizes out the social context, and with it social phenomena of any kind.

To exclude the social context from the study of language is, by implication, to exclude human interaction and the exchange of meanings from the scope of serious enquiry. But there is an alternative, which is to recognize that the "situation" is an idealized construct, as it was interpreted by Firth (1950) and developed by Hymes (1962). In Goffman's (1964) words, "It can be argued that social situations, at least in our society, constitute a reality *sui generis* ..., and therefore need and warrant analysis in their own right, much like that accorded other basic forms of social organization". (I would leave out "at least in our society".) The situation, interpreted as situation type, or "social context", is a representation of the semiotic environment in which interaction takes place. Such concepts – social context, environment, interaction – are of the same theoretical order as "knowledge" and "mind". Interaction explains knowledge no less than being explained by it.

It has been said that an obsession with what goes on inside oneself is characteristic of the modes of thought of the end of an era, when

intellectuals, not liking the reality that lies outside, the social upheavals and wholesale resymbolization, find a pleasanter or at least more ambiguous reality within. Behind this somewhat facile observation there lurks perhaps an element of truth – that for the linguist at least the reduction of human behaviour to mental operations does avoid the awkward consequence that (to adapt David Hays' formulation) between semantics and reality lies social structure. However that may be, the effect has been to turn attention away from social meaning, and from the social act as a source of explanation.

It is here that speech act theory – the work of Austin, Searle and Grice – has had such significance for linguistics. When the social context has been idealized out of the picture, a theory of speech acts provides a means of putting it back again. It celebrates the linguists' rediscovery that not only do people talk – they talk to each other.

The study of speech acts, which as Searle remarks is important in the philosophy of language, starts from the speaker as an isolate, performing a set of acts. These include, among others, illocutionary acts – questioning, asserting, predicting, promising and the like; and illocutionary acts can be expressed in rules. In Searle's (1965) words,

> The hypothesis ... is that the semantics of a language can be regarded as a series of systems of constitutive rules [i.e. rules that constitute (and also regulate) an activity the existence of which is logically dependent on the rules] and that illocutionary acts are performed in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules.

The meaning of a linguistic act thus comes within the scope of philosophical enquiry. But a language is not a system of linguistic acts; it is a system of meanings that defines (among other things) the potential for linguistic acts. The choice of a linguistic act – the speaker's adoption, assignment, and acceptance (or rejection) of speech roles – is constrained by the context, and the meaning of the choice is determined by the context. Consider a typical middle-class mother and child exchange: *Are you going to put those away when you've finished with them? – Yes. – Promise? – Yes.* The second of these yesses is at one level of interpretation a promise, a concept which (in Searle's now classic demonstration) can be explained by reference to conditions of three types: preparatory conditions, the sincerity condition and the essential condition. But its significance as an event depends on the social context: on modes of interaction in the family, socially accepted patterns of parental control, and so forth – and hence on the social **system**, Malinowski's "context of culture". To describe the potential

from which this utterance derives its meaning, we should need to specify such things as (sub-culture) professional middle class, (socializing agency) family, (role relationship) mother–child, (situation type) regulatory, (orientation) object-oriented; and to interpret it as, at one level, a move in a child's strategy for coping with a parent's strategy of control. (How this may be done can be seen from the work of Bernstein and Turner, from one viewpoint, and of Sacks and Schegloff from another.) We shall not want to say that the child's utterance is 'insincere'; but nor shall we want to interpret it as 'one speech act conveying another', which introduces an artificial distinction between a speech act and its use, as if to say "As an idealized structure, this is a promise; when it is instantiated, by being located in a social context, it functions as something else".

This is not to be construed as a rejection of speech act theory, which is concerned with the logic of individual classes of acts and not with the ongoing exchange of interpersonal meanings. It does not claim to account for interaction as a dynamic social process. But this does raise an important issue in the study of language as object, when one is trying to understand the nature of the linguistic system. It is one thing to idealize out the social process when one is accounting for the ideational part of semantics, where the relevant 'environment' is a second-order construct of objects and events (Malinowski's "context of reference"). It is quite another thing to do so in accounting for the interpersonal part, since this is, in effect, the semantics of interaction. If speech act theory is taken as a point of departure for describing the interpersonal component of meaning, the social context has to be added in afterwards; and this is somewhat like idealizing the nourishment out of a loaf of bread and then adding vitamins in order to enrich it.

Among the interpersonal meanings expressed in language are the sets of roles that the speaker can select for himself and for the hearer from the social relationships that make up the potential inherent in the speech situation. In the most general terms, the options are (i) either giving (offer, or response) or accepting (ii) either information or goods-and-services; derived from these is a rich network of more specific choices. But the meaning of any specific role-relationship that the speaker can assign depends on the social context. The notion of 'offering information', for example, means one thing in school and another thing in the family; and something else again in the young children's peer group. It is difficult to account for these patterns – or for how a child

comes to learn them – in terms of a semantics in which the speech role has an idealized meaning abstracted from the social situation.

The speech role system is one which has a great deal of 'play', or variation, in it; it is highly sensitive to individual differences, and to differences among social groups, and so plays a significant part in the differentiation of meaning styles. Individuals differ widely in their meaning styles; this is how we recognize people by their meanings. Subcultural meaning styles – what Bernstein calls "sociolinguistic coding orientations" – show the same phenomenon at the subcultural level. Both individuals and social groups vary in the meanings they typically associate with given social contexts; and the selection of roles in the speech situation is a rich source of variation. If any general interpretation is to be given, such variation has to be treated as inherent in the system.

Of course, there will always be idealization; in any systematic account of language, certain phenomena will have to be dismissed as irrelevant. But the nature and extent of this idealization is a function of the purpose in view. In order to achieve a syntax that could be stated by rules, linguistic philosophy first idealized out natural language altogether. Chomsky then showed that natural language could be brought within the scope of rules, given a particular kind and degree of idealization (labelled "competence") which, among other things, excluded all but the ideational component of meaning. If the rules are to be extended to (that part of the syntax which expresses) meanings of an interpersonal kind, it is still necessary to let the indeterminacy in as late as possible, by idealizing out the social context – since it is this that is responsible, so to speak, for the variation within the system. This is not the only possible scheme of priorities; we can conceive of a sociological semantics which excluded all ideational meaning – and which would be equally one-sided. As it is, however, linguistics has been dominated by a perspective which, because of its emphasis on knowledge in contrast to interaction, has favoured a semantics without social structure, rather than one that characterizes the meaning potential inherent in the contexts that are defined by the social system.

Progress has then been achieved by further extending the scope of rules. From having been first used in the representation of isolated sentences having neither verbal context nor situational context, their scope has been extended in these two directions: towards text grammars, and towards the structure of interaction.

Text grammars have been described by van Dijk (1972) as grammars in which

> ... derivations do not terminate as simple or complex sentences, but as ordered *n*-tuples of sentences (*n* ≥ 1), that is as *sequences*. The intuitive idea, then, is that the text grammar must formulate derivational constraints such that certain sequences are grammatical and others are not, viz. that the set of well-formed texts of a language is a subset of all possible sequences of sentences.

Here there is verbal but no situational context; hence the concept of a text grammar relates primarily to those registers in which the "situation" is contained within the text as a second-order field of discourse, typically various forms of narrative. Any descriptive ideal that proves to be unattainable with a sentence grammar will be doubly unattainable with a text grammar; for this reason text grammars in this sense are likely to remain purely formal exercises.

The structure of verbal interaction has been described by Sacks and Schegloff in the form of rules of sequencing, turn-taking and the like (Schegloff 1968; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1973). Such rules do not specify relations between the social context and the text, but they do take account of features of the non-verbal environment in specifying the sequence of verbal events. The question at this point is how far rules can take us in representing interactive sequences, and how much this in turn tells us about the exchange of meanings as a social process. Mohan (1974) suggests that a more appropriate model for interpreting utterance sequences may be found in social action theory:

> I shall view certain patterns of dialogue as the result of rational goal-oriented linguistic action by the participants. ... [The] rational order does not determine the specific sequences of utterances, but rather places constraints on the sequencing of utterances.

In Mohan's view the "means-ends" concept of the purposive, rational actor may be more relevant to human action and interaction than a system of rules.

If utterances are directed by rational action, what is the status of the system that has evolved to produce them? Without going into problems of the nature of functional explanations of human symbolic systems, or their relation to rational action as an explanation of the behaviour of the individual, I shall assume that it makes sense to say that language has evolved in conditions which relate it to the creation and maintenance of the social system. Given some form of "means-ends" interpretation of

language (cf. Jakobson 1963), such as enables us to transcend the distinction between the system and its use, what are the "ends" to which the linguistic system provides the "means"? Essentially, language expresses the meanings that inhere in and define the culture – the information that constitutes the social system.

Language shares this function with other social semiotic systems: various forms of art, ritual decor and dress, and the like. Cultural meanings are realized through a great variety of symbolic modes, of which semantics is one; the semantic system is the linguistic mode of meaning. There is no need to insist that it is the "primary" one; I do not know what would be regarded as verifying such an assertion. But in important respects language is unique; particularly in its organization as a three-level coding system, with a lexicogrammar interposed between meaning and expression. It is this more than anything which enables language to serve both as a vehicle and as a metaphor, both maintaining and symbolizing the social system.

I do not mean by this that language provides a formal model for the representation of culture. As John Lyons pointed out in the context of a recent conference on communication studies (1973),

> ... the structuralist approach to non-linguistic material in terms of lower-level linguistic concepts would tend to support the view that there is a fundamental difference between linguistic and non-linguistic modes of communication. ... We cannot expect to be able to apply very much of the framework of concepts and categories established by linguists to non-linguistic material.

If we do find partial similarities between language and other symbolic systems having semiotic value in the culture, this may suggest that common functions determine common forms, but its significance lies in explaining how one symbolic system can serve as metaphor for another and is interpreted as such. For example, language has certain properties in common with games: it has tactic systems, or sets of rules; it requires the adoption and assignment of roles, based on turn-taking, and so on. Not surprisingly, the two can serve a similar social function; so we find verbal contexts alternating with contexts in other spheres. Compare also Mead's view of language and games as the two "social conditions under which the self arises as an object" (1934). But we are not projecting the form of language on to other semiotic systems; the link between them depends not on a common mathematics but on a common social function and social value.

In using language, we are both observing the environment and intruding on it. Nearly every utterance has both an ideational meaning, relating to the processes and things of the real world, and an interpersonal meaning, relating to the roles and attitudes adopted and assigned by the speaker. The semantic system is organized around this dual focus, of reflection and of action; and because it is so organized, it also stands as a metaphor for the culture, since culture is a construct of two environments, the natural and the social. Lévi-Strauss has stressed how the two are interlocked: the natural environment is a focus both of action and of reflection, and the social system is encoded in natural as well as in behavioural symbols. This interdependence is also both expressed and symbolized in language: to speak is to be both thinker and actor at the same time, and the two together define the act of meaning – which in turn has shaped the inner structure of the semantic system. Yet by the same token the act of meaning transcends this duality of thought and action. Let me quote here a passage from an article by Tambiah (1969), which makes the same point in quite another context, that of the study of animal classification systems. Discussing the problem of whether rules tend to accrue to animal species for symbolic or for pragmatic reasons – because they are 'thinkables' or because they are 'eatables', in Lévi-Strauss' mode of discourse – Tambiah concludes:

> Between Lévi-Strauss' sign-oriented intellectualism ... and Fortes' actor-oriented moralism ... lies scope for an imaginative reconstitution and reconciliation of the structural properties of symbolic systems quâ systems, and the effectiveness of symbols to bind individuals and groups to moral rules of conduct. Cultures and social systems are, after all, not only thought but also lived.

This I think provides a perspective for a humanistic interpretation of language. This is a very abstract conception; but it has practical consequences in explaining how language comes to symbolize the social structure, and thus social values come to be attached to linguistic forms. Let me cite a rather extreme example, that of Podgórecki's interpretation of the "second life" – the subculture, or anti-culture, of corrective and penal institutions which he has studied in Poland and in America. This "second life" takes the form of hierarchy which represents in symbolic form the social order of the world "outside"; it is ritualized through a "language" which appears to have as its primary function the maintenance of the social order of the second life, symbolically and through the regulation of behaviour. In Podgórecki's words (1973),

The essence of the second life consists in a secular stratification which can be reduced to the division of the inmates into 'people' and 'suckers'. The 'people' are equal; they differ [only] in the degree of acceptance of the patterns of behaviour which are the second life rituals. ... The body of those rituals are called 'grypserka' (from 'grypa' – a slang word designating a letter smuggled secretly to or from a prison); Malkowski defined it as "the inmates' language and its grammar". In this language, certain ... words are insulting and noxious either to the speaker or to one to whom they are addressed.

It may be said that these are pathological phenomena, of no general interest. But only the most determined idealist would claim to distinguish clearly between the pathological and the normal; it is pointless to ignore the pathological aspects of the social system. The second life comes into existence in response to conditions created by the system; it also stands as a metaphor for the system, representing it as though projected into a closed shell. The anti-society is the society as it becomes when cut off from nature and openendedness and forced to close in on itself. A linguistic study of phenomena of this kind may shed new light on more familiar patterns of interaction and their relation to social structure.

In our concern with the rules of forms and the forms of rules, the social structure tends to be forgotten, and language is set apart from the linguistic community. But the linguistic community is an important component of a linguist's reality. In its traditional sense, as a linguistically homogeneous population linked together in a network of communication, it is an idealized construct to which probably no human group ever fully corresponds, and from which our modern urban social structure is very far removed. But whether we think in terms of the United States, or New York City, or the Lower East Side, we are still referring to what are in a real sense semiotic domains, entities throughout which meanings are exchanged in regular, socially defined contexts. A modern city is an elaborate cosmos of symbolic interaction in which language functions as a powerful and yet sensitive instrument for the fashioning of social life. The patterns of interaction recall in many ways the dialectic of society and anti-society, though without the sharp boundary which separates the two; between language and anti-language there is, rather, an uneasy continuum, in which the street gangs and criminal subcultures define one pole (Halliday 1976). In this sort of environment, the language of a social group that is under pressure, for example what Labov (1972) calls "BEV" (Black English

Vernacular), becomes a major factor in the definition and defence of that group's identity.

The linguistic "order" (to borrow the sense of "social order") in a complex society is closely bound up with variability in the linguistic system, our understanding of which is due first and foremost to the pioneering work of Labov. Wherever human behaviour is perceived as variable, social value tends to attach to the variants; and language is no exception. In many instances, the value assigned to a variant is simply the value assigned to the social group with which it is thought to be identified; this is the source of the "prestige form". From the point of view of language as system, the assignment is arbitrary: there is no intrinsic reason why $+/r/$ should be favoured over $-/r/$, or the other way round as the case may be. At other times, the value attaches to meanings, and here the effect is non-arbitrary. Semantic options, especially perhaps (though not only) those of an interpersonal kind, forms of address, politenesses and insults, modalities, and the like, mark not only individuals but also social groups: these too have their "meaning styles", as I expressed it earlier. Elements at other levels, syntactic, lexical, morphological and phonological, may become "foregrounded" through association with these semantic features, giving a sense of mutual reinforcement – what in the context of a literary work is called its "artistic unity", where in layman's terms 'the style (or the sound) suits the meaning'. An example is the social status of vocabulary derived from different sources: in English, Graeco-Romance words are associated with learning, and hence by a natural extension with pomposity and pretence (a "latinate" style). Either way, value-charged elements become available as coinage in verbal exchanges of all kinds; the speaker may "follow the rules", or he may play with them, bend them, and break them, as Sherzer has described. Gumperz' work brings this out strikingly in a number of different contexts (1971). Variation in language is a rich source of symbolism for the elaboration of the social structure.

Since in the main stream of linguistics language had been isolated from its social environment, work in this area came to be known by the somewhat self-conscious label of "sociolinguistics", the prefix suggesting that here, by contrast, language is studied in its natural environment. "Sociolinguistics" thus corresponds to what at other times and places has been called simply linguistics. It has led to some striking new linguistic insights, particularly in the interrelation of descriptive and historical theory. On the other hand, it has had little to

say about society; "nor", as Bickerton (1972) remarked, "has there been any stampede of sociologists into the linguistic corral, looking to see what there is for them there, as there has of educationists or philosophers".

It will not do, in the present context at any rate, to read too much into the "socio-". Most sociolinguistic studies still accept as given the linguist's own rather simple model of the social structure. They still concentrate on phonological and morphological indices; and they still assume a situational determinism based on a concept of style as something somehow separate from meaning. The next step is to see where language might suggest some new interpretations of the social structure; to work towards a social semantics which could explain patterns of social value in terms of more than the "prestige" of arbitrarily selected formal features; and to investigate the question of how the social system, as a whole, works through the linguistic system as a whole – which Hymes has referred to as the central problem for sociolinguistics in the immediate future.

Until this step is taken, the frame of reference for the discourse will continue to be the traditional subject-matter of linguistics. This is the basis of the definition of sociolinguistics as "the study of language in a social context", as distinct from "the study of language-and-society", perhaps again reflecting the prevailing "intra-organism" mode of thought in its reluctance to postulate a deeper social reality. Contrast in this respect the different and largely complementary conception of sociolinguistics to be found in the work of Bernstein (1971, 1973), directed towards a theory of society, but one in which language has a critical function as the effective channel of transmission of the social structure.

Bernstein's studies of socialization suggest how the semiotic patterns of culture and subculture perpetuate themselves in language, and how a child is drawn into the systems of social values in the course of, and as a concomitant of, learning his mother tongue. Among these value systems are those relating to language itself, and these carry with them a whole baggage of largely negative attitudes to which the child is exposed – it is over-simple to suggest that a child has no conception of linguistic inferiority other than that which he learns through school. These attitudes are prevalent in family and peer group. But they are sanctioned from beyond; and the authority that comes from the adult world is felt most strongly in the context of the third of the primary socializing agencies, the school.

Through the accumulation of debate and experiment in the education of non-standard speakers, it seems to emerge that it is no great burden on a child, or even an adult, to live with two (or more) dialects provided the conditions are not unfavourable. This is not surprising once one accepts that, in language, variation is the norm. Unfortunately, however, an environment of linguistic prejudice constitutes a very unfavourable condition; as Riegel expresses it (1973),

> Children raised under poor economic conditions ... are commonly also raised under the least favorable linguistic contingencies, those leading to confounded bilingualism. They are prevented from transferring knowledge in one language to the other because the two languages are not sufficiently separated. ... The first step to aid them has to consist in accepting the two languages, e.g. standard and non-standard English, as separated and equal.

Riegel's concept of separateness raises interesting questions of a different kind, that we cannot go into here; but on the equality issue there can be no hedging.

I think it is fair to claim as a positive achievement for linguistics its part in modifying the prevailing social attitudes to dialectal varieties. This is not to claim that the battle has been won. But those who have worked in an educational context over a period of time can testify to the increasing objectivity towards, and tolerance for, non-standard forms of speech; it seems to go hand in hand with a greater interest in and concern for the spoken language. There has been opposition, of course, both from within and from outside the academic community; there are those for whom the recognition of social value in non-standard speech is nothing but sentimental egalitarianism, as well as others who have seized on the idealizations of formal linguistics as a justification for worn-out perscriptivism – a move made easier for them by the prevailing but quite erroneous notion that casual speech is fragmentary and formless. It is fairly generally known, by now, that linguists have always insisted that the standard/non-standard distinction has to do not with language as a system but with language as an institution – it is a function solely of the relation between a language and its speakers – and that all forms of language are equally deserving of respect and attention. No other group than the linguists has consistently espoused and explained this position.

No one would wish to imply, therefore, that linguists everywhere have contracted out of the social system. But the participation of a

group is not measured by the number of individuals in it who get their feet wet. We cannot divorce the social context of linguistics from its intellectual context; and it cannot be disputed that the profession as a whole has tended to dissociate itself from many questions of language that are of serious and understandable concern to laymen. We have disclaimed interest in questions of rhetoric; in socially weighted languages, such as those of politics and the law; in writing, journalism and the media; in technical languages and technical terminology; in translation and interpreting; and in the whole problem of evaluating and monitoring human communication. An example of what linguists are doing in these areas can be found in Ferguson's (1973) studies in the language of religion; but such studies are still rare. It is as if, far from struggling for social recognition, we have struggled to reject the recognition that society wants to thrust on to us, and the responsibility that goes with it. At an academic level we have wooed those disciplines which allowed us to maintain our own purity of thought; while the intellectual exchanges with other neighbouring disciplines, such as English, education, and rhetoric, have been minimal.

In short: linguistics has not yet faced up to the question of its social accountability. Social accountability is a complex notion which cannot be taken in from one angle alone. It is not defined as satisfying some abstract or symbolic entity such as a board of trustees, the business community or the taxpayer. Nor is it the same thing as satisfying our own individual consciences, which is a purely private luxury. There is an ideological component to it, which consists at least in part in eliminating some of the artificial disciplinary boundaries that we have inherited and continued to strengthen. At this level, many of the arguments lead back to this same point: that there are strong boundaries between academic disciplines, which hamper intellectual development, and induce both overspecialization and underapplication. Perhaps we need some "semi-revolutions" of the sort envisaged by Bennison Gray (1974), with his plea for unifying linguistics and rhetoric in a "semantic grammar". At any rate, in the human sciences, private conversations within one discipline seem to have outlived their usefulness; as Mary Douglas has said (1973),

> The specialists have had half a century to confer with their inner circle of initiates and to evolve rules of discourse appropriate to the fields they have hedged off. The time has come for a renewal of the original community and of the free-ranging conversation about the social basis of knowledge that it once enjoyed.

Nothing represents the unity and the social basis of knowledge better than language. Here "represents" is being used in both its senses: as I have tried to suggest all along, the linguistic system both realizes and symbolizes the social semiotic, of which academic knowledge is one part – to quote Mary Douglas again, "The time has come to treat everyday knowledge and scientific knowledge as a single field". The "truly comprehensive semiotic", which as envisaged by Maclean (1972) "must find its point of departure in a humanistic perspective upon social life", will have linguistics – or, at least, the study of language – as a vital component. In more concrete terms, if we are prepared to think of meaning as energy, and the exchange of meanings as the social creation of energy, linguistics can help to ensure that this energy is effectively released and that people come to achieve, much more than they are doing at present, their full potential as meaners.

But this role can be filled only by a linguistics "in the round", as I expressed it earlier, and unhampered by disputes over territoriality. Linguists cannot afford to absent themselves from the dialogue of disciplines; if they do, the study of language will simply go on without them. The public image of linguistics – one that unfortunately reflects the reality of some linguistics departments – is that it continues to be defined by a single interest and a single intellectual mould. Both the image and the reality are changing, especially as linguists reopen their contacts with teachers and educators. But there are many other avenues of public activity that have hardly begun to be explored.

This is partly, no doubt, because of our ignorance. How much do we yet know, for example, about linguistic interaction in the young children's peer group, and the part it plays in their construction of reality? Or about how a doctor or a politician or a poet makes language work for him? Or about why one example of speech or writing is judged more effective than another? But it is partly because we have not yet given up our right to put our chosen object, language, in its glass case and scrutinize it from just our own favourite angle. It has to be everyone else's idea of language that we look at, not just language as we choose to define it.

In this sense, the context for linguistics in the future is likely to be one in which linguistics in its present form as a social phenomenon ceases to exist. Society, language and mind are indissoluble: society creates mind, mind creates society, and language stands as mediator and metaphor for both these processes. That is the slogan. In terms of practicalities, provided there are still universities ten years from now, I

am confident that there will still be students of language. I imagine they will have little patience with an academic distinction between language structure and language use; but they may be very much concerned with the concept of language and the social system – with the language of politics, education, religion, ideology; with language and poetry, cinema, theatre, music, dance; with the language of mathematics and science, and with how it differs from the language of literature or of everyday conversation. Also, I think, with the whole question of how people use language to learn, and to construct the various levels of reality by reference to which we define ourselves. These concerns, in turn, should enable theoretical linguists to see more deeply into the semantics of language, the systems of meaning with which we actually operate as a symbolic potential. In my opinion, this is an area which we have hardly yet begun to understand.