Language, Culture, Identity

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Questo testo intende presentare in forma sintetica e divulgativa alcuni aspetti del rapporto tra linguaggio e contesti socio-culturali. Il pensiero antropologico novecentesco ha sottolineato l'esistenza di una relazione biunivoca fra linguaggio e cultura. Da un lato, la cultura influenza e determina gli usi linguistici: è questo il campo di riflessione della disciplina comunemente detta "sociolinguistica". Dall'altro lato, è il linguaggio che influenza e plasma la cultura stessa: siamo qui nell'ambito di riflessioni accomunabili sotto l'etichetta di "relativismo linguistico". Il nostro modo di pensare le relazioni fra linguaggio e identità etnica o culturale è ancora oggi influenzato da una forte eredità romantica: l'idea del linguaggio come espressione di uno "spirito del popolo" che definisce in modo compatto ed esclusivo l'identità di un gruppo sociale e di un territorio. Questo modello, che influenza a fondo anche il pensiero antropologico, rivela i suoi limiti nella parte finale del XX secolo, mostrandosi incapace di comprendere i fenomeni della globalizzazione. La critica delle concezioni essenzialiste dell'identità porta a mettere a fuoco una molteplicità di livelli di identità linguistica nelle società contemporanee, i cui intrecci complessi e conflittuali sono talvolta definiti attraverso la nozione di eteroglossia.

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Culture influences language

It can easily be understood how linguistic uses may vary according to the natural environment, economic systems, types of social relationships and what could be called the world pictures of different cultures. Lexicon, grammar rules, and codes and rules of linguistic communication are all entirely formed by these elements, that is to say, by the anthropological features of the speakers' community.

As regards the lexicon, a traditional anthropological example, albeit a very controversial one, is that concerning the numerous words to describe 'snow' used in the languages of peoples living in cold countries (such as the Aivilik, Igloolik and Inuit, commonly called Eskimo). Snow is referred to by different words according to its type (freshly-fallen, icy, packing snow etc.), its position or its use. Its importance, not so much in the natural environment itself as in its cultural transactions, seems to impose a greater lexical differentiation than ours (which in its turn is bijective related to a perceptive differentiation). I have called it a controversial example because its introduction by traditional anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Benjamin Whorf, has recently been criticised in

that it was based on an insufficient understanding of Eskimo grammar, in particular on the ethnographer's inability to differentiate between 'words' and 'roots' [1]. Nevertheless, the idea that vocabulary reflects the prevalent cultural interests of a human community is perceptive and difficult to contradict. On the contrary, the ways in which culture affects grammar are not so clear. Some of the hypotheses that have been put forward seem rather generalized and obvious. For example, the idea that nomadic tribes use syntactical structures that emphasise movement, or the connection between the introduction of private property and structures based on the verb 'to have' (in societies that have not institutionalised property the use of the transitive verb to indicate possession – "I have got something" – would be replaced by expressions such as "something is to me" [2]).

In any case, accepting the cultural variability of the language, the problem that anthropology raises regards the degree of this variability, whether language depends partly on the context of a specific culture or whether on the other hand it is also linked to universal type cognitive structures that do not vary according to the context. How far, then, are linguistic differences simply variations of a universal meta-language? And, on the other hand, how far does is it a matter of differences that are somewhat incommensurable? This problem has been extremely thoroughly examined in the field of cross-cultural semantics. What happens when we have to translate a language that is deeply rooted in a culture that is anthropologically very different from our own? Let us examine the apparently very simple case of descriptive words for what could be called natural phenomena. According to a realist conception that sees the meaning of a word in the object that it indicates, it is precisely reference to the object that ensures translatability. For example, it is sufficient to identify how a certain language expresses the concept of 'tree', 'to walk', 'to eat' etc. and that is all we need do. What we are thinking of here is translation as a simple transposition of the meaning itself from one linguistic code to another, no matter how different, rather like a cryptic puzzle where, having found the key, an absolute equivalence can be established between the hidden message and the decoded one.

But things change if we think of meaning as being determined by linguistic uses that are always cultural uses. What can be more universally human for example than 'to eat'? Yet in this regard many cultures use a variety of words that may leave us perplexed. Let us take the example of Indonesia. In his classic work on Java, Clifford Geertz records no fewer than five different ways of asking the simple question "Are you going to eat rice and *kassava* now?" according to whether the interlocutor is a close friend of the speaker, just an acquaintance of the same social class, or of a higher social class. The same word that means 'to eat' changes (*mangan* between close friends, *neda* within the same social class, *dahar* for higher social classes [3]). Even more complex is the case of Bali, as summarised by the anthropologist Mark Hobart:

> Balinese has several lexical levels with ranked words for the same object or act. Words for ingesting include *miunan*, *marayunan*, *ngajengang*, *madaar*, *ngamah*, *ngaloklok*, *neda* and *nysèksèk*. The first two are used of high priests and Brahmans, or when inferior address princes. *Ngajengang* is used for most other high castes. *Madaar* is used with strangers, where status is unclear, for politeness, by some ambitious people about themselves, but also of the sick. *Ngamah* is used of lower castes and, by them, for people they know well. It may also be used loosely of animals. Different animals are distinguished by their way of feeding. So *ngaloklok* is said of beasts which gulp, like dogs and pigs (*neda* is used of dogs owned by high castes); *nysèksèk* describes how a chicken picks at the ground, and how people pick out items from a collection. There are many others [4].

Faced with this account it would be tempting to ask, "But is there no single, more general word that corresponds with our concept of the natural mechanism of eating, common to people and animals and in particular to all social classes of people, from which all other words derive as special cases?" Yet there is nothing in the ethnographical report to suggest the existence of a similar meta-linguistic entity, of a 'natural and general eating'; only our ethnocentrism leads us to make this supposition. Perhaps we should accept the fact that in Balinese culture and language the meaning of 'to eat' has never fully coincided with the meaning we give the word. However, neither is it so remote as to hinder us from understanding it: a translation is possible even though it will never be an exact equivalence. I must also emphasise that this translation and understanding is possible not by trying to throw away our own linguistic categories, but by departing from them and putting them into play. The "opacity" of ethnocentrism is inevitable, but it must be faced critically, triggering a process at the end of which our categories will probably come closer to the others, by changing themselves.

In any case, these anthropological observations support the linguistic principle of indexicality, according to which the meaning of words or expressions is always determined by the specific, concrete context of the social transactions in which the linguistic practices take place. A similar principle is the basis of the cross-cultural study of language that the anthropologist Alessandro Duranti makes coincide with the discipline of ethno-pragmatics which is defined as follows: "The ethnography-grounded study of linguistic uses, throwing light on the ways in which linguistic communication and social interaction constitute each other".

Language influences culture

The foregoing discussion leads us to the second aspect of the culture-language relationship. An important anthropological tradition of thought holds that this relationship is a bijective one. While on the one hand culture shapes languages, on the other hand it is also formed by them. That is to say that linguistic differences are the basis of important peculiarities of cultures and the world visions that support them. This view, usually called linguistic relativism, completely turns its back on both semantic realism and cognitive universalism mentioned earlier, in order to argue: a) that linguistic uses determine perceptive and cognitive structures and not vice versa, and b) that such linguistic uses and relative semantic systems are basically incommensurable. A fundamental difference in the identification of meanings on the cross-cultural level follows from this: the inextricable relationship of language, thought and culture [5] suggests considering each language as being associated with a specific distinct world vision.

At about the middle of the 20th century the anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, both devoted to the study of Indoeuropean languages such as those of the Amerindian groups, expressed their views on a similar principle of linguistic relativity. Sapir clearly sets out the philosophical premises of this viewpoint, writing that

> ... the real world is to a large extent built up on the language habits of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. The worlds in which different societies live are *distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached* [6].

In turn Whorf emphasises that our way of looking at the world, including the natural world, does not depend on things themselves which, so to speak, impose their real meaning on us, but rests on the contrary on an agreement or social solidarity that is deeply entrenched in our commonest (and usually unconscious) linguistic models:

> We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way –- an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and un-stated one, but *its words are absolutely obligatory*; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees [7].

Obviously this view cannot be understood in a deterministic sense: we cannot argue that cultural models (including cognitive and perceptive aspects) depend almost automatically on grammars that are reciprocally immeasurable. We can, for example, consider the relation that exists between how a society makes a conceptual difference between man and woman and the precise distinction a grammar makes between masculine and feminine genders. But we certainly cannot think that a completely dichotomic view of the genders (that is a different thing – it must be remembered – from the biological difference between the sexes) is simply the 'product' of a grammatical classification. Deterministic relativism cannot be supported for numerous reasons [8], that basically consists of two principles: a) the impossible task of precisely separating thought, culture and language prevents us from establishing causal univocal relationships between any one of these areas and the others; b) it is never possible to distinguish independent cultural entities and linguistic communities that are clearly separate and even more difficult to make them correspond in a peculiar and distinctive way.

Further, Sapir and Whorf were a long way off from upholding the linguistic determinism that is often attributed to them. It is true that their theories are tinged with tones of relativism according to the preponderant spirit of North American anthropology of the day, however they were mainly concerned with exposing the culturally active role of language. The two scholars opposed the positivist tendency to consider language as a neutral mediator in the relationships between a thought and a reality that exist prior to and independently from it. From this point of view their ideas are still very pertinent today, in addition to being backed up by the most important results of the 20th century philosophy of language, and end up by becoming fused with that idea of ethno-pragmatics that we have seen in the quotation from Duranti above. It is important to note how this approach, as opposed to semantic realism, does not necessarily result in cultural relativism. Indeed, it implies neither a) the idea of a variety of incommensurable, distinct, united cultural-linguistic entities; on the contrary (as we shall see in the following sections) it emphasises the phenomena of intermixture, hybridism, multiple belonging, nor b) the impossibility of determining universal characteristics of cultural and linguistic processes, in particular on the cognitive level.

Indeed, important anthropological traditions have examined this latter point in depth. A very well known example is that from cross-cultural studies on the perception and naming of colours by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay. The question these authors considered is the following. Human cultures and languages recognise and name colours in extremely different ways. The number of primary colours that are identified varies (from two to eleven) as do ways of establishing divisions

between the scales on the colour spectrum. So, are these variations arbitrary and solely dependent on local contexts, or is it possible to see a coherent perceptive and cognitive model underlying them? Berlin and Kay, working comparatively on ninety-eight languages (twenty using direct analysis and seventy-eight using previously edited statements), claimed that is was possible to identify some common characteristics in the development of the semantic area relating to colours. The differences are anything but incoherent and are arranged according to a rather precise pattern. First and foremost "each of the words for primary colours in all the languages could be referred to one of eleven colours of reference" [9]. In other words, a universal method of perception is imposed on language that tends to break the colour spectrum down into established perceptive units. It is therefore the latter that establish the meaning of words for colour. Secondly, a precise evolutional progression exists in the development and differentiation of colour words. In not such 'rich' languages it starts with a basic differentiation between just two fundamental colours, black and white (or light/dark) and then proceeds to further divisions according to a regular order. When a third word is introduced it will almost invariably be red, followed by green and yellow, and then in the sequence blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey [10].

Berlin and Kay present their research as a reply to linguistic relativism and the "Sapir-Whorf theories". Conversely their theories have been heavily criticised by supporters of radical contextualism (on the basis that the methods of research and linguistic surveys used somehow presuppose the results). However, universalist theories are perfectly legitimate: they must be proved case by case and are not in themselves incompatible with a view that establishes meaning mainly in the practices of social action.

Language and identity

Whether linguistic practices are based on universal cognitive structures or not, anthropology and the social sciences are deeply concerned with their rich variety for a further reason: language and communication (verbal and non-verbal) are the main criteria used to describe (or maybe construct, as shall be seen) the differences between human groups. Indeed, it is by referring to linguistic diversities, over and above other cultural elements, that the members of a community identify themselves and are identified by others. In other words, language is a powerful instrument of identity and belonging.

There are numerous levels of identification that are conveyed by means of language:

– firstly, the national level and (obviously distinct from the former) the ethnic and/or regional one, that for historical reasons play a significant role and on which we will dwell shortly;

– rank or social class: one only has to think for example of how often we speak sarcastically about those who 'do not speak properly', or who use special dialects, registers or expressions that are thought of as being 'unsophisticated'. It is a demarcative instrument as regards the 'lowest' of our social rankings. In addition, the expressions we use when speaking to others always reflect the status relationship between 'them' and 'us'; close, friendly relations or formal reserve, respect and deference require different forms of exchange. In Italian, for example, these status rules affect the choice to use the informal '*tu*' or the formal '*Lei*', surname or first name, dialect or official language, formal or informal registers in public verbal communication. (On the other hand it is interesting to note that in different contexts rules of propriety may change even towards the

same person, and, moreover, that these rules may be interpreted and used to express subtle feelings of defiance or sarcasm etc.);

– level of sexual identity or gender. In all societies the 'proper' way for women to speak is different from that for men, a difference that sometimes goes so far as to the methodical use of a special vocabulary and of different syntactical structures. If this may seem strange, just think about phenomena that are very familiar to us. In European societies it is usually inappropriate for a woman to use expressions that are too 'strong' and direct, or to use pronunciation that is the characteristic of dialect or slang. In English for example the socio-linguist Robin Lakoff observed the particularly feminine way of replying to questions with ascending rather than descending inflections (as is usually the case in emphatic forms of reply), adding in their turn a question tag – as in the example of the utterance "they caught the robber last week, didn't they?" [11];

– the level of generation. What is particularly relevant here is the phenomenon of languages of juvenile groups and subcultures that are characterised by the common use of neologisms, of special phonetics and spelling, and more generally of codes that are extremely different from official ones. The sharing of these linguistic codes (together with those regarding cultural consumption and trends) is a strong cohesive group element which often not only identifies youngsters from adults but one particular generation, even after the passage of many years;

– the level of professional identity. The identifying cohesive element here is the sharing of technical and special languages, of jargon that is not familiar to the community at large. One only has to think, for example, of the jargon used by computer programmers, but also, albeit in a more subtle way, by university students where professional characteristics blend with those of generation and often of social class, giving rise to very interesting combinations.

However all these forms of social use of linguistic differences are of lesser importance, at least as is usually thought, in comparison with the level of national or ethnic belonging. This perception has something in common with what could be called the persisting Romantic heritage of the major countries and cultural traditions of Europe. I am referring to the fundamental idea – that has characterised the entire process of European nation-building in the modern age – of 'natural languages' being the basis of as many natural identities. Romantic culture perceived natural languages, especially in their folkloristic and traditional expressions, as the most immediate expression of *Volksgeist*, that authentic national spirit that is meant to establish the forms and political unity of human societies. The equation nation-homeland-language is the foundation of modern nationalist ideology, and forms an image of citizen that, while on the one hand is the abstract subject of rights according to the Enlightment, on the other is deeply rooted in an ethnic belonging that has its essential element in language (sometimes together with religion and specific 'traditions').

Historiography tells us that these roots of national unity are not so very ancient, on the contrary they have often been recently regenerated or even 'invented'. They are a consequence rather than a cause of the development of national unity. As far as Italy is concerned it is sufficient to recall that at the time of the Unification the national language was based on an important literary tradition that had adopted the model of Italian in Tuscan dialect. At the level of spoken language, however, the country was divided into numerous very diverse dialects, so much so that the 'language question' was one of the main concerns of the Post-Unification ruling classes. Indeed, it was only resolved by mass television broadcasting in the 1960's onwards. In European countries with an

older history of unity it was also political unity that produced linguistic unity (with pronounced normative results on the spoken language) rather than vice versa.

Although 'invented', the Romantic model – nation/homeland/language – is strongly rooted in western and European culture and politics, deeply influencing our way of thinking of ourselves as a community (to use the famous words of Benedict Anderson). Apart from anything else, this model has profoundly affected colonial politics by playing the role of normative standard imposed on the cultural and political level over subject nations – who where in themselves very far from it. It has been well demonstrated, for example, by African colonial history marked by an acculturative strategy of forced subdivisions and aggregations that has sometimes had devastating results, while it is true that some of the ethnic strife which disrupts the continent today are one of its probable direct consequences.

Anthropology itself has been deeply influenced by this nationalist ideology. The discipline has taken for granted that cohesive, well-defined cultural-linguistic spheres were the natural condition of all humankind, even though among primitive peoples we speak of 'tribes' rather than of 'nations'. This divisionist obsession, as Clifford Geertz called it (1999), lies at the basis of the same debates on cultural and linguistic relativism. Relativism combines an anti-realist epistemology with an essentialist and divisionist conception of languages and cultures. This latter component is its weak point, the source of difficulties and paradoxes which one encounters (that on the other hand have by some been used to suggest a return to unsupportable forms of epistemological and semantic realism).

From mono-linguism to heteroglossia

In an essay first published in 1985, the anthropologist James Clifford wrote:

> An intellectual historian of the year 2010 […] may even look back on the first two-thirds of our century and observe that this was a time when Western intellectuals were preoccupied with grounds of meaning and identity they called "culture" and "language". I think we are seeing signs that the privilege given to natural languages and, as it were, natural cultures, is dissolving. These objects and epistemological grounds are now appearing as constructs, achieved fictions, containing and domesticating heteroglossia [12].

Twenty years later the year 2010 is not very far off and Clifford's prospect can be clearly seen. In the last twenty years social disciplines have criticised "essentialist" and "reified" uses of concepts of culture and cultural or ethnic identity, revealing their "fictional" nature (that is, showing the rhetorical and political processes that mould them). Developments in the process of cultural, communicative and economic globalisation have simultaneously made the 'nation-language-homeland' model even less conceivable. World market growth, the long flows of migrants and diasporas, the gradual weakening of the political strength of the traditional Nation-State, the increasing use of mass-media broadcasting and the Internet – all this seems to finally bring the illusions of the Romantic heritage to an end. Once again Clifford expresses this point very cogently:

> In a world with too many voices speaking all at once, a world where syncretism and parodic invention are becoming the rule, not the exception, an urban, multinational world of institutio-

> nal transience – where American clothes made in Korea are worn by young people in Russia, where everyone's "roots" are in some degree cut – in such a world it becomes increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent "culture" or "language" [13].

If traditional anthropology was obsessed with questions of the authenticity and incommensurability between cultural and linguistic traditions, modern anthropology focuses its attention on 'heteroglossia'. This word was coined by Mikhail Bachtin (see table 1) when analysing literary texts and means "the simultaneous use of different types of discourse or other signs, the tension that is created between them and the conflicting relationship that revolve within a text" [14]. But in modern social sciences the idea is removed from the field of pure textual analysis to describe the interaction between 'voices' and discourses that in many parts of the world inextricably intertwine in everyday communication. Hidden within essentialist ideology for two centuries, heteroglossia seems to break out and come to the fore once again in the age of globalisation.

This in no way means that linguistic behaviours cease to be important elements of assertions of identity and to be interpreted and made use of in this way by social actors. However, "identity" should not be understood in the essentialist sense but in a processual sense: an incessant structure in which the actors, from various social levels, behave strategically using the cultural and linguistic 'raw material' that is available to them. In globalised society, languages, together with religion, are the main instruments used to construct and represent an identity for themselves and for others. But, as has been said, this occurs on a variety of levels that in daily use may change continually. The example of a citizen that speaks one single language, that identifies him or her as a member of one single community or nation, is increasingly unlikely. In Europe, that is in the cradle of the Nation-States, the ideal model partly holds fast but here too it is undermined by phenomena that make the language question very much more complex. The following levels of linguistic identity and competence for example must be taken into account:

– an international community that communicates in English or other lingua francas;

– official national languages (in many cases beyond Europe, distinct from the idioms actually spoken; further, in ex-colonial c akers of neighbouring regions, and great importance is given to them when guessing where the speaker originates from;

– local dialects, often spoken at the same time as the official language in more familiar, less formal contexts;

– bilingualism or multilingualism that occur near the borders of countries, or that are produced from 'mixed' marriages, long periods of education abroad, or from other cultural or educational experiences;

– mixed languages or communication that are produced in the field of migrant communities or diasporas or in the sector of tourism or other phenomena of cultural mixing.

All these elements are added to and interconnected with the factors of linguistic differentiation that have already been mentioned that regard social rank, gender, age category etc., going to make up a very complex and dynamic picture. We could not be further from the idea of those closed and isolated languages that are so exclusive as to cause methods of thinking that cannot be measured – the great obsession of classical anthropology, which lies at the very heart of the ambiguous problem of linguistic relativism.

At this point however the re-examination of the traditional model of relationships between language, culture and identity still lacks one dimension, what can be generally called politics. When we talk about actors and social groups that freely and creatively formulate strategies of identifying structures, and are able to move confidently in a context of heteroglossia, it should not be thought that all this occurs in a sort of political vacuum – like an innocent game between competitors who all start from the same level. On the contrary, the starting points of the "game" are precisely the great, dramatic inequalities in the distribution of resourses (economic and cultural) and of power that characterise modern life, in international relations as in those within individual societies. The formulation of the differences arises from this very fundamental asymmetry of relationships. This means that all politics of difference take place in the confrontation between two aspects that cannot be separated, like the two faces of a coin. In other words, difference, in linguistics too, on the one hand asserts itself as a marker of belonging, often at least implicitly regarded as being exclusive and superior. On the other hand, it is emphasised as a stigma that marks the 'others', the bearers of a lower status. Starting off with the Greeks who called foreigners with no knowledge of Greek 'barbarians', the construction of downgrading markers according to linguistic use is a simple widespread cultural mechanism. As has already been said, one only has to think of how common jokes and witticisms are in modern societies about 'how others speak' – the lower classes, urban dwelling peasants, immigrants and so forth. Sarcasm that is anything but innocent, and which should be understood in the light of what Pierre Bourdieu called strategies of distinction.

If therefore linguistic peculiarity has never been a cognitive prison, neither has it always been a purely free choice. For those belonging to the lower classes, identity is often not a choice but an imposition. But while linguistic use reflects a lower class, it may at the same time represent an element of 'rebellion' against the rules of the dominant classes. In other words, what begins as a stigma, may end up by being proudly asserted in the area of oppositive strategies (or 'tactics' of popular culture where anti-hegemonic resistance is implicit and occasional, as those described by Michel de Certeau [15]). A case that has been often studied in this area is, for example, Afro-American English and its relations with the official language of the United States; but also the relations between Italian and its various dialects or regional varieties has very interesting complex aspects, and is extremely full of connotations with a political meaning.

Finally, if there is a common feature to the great complexities of linguistic and cultural relations in modern Europe and the world, it consists in the constant tension between universal codes of communication and local or vernacular forms of speech (and of life). Long considered a fundamentally human rule, mono-linguism today definitely seems to be an exception.

Notes

1 L. Martin, *Eskimo words for snow: A case study in the genesis and decay of an anthropological example*, "American Anthropologist", 88, 2, 1986, **[p/pp.?]**.

2 C.R. Ember - M. Ember, *Antropologia culturale*, trad. it., Bologna 1998, p. 106.

3 C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, New York, 1960; E.A. Schultz - R.H. Lavenda, *Antropologia culturale*, trad. it., Bologna 1999, p. 83.

4 M. Hobart, *Summer's Days and Salad Days: The Coming of Age of Anthropology?*, in L. Holy (ed.), *Comparative Anthropology*, Oxford 1987, p. 39.

[5] J. Gumperz - S. Levinson, *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity,* Cambridge, 1996, p. 2.

[6] E. Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, (ed. D.G. Mandelbaum), Berkeley 1958, [**p./pp.?**].

[7] B.L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, (ed. J.B. Carroll), Cambridge 1956, [**p./pp.?**].

[8] See Schultz - Lavenda, *Antropologia culturale*, cit., pp. 84-85.

[9] P. Kay, *Color*, in A. Duranti (ed.), *Key Words in Language and Culture*, Oxford 2001, p. 54.

[10] *Loc. cit.*

[11] R. Lakoff, *Language and woman's place*, "Language and Society", 2, 1973, pp. 45-80; Id., *Talking Power: The Politics of Language in Our Lives*, New York 1990, [**p./pp.?**]; see Ember - Ember, *Antropologia culturale*, cit., p. 110.

[12] J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge 1988, p. 95.

[13] *Loc. cit.*

[14] V. Ivanov, *Heteroglossia*, in A. Duranti (ed.), *Key Words in Language and Culture*, Oxford 2001, p. 107.

[15] See M. De Certeau, *L'invention au quotidien,* I, *L'art de faire*, Paris 1990, [**p./pp.?**].

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Source?

Mikhail Bachtin and Heteroglossia

Bakhtin's views anticipated the analytical school of linguistic philosophy, and emphasized the vitality of language. Speech and writing come with the viewpoints and intentions of their authors preserved in the multi-layered nature of language, and heteroglossia is therefore an effective argument against some of the more extreme views of Postmodernism.

Whereas the Russian formalists drew their inspiration from Saussure, seeing language as a system of signs, Bakhtin took a sociological line similar to that later developed in Austin's speech acts. The spoken word is primary, and words in conversation are orientated towards future words – they stimulate and anticipated replies, structuring themselves to do so. Many genres (e.g. epics, tragedy, lyrics) overlook or even suppress this natural feature of language to present a unified world-view. But the novel accepts, and indeed makes use, of many voices,weaving them into a narrative with direct speech, represented speech, and what Bakhtin called doubly-orientated speech. Four categories make up the latter: stylization (a borrowed style), parody, *skaz* (oral narration) and dialogue (a hidden shaping of the author's voice).

Bakhtin stressed the multi-layered nature of language, which he called heteroglossia. Not only are there social dialects, jargons, turns of phrase characteristic of the various professions, industries, commerce, of passing fashions, etc., but also socio-ideological contradictions carried forward from various periods and levels in the past. Language is not a neutral medium that can be simply appropriated by a speaker, but something that comes to us populated with the intentions of others. Every word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially-charged life.

Bakhtin's concepts go further than Derrida's notion of 'trace', or Foucault's archaeology of political usage. Words are living entities, things that are constantly being employed and partly taken over, carrying opinions, assertions, beliefs, information, emotions and intentions of others, which we partially accept and modify. All speech is dialogic, has an internal polemic, and this is most fully exploited by the novel, particularly the modern novel.

From C. John Holcombe (http://www.textetc.com/theory/bakhtin.html).