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ABSTRACT

Two papers address different issues in linguistic theory. "Attitudes Norms and Standardization in English: Some Aspects of the Language In Its Social Context," by Bent Preisler, looks at how attitudes affect language norms and ultimately, standardization in British and U.S. English. It begins with the attitudes and communicative patterns of children and adolescents and the development of male/female speech patterns later in life. After relating this to the process of standardization in society at large, some problems in these specific social contexts are discussed. Implications for the teaching of English as a Second Language are also examined. "Metapragmatics and Chauncey Gardener: Toward and Ecology of Communication," by Claudia Caffi, discusses the role of metapragmatics in the study of human interaction. First, three perspectives on metapragmatics are presented, and then the application of metapragmatic perspective in analysis of empirical data is illustrated in dialogues from the film "Being There." It is argued that metapragmatics allows examination of the unintended meaning assigned to utterances by the character Chance and enables us to make the conditions of interaction explicit. (MSE)

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ERIC

Attitudes, norms and standardization in English: some aspects of the language in its social context*

Bent Preisler

Perhaps the most fascinating fact about language is that its form is a manifestation of speaker identity. Like a flag, whose colors and shapes symbolize a particular nationality, the sounds and other patterns of a speaker's language, though they may not have meaning in a semantic sense, are recognized by other speakers as complex symbols of allegiance. In fact, the flag is a much cruder symbol of identity and allegiance than language, which can signal not only nationality but an infinite variety of regional, social, ethnic and political affinities, and which may even vary according to the particular situation.

This complex linguistic manifestation of speaker identity is not in every respect a conscious one. However, not only are speakers usually able to recognize varieties that are different from their own, they will often *feel* strongly about those varieties because of the cultural values, experienced as positive or negative, which they symbolize. If these varieties are experienced as positive, even desirable, the speaker's own variety may change so that it becomes more similar to them. If they are experienced as negative, perhaps symbolizing a threat to the speaker's own values, the distinctive features of the speaker's variety may instead be further emphasized. This is the basic mechanism of how language norms are formed, and of how language changes. The

*Inaugural Lecture, University of Roskilde, September 7, 1992 formation of language norms is seldom determined primarily by a need to improve communication, nor will the mere exposure to another variety, without the accompanying attitudes, be enough to bring about changes in the language.

In this lecture I will discuss some important aspects of how attitudes affect language norms and, ultimately, standardization in English. I will be talking mainly about Britain and the United States. My point of departure will be the attitudes and communicative patterns of children and adolescents and how these are probably related to patterns of male/female speech in later life. After relating this question to the process of standardization in society at large, I will discuss some particular problems in Britain and the United States in their historical contexts. Finally, I will have a few words to say about some of the implications for the teaching of English as a foreign language.

What kind of social group is strong enough to make its members identify with it to such an extent that, consciously or unconsciously, they will adjust their language patterns to each other in indication of group solidarity? The theory of "social networks," introduced into sociolinguistics by James and Leslie Milroy (e.g. Milroy, 1980), distinguishes between closed ("dense") and open networks. Closed networks are of the "everybody-knows-everybody" type (e.g. family, circle of friends, workmates, small village), whereas open networks consist of individuals whose contacts tend not to know each other. Closed networks are effective in enforcing their own group norms, including linguistic norms, whereas open networks are not.

If we combine this theory with the description, presented by Maltz and Borker (1982), of children's peer groups during the time period (age 5-15) when they tend to associate primarily with members of their own sex, we may have a culturally based explanation of how distinctive male/female speech patterns evolve.

Boys' groups are relatively large, and they are hierarchical, with a group leader at the top. The reason they are large is that they tend to be non-exclusive: everybody can play along, as long as they know their place in the hierarchy. Relative status has to be competed for, and games are competitive. Speech, therefore, is used for self-assertion. Furthermore, boys' groups are relatively stable over time. Such a large, closed and stable network is the ideal environment for norm-enforcement, including the enforcement of linguistic norms. This norm will often be an emphatic version of the local nonstandard variety, which variety is associated with "toughness."

Girls' groups, by contrast, are small, often consisting of two "best friends." Their relationship is one of equality, and play is noncompetitive. Communication focuses to a great extent on the sharing of feelings. Listening to the other is just as important and satisfying as talking. Girls' groups are not very stable over time: a girl has the same best friend for some weeks or months, during which period they are extremely close to one another, to the exclusion of the other girls in the class or neighborhood. Then suddenly there is a highly emotional breakup, after which each girl is free to form a new exclusive relationship with another girl. Because they are small and short-lived, girls' groups are ineffective as norm-enforcement factors. Girls are therefore more open to influence from their mothers and from the less closed networks of which they are members. And like their mothers, whose speech patterns have developed in the same way, they will often end up using the standard forms of the language more frequently than the boys.

In this sketchy account of the archetypal boys' and girls' groups we may see the foundation of two different, yet related, features of adult language use. One feature pertains to the use of **standard vs. nonstandard** forms: men tend to use nonstandard forms more frequently than women. Conversely, women's more frequent use of the standard forms of the language means that language changes contributing to standardization tend to be spearheaded by women. By 1975, these tendencies had already been confirmed, in the United States, for New York City (Labov, 1966), North Carolina

(Levine & Crockett, 1966) and Detroit (Shuy et al., 1967), and in Britain, for Glasgow (Macaulay & Trevelyan, cited in Macaulay, 1977) and Norwich (Trudgill, 1974), and I will not go into any details here except to point out one important fact: most adults, regardless of social class, will say if you ask them that they regard the standard forms of the language as desirable and "proper," and consider nonstandard forms to be undesirable and "bad." In other words, the choice between a nonstandard form and a standard form, say *walkin'* instead of *walking* or *ain't* instead of *isn't*, is a choice between a stigmatized and a prestigious form. When in informal situations speakers, men especially, use a relatively high frequency of the stigmatized forms, it is because unacknowledged forces of group solidarity are at work.

The other feature of male-female speech differentiation is related to the **interaction** in boys' as opposed to girls' groups: as we saw, boys tend to use speech especially for self-assertion, whereas girls seem to value the supportive aspects of communication more. What are the linguistic equivalents of assertive and supportive behavior? Well, the issue is not as simple as the question appears to suggest, because there is seldom any one-to-one relationship between type of behavior and linguistic form. What we can say is that there is a whole area in the system of the language, involving intonation and grammar as well as vocabulary, which is geared especially to the expression of interpersonal attitude. Assertive behavior, like ordering people around and expressing categorical opinions, is often associated with the use of imperative clauses, and the absence of expressions of doubt and uncertainty. Conversely, supportive behavior is often associated with interrogative structures and modal expressions like *I think, maybe, possibly, it is unlikely that*, etc. In reality, the way these forms are used is a great deal more complex, as shown by a large-scale investigation into male-female interactional language in the industrial community of Lancaster (Preisler, 1986).

It was the basic hypothesis of the Lancaster project that if it turned out that men and women did in fact use these linguistic categories differently, then this would simply be a manifestation of male assertive as opposed to female supportive behavior. However, although the linguistic gender difference was confirmed beyond any doubt, it was not primarily a function of the behavioral difference. In other words, although male speakers would more often than female speakers show assertive behavior, the individual male speaker would use few modal expressions regardless of whether his nonlinguistic behavior happened to be assertive or supportive. Conversely, the individual female speaker would use a high frequency of modal expressions even if she was being highly assertive and influential.

These results seem to indicate that although the gender-specific use of linguistic tentativeness signals is learned in terms of interaction during childhood, it apparently develops into generalized speech norms. Could they somehow be related to the other set of norms which I have discussed with reference to girls' groups and boys' groups, the gender-specific use of standard vs. nonstandard forms?

Well, if boys tend to use nonstandard language because they associate it with toughness, then the same attitude would also lead to the relative absence of linguistic tentativeness signals. Conversely, the greater influence of "polite society" on girls might well further a tentative speech style as well as the use of standard forms.

The Lancaster project provides further evidence that the two types of gender-specific norm may be related in this way. Like gender-specific use of standard forms, gender-specific use of tentativeness signals tends to be particularly noticeable among **young** people (cp. e.g. Milroy, 1980), as opposed to the older generation whose speech styles may gradually have become less extreme as a result of their more open social networks, and the more complex pressures of adult society. And like gender-specific use of standard forms, such variation in the use of tentativeness signals seems to be particularly marked in the **lower middle class**. This, as far as the use of standard forms are concerned, has been explained in terms of lower-middle-class women's greater social insecurity (e.g. Trudgill, 1975). Although the female speech style of relative ·tativeness seems to be a generalized norm, which does not necessarily reflect psychological insecurity, it is still possible that it is a culturally transmitted reflection of the historical social insecurity of women, especially in the lower middle class.

As I pointed out earlier, all native speakers tend to be in overt agreement on what constitutes "good" language as opposed to "bad" language (see e.g. Labov, 1970). This means that one particular variety of the language is exerting a very powerful influence on the nation's collective language behavior. During the early middle ages, as far as Britain is concerned, the dialect of London was already beginning to exert that kind of influence because of the growing social and political power of its speakers. It became prestigious and socially rewarding to adopt it, and thus the dialect of London came to be the nonlocalized model for the whole kingdom.

When society has decided on a model, there are two natural stages in the process of turning the chosen variety into the standard for the language as a whole (see Haugen, 1966): (1) the **form** of the standard variety must be made available to all speakers of the language, e.g. through a literature written in that variety, and through grammars and dictionaries; (2) the **uses** of the standard variety must be extended to cover every aspect of public life: government, administration, the courts, the Church, business, science, etc.

The result of this process, which as far as English is concerned took place gradually over the centuries, is a variety which comes to represent the official culture of the nation. It is the variety on which the written language is based, and it is the variety normally taught in the schools and used by educated people in all their public functions. In fact, as often happens with standardized varieties, Standard English frequently comes to be thought of as constituting the language of the nation. When non-native speakers learn English, "English" really means that particular, very influential, variety. The negative aspect of this is that nonstandard varieties tend to be considered deviant, even corrupt, versions of the language, their speakers being thought of as lazy or less intelligent.

In terms of attitudes, then, the significance of the standard variety is at least twofold: (1) within the national community, it gives prestige to speakers, indicating membership of the social elite and marking them off from the less educated; and (2) in representing "the language," it becomes a symbol of cultural autonomy. These two factors together explain why questions of language norm are often extremely sensitive, and why language debates are often highly emotional. They also lie at the root of some of the particular developments to be discussed in the following.

I have so far been making particular reference to "British English," as distinct from "American English." American English is that variety of English which has developed in the United States and Canada, where English was introduced during the 17th and 18th centuries. The English varieties of the United States and Canada have a number of features in common that distinguish them from the other native English varieties, such as the varieties spoken in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, which, for historical reasons, are more similar to British English (Trudgill and Hannah, 1982). Looking first at Britain, and then at the United States, I will now consider some important aspects of the standardization process.

In discussing standardization, it is necessary both with regard to British and American English to distinguish between pronunciation on the one hand, which in sociolinguistic terms is called "accent," and grammar/vocabulary on the other, which is what "dialect" refers to. It is significant that the term "Standard English" usually refers to grammar and vocabulary only. In the middle classes, regardless of region, we see very little variation from Standard English grammar and vocabulary. However, British middle class speakers have not felt called upon to drop their local *accents* to the same extent. Standard English, in other words, is spoken with all kinds of regional and social accents in Britain (Trudgill, 1983).

But is there no standard British accent? Well, in a sense there is, but as far as the people of Britain are concerned, the process of standardization has not gone very far. This is the variety that linguists call Received Pronunciation (or RP), and which is commonly known as "Oxford English." RP is understood everywhere in Britain, but is used mostly in England. Here it is a nonlocalized accent – it is not possible to tell where an RP speaker comes from. However, RP is associated with the English "public" schools, i.e. with the upper- and upper-middle classes, and is in fact spoken only by about 4% of the British population (Trudgill & Hannah, 1982). Nevertheless, RP is also the accent traditionally taught to foreign *learners* of English, who are often greatly surprised to find, on arriving in England for the first time, that most native speakers do not speak the kind of English the learners have been taught, and that they may therefore be quite difficult to understand. Furthermore, the learners are frequently quite unaware that a good RP accent is likely to give the impression that they identify with the upper classes (see also Færch et al., 1984, pp. 120-122).

The teaching of spoken English in British schools (see Stubbs, 1976) has always been characterized by some confusion both about what spoken Standard English is and to what extent it should be taught. This confusion stems mainly from the fact that Standard English as it has been described by grammars and dictionaries is often based on written English, which is only loosely related to the way even educated people actually speak. The spoken standard transmitted by schools, therefore, often reflects a prescriptive tradition based on written language not necessarily appropriate to speech, whereas the accent held up as a model is heavily influenced by local and subjective notions of what constitutes a "good accent."

Various aspects of these problems were pointed out very successfully by sociolinguists during the 70s and 80s, at the same time as Britain was becoming a truly multilingual society. In fact, many teachers started to pay less attention to Standard English and to the "correctness" of student usage in relation to the standard, and began to focus on the students' linguistic diversity instead, on the range of their linguistic resources reflecting differing ethnic, social and regional backgrounds (Quirk, 1990).

The official reaction to this tendency came in 1988 with the publication of the Kingman Report, one in a series of government publications springing from the Education Reform Act of 1988, which provides for the establishment of a national curriculum. The Kingman Report (extracts in *English Today* 16, 1988) states that

> "one of the school's duties is to enable children to acquire Standard English, which is their right" (*ET* 16, p. 15)

The influence from sociolinguistics is seen in the fact that the Report considers the question of accent irrelevant to the concept of Standard English, and says about Received Pronunciation that

> "This accent is the standard for foreign students of English in Britain, but is not used as the model of English pronunciation in British schools, since speakers may be rightly proud of their regional pronunciation, which identifies where they come from" (*ET* 16, p. 17)

It has recently been suggested by Sharon Millar (1991), however, that the notion of complete independence between accent and Standard English may be little more than a sociolinguistic dogma, which may not necessarily be true – that in fact it is hard to imagine a speaker signalling membership of a prestigious social group through grammatical features, while consistently using stigmatized pronunciation features to express membership of a low-status group. Instead, it is likely that the use of Standard English always involves *some degree of approximation* to the nonlocalized accent norm.

I will now turn to the standardization of English in North America, more particularly in the United States. Here, again, we see the principles of language attitudes at work, but to understand how they have applied to the development of English in the United States (see Baron, 1982; Gallardo, 1984), we will have to go back to a very important event in the history of the nation, the American Revolution. The fact that American English stands out as distinct from the British types of English is to a large extent due to the language attitudes which developed as a result of the conflict between the colonists and the British Crown in the latter half of the 18th century.

The adversaries' common point of departure, of course, was English as it was spoken at the time of Shakespeare. By the time of the Revolution, separation and different social conditions had already resulted in different language developments in Britain and America: the settlers had borrowed a number of words from the Indians and various groups of non-English immigrants, while British English was changing with regard to certain grammatical and pronunciation features. Under different political circumstances, the American settlers might have regarded the language of the British authorities as fashionable and prestigious, but in the revolution against the Crown the linguistic characteristics of the occupational forces became symbols of oppression. By the same token, the American settlers' peculiar additions to the vocabulary, as well as their conservative syntax and pronunciation, became the outward signs that a person was a Republican and not a British follower.

The demand that American English be considered a national standard was not raised by the American elite. The early American leaders, though aiming above all to get rid of all institutions inherited from Britain, tended to ignore the question of that very important institution which is the language (see also Cheshire, 1991, p. 15). Nor was it supported by American academics, who in the establishment of an autonomous "American language" saw the loss of the great literary heritage of the English language. It came from a schoolteacher, Noah Webster, who was to devote his life to the promotion of a national standard not based on a great literature, but on the way the language was actually used in everyday life in America.

This particular distinction is crucial to an understanding of the way standardization developed in the United States: while Webster's opposite number in England, Dr. Johnson, was able to draw on examples from a long literary tradition in writing his famous dictionary, Webster's books codifying the American language as unrelated to British English had to rely simply on usage. This explains their success as instruments of standardization: they were accessible to all literate Americans, not just the property of a literary elite; and the aim of Webster's books, including his Spelling Book, was efficient communication, not the maintenance of cultural heritage (see also Helle Bering-Jensen, 1991). Unfortunately, this approach also meant that most of the American academic world would have nothing to do with Webster's American Language.

We see in other words the beginning of a development where American English is being standardized by popular consensus, literate Americans eagerly buying Webster's dictionaries to check how other literate Americans use the words of the language in everyday and even technical contexts, while the academic world – universities, schools – for the most part refuse to acknowledge American English as a standard distinct from British English.

The fact that most of American *academia* remained faithful to the standard language of the mother country had far-reaching consequences in terms of the codification of American English. Until Mark Twain, no American writer dared to deviate from the written norms of British English. In the teaching of English in schools, the aim was to "keep the language pure." The norm was British written language, and if you wanted to become an actor or aspired to high society, the prestigious accent was that of Eastern New England, which shared some important features with RP. And this is how it happens that Mark Twain's American English does not begin to gain the recognition of American critics as a literary medium until 1910; that by World War II the only attempt at a comprehensive treatment of *The American Language* had been written by an amateur, H.L. Mencken (1919), who was a journalist; and that the accent of American film actors does not sound very different from British English right up until the end of World War II.

The codification of American English has remained centered around the dictionary tradition which Webster initiated. American dictionaries make available an updated version of the language as a tool in communication. The reason why lexical codification has taken place before the codification of grammar and phonology is probably that the ability to use the vocabulary adequately is the most important aspect of communicating in a particular language. In terms of efficient communication, variation in lexis is probably less tolerable than grammatical variation, whereas variation in pronunciation tends to be the least disturbing (Shuy, 1973, quoted in Gallardo 1984: 140-41).

After World War II, some significant developments have taken place with regard to the standardization of pronunciation. In fact, the characteristic features of the Western American middle class have superseded the accent of Eastern New England as the prestigious variety. American sociolinguists have contributed to the recognition of this fact, especially with regard to the spread of the Western American post-vocalic /r/ (see Labov, 1966), the most conspicuous feature of linguistic prestige, which is fast becoming nonlocalized. Because the characteristic features of Western American English are becoming prestigious and nonlocalized, they are often referred to as "General American" (e.g. Kachru, 1981). As a phonological system, GA is more variable than RP. It shows infinitely less variation, however, than the accent of the middle classes in Britain. And contrary to RP, which is spoken by a very small minority of Britons, GA is spoken by the whole of the middle class in an area inhabited by around 70% of the American people (see Egersten 1960).

The sore spot in the codification of American English is the grammar of informal language. It is primarily a problem of codification, not standardization: middle- and upper-class American English grammar varies very little from coast to coast, while there is often a considerable gap between this standard and regional or working-class grammar. Grammar, as it is taught in the schools, is limited to rules of do's and don'ts which represent a grammatical tradition based on written British English (see also Hymes, 1981, p. vi). It is true, of course, that formal written texts can be difficult to identify as either American or British, and that spelling and vocabulary are often more obvious give-aways than grammar. However, formal written texts are the product of a prescriptive, often literature-oriented convention taught at school. What about the grammar of informal American English as it is used in everyday situations by ordinary educated Americans? Well, although speakers of GA are obviously conscious of also adhering to a grammatical standard, this standard has never been described. There are no exhaustive grammars of American English like all those that have been written on British English, by British as well as other European scholars. This is so much more surprising as the existence of such a standard is actually presupposed in the sociolinguistic literature of the last two to three decades. Works like William Labov's (1969) important article on "The Logic of Nonstandard English" take for granted the existence of an American English grammatical standard. How else can the grammar of native African-Americans be referred to as nonstandard?

The differing patterns of standardization in Britain and the United States give rise to different problems with regard to the teaching of English in the two nations. In Britain it is a problem that the nonlocalized accent is used only by a small elite. Local and social accent variation in Britain is considerable, which problem lies behind the Kingman Report's recommendation (*ET* 16, 1988, p. 21) that at age 16 children should be able to

> "speak in Standard English, using their own accents (provided that those accents do not impair comprehension by other speakers of English)."

However, as pointed out by Millar (1991), it is very difficult to see how this proviso is to be interpreted and translated into practice: are particular groups of children to be taught RP features anyway, just in case they experience communication problems on account of their accent? Who decides whether their accent is "intelligible"? The teacher most likely is not an RP speaker, but may well be from another part of the country. Will the "intelligibility" of the children's accent be determined by the teacher? Can we be sure that impressions of "intelligibility" are not sometimes colored by notions of social acceptability? Is it fair to give children the impression that their native accent is not generally intelligible or desirable? In any case, it is probably difficult to teach a spoken standard to children who are nonstandard speakers unless they actually see themselves as future members of the social group using the standard (see e.g. Rosen, 1991).

In American schools, accent is rarely experienced as a problem in the teaching of English to native speakers, and hardly ever in terms of comprehensibility. There is much less local variation than in Britain, and society tends to be more tolerant of nonstandard accents (see e.g. Urdang, 1990). Instead, a lot of effort goes into the teaching of what is referred to as Standard English or Standard American English grammar. It is mostly remedial, being aimed at speakers of nonstandard English, or it teaches writing skills. It is based on work books dealing with what the teacher perceives as the trouble spots of English grammar. Given the history of the standardization of American English it is hardly surprising that some of the most widely used grammar workbooks published during the 70s and 80s should reflect this basic uncertainty as to what Standard American English actually is. Thus the *New handbook of basic writing skills* by Robey et al. (1984) seems to equate Standard American English with formal written language, the preface "To the instructor" containing the following passage:

> "Throughout the book there are such labels as RIGHT and WRONG and WEAK and BETTER to identify example sentences. These labels are designed

> to help students recognize Standard American English. We are not commenting in any way on the acceptability of the language that students use in their own informal speech" (vii)

The use of conservative British-oriented forms is clearly seen, for instance, in the lists of irregular verbs which are often included. These lists usually contain a few conventional adaptations to American English, whereas it must be clear to any observer of middle-class spoken American English that the use of irregular verbs differs in many more places from that prescribed by the grammar workbooks. For example, the past participle of *to bite* is given everywhere as *bitten*, though most standard speakers seem to prefer the form *bit* after the passive use of *to get* in informal speech: *she got bit by a snake*. The past participle of the verb *to dive* is usually given as *dived*, whereas the form *dove*, like the past tense (in American English), seems to be almost as frequent: *she had dove into the water*. The distinction between *hung* and *hanged* as past-tense forms of *to hang* (*he hung his coat on a chair – they hanged the murderer yesterday*) has for the most part been lost, *hung* being used to cover both meanings. The same goes for the distinction between *shone* and *shined* as past-tense forms of *to shine* (*the sun shone all day yesterday – he had just shined his shoes*), where the form frequently occurring in weather forecasts is in fact *shined*. The forms of the verb *to lay* seem to be taking over the functions of the verb *to lie (down)* (*I want to lay down; I laid there for an hour*).

The gap between codification based on outdated written forms, on the one hand, and the forms people actually use, on the other, leads to uncertainty and inconsistency. One list of irregular verbs, in Cook's *Trouble spots of English grammar* (1983) labels the forms *hung* and *hanged* "intransitive" and "transitive," respectively, which is wrong. The same list gives the principal forms of *to swing* and *to wring* as *swing, swung, swung* and *wring, wrung, wrung*, respectively, which are the forms used in British English. In *Keys to American English* by Gefvert et. al. (1975), the same verbs are given as *swing, swang, swung* and *wring, wrang, wrung*. On pp. 73-74 of Gefvert, students are asked to memorize a list of "standard dialect" past-tense forms including the forms *dove* (from *to dive*) and *stank* (from *to stink*). In an expanded chart on pp. 103-105 of the same book, which students are again asked to memorize, those same forms have become *dived* and *stunk*.

This kind of situation does not exactly make it easy for the students to learn standard American English grammar. To informally measure the extent of the confusion with regard to irregular verbs, the last time I was in the States, I asked a number of native speakers of English who were all well-educated, and of fairly well-to-do middle-class backgrounds, to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 119 sentences where the informant had to provide a past-tense or past-participle form of the main verb. They were asked to write the form they would use in informal conversation, disregarding all notions of "correctness." This is something that people are probably never able to do with any degree of accuracy. Often they will end up writing the forms that they think are expected of them. But the instruction was meant to discourage them from consulting a dictionary.

I got 48 questionnaires back, most of them from students. In fact there were 30 students, most of whom were between 19 and 23 years of age. 18 questionnaires represented middle-aged speakers ranging from 36 to 71 years of age.

The proportion of forms which deviated from generally accepted school norms, with regard to irregular verb forms in standard American English, was 12.3%. Variation was most extensive in the students' questionnaires (14.1%), least extensive in the older people's material (9.2%). The difference according to age was statistically highly significant ($p < .0001$), whereas there was no significant difference according to sex. As expected, there was a great deal of inconsistency and disagreement in the data. The fact that the older generation adhered more closely to school norms does not necessarily mean that they actually do so in informal speech. They may have been more conscious of school norms in this particular situation, having over the years become more competent at applying them than the average student. In any case, what this research does seem to indicate is that the formal patterns taught at school, with regard to these verb forms, are to a great extent out of touch with informal usage, and that if standard American English grammar is to be truly available to all students, it should be based on systematic descriptive codification which takes informal usage into account (see also Baron, 1982, p. 227 ff., and Ferguson & Heath, 1981, pp. xxvii-xxx).

In this lecture I have discussed, first, the development of language attitudes and norms in childhood, how in English this leads to different norms and speech styles for men and women. I then went on to discuss related aspects of language attitudes and norms in society at large, with particular reference to standardization processes in British and American English. In conclusion I will say a few words about how these questions of norms and standards affect the teaching of English as a foreign language.

If we look at the grammar/vocabulary situation first, from the point of view of English as a world language, it is clearly an advantage that the formal written standard is very much the same the world over. Randolph Quirk, in an article praising the Kingman report's emphasis on Standard English (Quirk, 1990), says:

> "...if I were a foreign student...I would be particularly annoyed at irrelevant emphasis on the different varieties of English when I came to realize they mattered so little to native speakers of English – to those who effortlessly read the novels of Saul Bellow, Iris Murdoch and Patrick White, perceiving no linguistic frontier to match the passports"

However, just because there are relatively few differences between the written varieties of English, it does not follow that those differences should necessarily be ignored, and I think Randolph Quirk has missed the point. The aim of teaching

English as a second language, surely, is not primarily to enable students to read English literature (though one hopes they will). The aim of teaching English as a second language is first of all to enable students to communicate in English. I do not mean "communicate" in the sense of getting one's message across without much attention to form. True communication means making the text optimally suitable, in terms of form as well as content, for its specific purpose and audience (see e.g. Larsen, 1991). This aim is not compatible with a practice of ignoring differences between the major written varieties. American and British texts, depending on the text types, are not identical, because the cultures they represent, though closely related and similar, are not identical. Ironically enough, this is demonstrated by Quirk's very words, as just quoted, where the word *'frontier* is used in a sense which would baffle most Americans, who would be associating it with the meaning of *fron 'tier*. Effective use of English as an international language presupposes an awareness of the fact that there are considerable vocabulary differences in such important areas as government and administration, education, trade, transport and communication, clothing, food and housing.

As far as accents are concerned, GA and RP are obviously different, while this difference (as indeed the differences between most major native accents) hardly ever impairs comprehensibility. As GA-speakers tend to react favorably to RP-speakers, and most Britons to speakers of GA, there would seem to be no reason why more than one accent should be taught. However, here the question of student attitudes is important. Students who return from a period of study in the United States or Canada will often have acquired the basics of a North-American English accent, on the basis of a personal experience which often involves some measure of identification with the culture in question. If it is made possible for such students to cultivate this accent in Denmark, the increased motivation (see e.g. Marton, 1989) will result in an accent which is more genuinely *English* (rather than Danish-English) than if they had had to switch back to RP. Though operating in different ways, the forces of speaker identity and attitudes are at work in the foreign language classroom just as they are in the development of language norms in the world outside.

Finally, in the area of interaction, it would at first sight seem difficult to apply our knowledge of gender-specific speech norms to the foreign language classroom. However, the basic result of the Lancaster project *is* highly relevant to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Apart from the fact that gender-specific tentativeness usage, on the whole, seems to represent generalized speech norms, the project also seems to indicate that some female decision-makers may be able to exploit their tentative speech style and use it as a strategy. This suggests that, in teaching the use of modality features and other tentativeness signals in interaction, we must be careful to distinguish between form and pragmatic function – that we should not, in fact, teach the use of the linguistic system of tentativeness solely in the context of "politeness," "uncertainty" or any other particular strategy or state of mind (see also Preisler, 1989). Linguistic tentativeness is an instrument of very different strategies, including deliberation and manipulation. I believe this should be made clear in the foreign-language classroom.

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Metapragmatics and Chauncey Gardener: Toward an ecology of communication[*]

Claudia Caffi (Genova)

> "— Que faut-il faire? dit le petit prince.
> — Il faut être très patient, répondit le renard. Tu t'assoiras d'abord un peu loin de moi, comme ça, dans l'herbe. Je te regarderai du coin de l'œil et tu ne diras rien. Le langage est source de malentendus. Mais, chaque jour, tu pourras t'assoir un peu plus près..."
>
> A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p.69.

0. Summary

The subject of this paper is metapragmatics. Some ideas about what metapragmatics is and why it is useful in the study of human interaction will be put forward. I will first of all define three different ways in which metapragmatics can be viewed.

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[*]Lecture, given at the University of Roskilde, on October 27, 1992. A slightly revised version of the first part of this paper will appear in R. E. Asher ed., *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Oxford: Pergamon Press as the entry *Metapragmatics*.

Second, I will try to show the relevance of a metapragmatic perspective in the analysis of empirical data, namely, some transcriptions of dialogues taken from a movie, *Being there* (1978), by H. Ashby.

As to the definition of metapragmatics, there are at least three senses in which it is possible to speak of metapragmatics. In the first sense – the most general, and potentially generic, sense – it is the theoretical debate on pragmatics and its central concerns, its epistemological foundations, and the definition of its relevant object and scope. Metapragmatics in this sense concerns itself with the criteria of pertinence of the discipline, not with a view towards telling us which is the 'best' pragmatics, but in order to verify the consistency of the basic assumptions, the definitions of the questions to be asked, and the methods to be adopted.

The second, narrower sense, highlights the conditions which make speakers' use of language possible and effective. The task of metapragmatics in this sense is, above all, to make those conditions explicit. This kind of metapragmatics, which can be related to the problem of the universals of human communication, is transcendental in a Kantian sense inasmuch it deals with the constitutive elements of human knowledge.

The third sense is less ambitious than the other two. It is concerned with the investigation of that area of the speakers' competence which reflects the judgments of appropriateness on one's own and other people's communicative behavior. This metapragmatics deals with the 'know how' regarding the control, planning and feedback on the ongoing interaction.

The different meanings of the term *metapragmatics* – with their corresponding different objects of study – have an etymological justification, as they can be linked to the different meanings of the prepositon *metá* in Greek: not only 'above', but also 'beyond'. After all. the term *metaphysics* is based on a misunderstanding: the volumes by Aristotle entitled *Metaphysics* did not transcend and justify his earlier writings on physics, but simply, owing to a chance arrangement, 'came after' the ones on physics. The paradox of metapragmatics – and also its potential oxymoron – is that it 'comes after', though reflecting on, a knowledge that 'comes before' any theory.

My point is that the metapragmatic level is not just *one* of the metalinguistic levels: on the contrary, it is something different from them, since the knowledge it refers to concerns not 'being able to say' but 'being able to do' (and being able to say what one does); it is the interface between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic: it means being able to relate language and world, by checking the adequacy of utterances with regard to actual contexts. The knowledge it incorporates leaves traces on the surface of discourse.

1. Metapragmatics 1: The Need for Metatheoretical Reflections

1.1. Clearly, any choice regarding the object of study of pragmatics[1], its domain and, as a consequence, the choice of the most effective descriptive categories and methods, entails a commitment to a metapragmatic view which is often neither foregrounded nor even made explicit. At times it is simply missing. Actually, such an awareness is not only legitimate but also necessary, since pragmatic investigation passes over the

[1]Pragmatics has definitely come a long way. From being a wastebasket, in Bar-Hillel's (1971) well-known metaphor, it has become an accredited discipline with an international association, crowded conferences, textbooks, a monthly journal. Pragmatics is undogmatic, tolerant, and does not demand acts of faith. The reverse of this tendentially ecumenical hospitality, however, is the heterogeneity of the theoretical proposals it brings together – something which makes it all the more necessary that the theoretical standpoints and the argumentative strategies be clarified. To tidy up the ex-wastebasket a bit, an agreement on an, albeit minimal, definition of the field of pertinence and on the assumption of the ideological and theoretical commitments this definition entails, are both necessary. In order to achieve this goal, a metapragmatic awareness is needed. So far, it has mainly been practised on boundary issues – disciplinary and academic – on the often disputed borders with semantics and sociolinguistics. Beyond defining goals – something which was appropriate in the first stages of its development – metatheoretical reflections have a right to autonomy.

boundaries of linguistics and overlaps on semiotics. Its object is not language, speech, grammar, but human communication (clearly, all these terms ask for meta-theoretical definitions). Its subjects are not speakers, but people making (different types of) interactional choices whose study requires an integrated conceptual framework.

Last but not least, we need give no justification for speaking about meta*pragmatics*; rather, we should ask ourselves why we do not usually speak about metaphonology, metasyntax, metasemantics, and so on.

Metapragmatic epistemological reflection is not necessarily transcendental. One way to escape the foundational regression[2] consists in reflecting on how pragmatics speaks about itself, on how it represents itself, on its wording, on its key words, on its predominant metaphors. Much work is needed in this respect.

First of all, one has to avoid the risk of new forms of hypostasis (see Borutti 1984), brought about by certain, apparently harmless, metalinguistic uses. For instance, setting up a definite noun phrase is idealizing: the risk of an idealization exists whenever one refers to 'the speaker', who could end up by being an hyperuranic subject, a lunar *effet-sujet*. Hence, the obvious need for a solid empirical and context-sensitive 'anchorage'.

1.2. One could say that pragmatics is tolerant; some would even call it loose. Yet, if one looks at the literature labeled as pragmatic, one is struck by the frequency of such words as *rules*, *maxims*, *principles*. From the available data, we try to infer rules and principles. We could even imagine a (superego-like) need for normalization – something which is clearly understandable if we consider the messy nature of the

[2] Wittgenstein (1953) highlighted the constitutional fallacy of any metadiscourse that claims to be foundational, but which is actually just one more linguistic game among many others. Except that the games which consist of asking oneself where the game one is playing comes from, where it leads to, whether its rules have any sense, or if they ought to be changed, are games worth playing.

object and the need to define analytical instruments with which to infer generalizable results. On the one hand, it is a fact that pragmatic mistakes are much more compromising than grammatical ones: there is nothing worse for an interactant than the *pragmatica sanctio* whereby his/her syntactically and semantically well-structured utterance is inappropriate, ineffective, unhappy, inadequate to his/her wishes and aims. On the other hand, 'normativeness' assumes that what is regulated, the basic units to which rules and regulations are applied, is not controversial. But, once again, this is a matter of metatheoretical choice.

The only non-transcendental way of legitimizing metapragmatics (relevant for sense 1) is that which records and analyzes specific communicative practices in socially and historically determined contexts. Its being indifferent to individual languages is a major requirement for a non-metaphysical metapragmatics. Another requirement is non being indifferent to the ways in which people express their knowledge, e.g. by feedbacks and adjustments, on what they are doing communicatively, thus building up the interpretation which is the result of the cross-inferential work on the part of all the participants involved. A systematic account of this knowledge is a difficult inter-disciplinary enterprise which cannot merely be introspective. Undoubtedly, there is in pragmatics an increasing uneasiness at mere introspection (which is still extensively practised, because of the philosophical origins of the discipline). On the other hand, there is the risk of replacing a metaphysics of introspection with a metaphysics of empirical data, in an excessive fragmentation of the research work and its findings which leaves no room for any significant generalization.

One possible theoretical choice – one which in the present, extremely varied and lively state of research, can only be a partial choice – consists in denying any clear-cut division between 'scientific' metapragmatic knowledge and the metapragmatic knowledge of the users of a language and instead, assuming there is a continuum, at a smaller or greater distance from the object – the use of the language.

The basic assumption, which is relevant to the first sense of metapragmatics as metatheoretical reflection, could then be to hold that in pragmatics there are different degrees of explicitness, but no differences in nature, between folk and scientific theories. The metapragmatic paradox is that the traditional metatheoretical top-down control is valid only if it is kept down-to-earth.

2. Metapragmatics 2: On the Possibility Conditions of Action and Interaction

2.1. The second type of research which can be labeled as metapragmatics studies the possibility and felicity conditions of communication. Whereas in other research areas, such as text linguistics, there have been attempts to define the constitutive rules – what makes a text a text, the *quidditas*, rather than the *qualitas* of the text, identified in coherence –, in pragmatics attention has mostly been given to regulative rules or principles: how to cooperate, be kind, polite, etc. In this regulative sense, traditional rhetoric, as it lists and correlates locutionary and perlocutionary strategies, is a distinguished and sophisticated precedent. One limit of rhetoric is that it ignores the action-level of language, defined by Austin as the illocutionary level of a speech act, which is entitled to represent the basic unit of analysis both in conversation analysis and in pragmatic linguistics .

Normativeness, as said above, presupposes that what is normalized is clear. On the other hand, the following questions remain open: What is constitutive of an action? What is constitutive of an interaction? What must necessarily, not optionally, hold for an action of a certain kind to be performed? Further: What units of action are constitutive of a given interaction?

In this type of metapragmatics, for instance in research on dialogue-constitutive universals, to use Habermas' (1971) label, the metaphysical risk is particularly tangible. The same risk is noticeable in the presumed identification of universal speech acts, particularly if they are transferred onto syntactic units and moods (the illocutionary acts of statements, questions, and commands as reflecting the indicative, interrogative and imperative moods). The problem of identifying basic acts – whether universal or not, whether associated with a specific syntactic form or not – is related to the problem of the conventions underlying the performance of an act. In its turn, this problem is linked with the problem of agreement: what is the agreement which makes it possible to define the interactional sequence X as Y? Is there a pragmatic common core allowing a cross-cultural comparison of communicative behaviors and, if so, what does it consist of?

2.2. Here, a wide and by no means uncontroversial area of research opens up before us. We shall confine ourselves to what follows. Shared metapragmatic knowledge concerns knowledge of culture-bound and group-bound action frames. As members of a given community in a given phase of its history, we are able to produce and recognize types of linguistic action, and assign, prospectively or retrospectively, an utterance 'token' to a 'type' of action, describing X as Y. Behind this possibility of performance and recognition of linguistic action we can imagine, in a Kantian fashion:

1) Conditions of 'thinkability' (i.e. conditions underlying the possibility of thinking certain types of actions). These conditions are registered in the lexicon, for instance as speech act names or illocutionary force indicating devices; they deal with the "what is", the essence. The most famous attempt to define constitutive rules of speech acts was made by Searle (1969)[3]. Such attempts can be related to research in AI and cognitive psychology on action frames and on how global patterns are inscribed in the speakers' memory. The major difficulty met by this kind of investigation derives from the fact that there is not just *one* way to perform an action, neither is there a one-to-one relationship between linguistic form and action type: in short, there is no correspondence between sentence types and utterance types.

[3]The difficulties brought about by Searle's constitutive rules, and their inadequacy as micro-models of linguistic action and communicative behavior have been highlighted by Kreckel (1981).

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2) Conditions of feasibility, i.e. conditions regarding the system of aims and expectations within which the action is performed; they deal with the "how to do", the procedure. This kind of knowledge concerns the existence and functioning of intersubjectively recognizable strategies by which people match different kinds of action to different actual contexts. An example of proposals in this area, which can be related to praxeology (dealing with effective acting is that of the Gricean maxims. However, further research – including cross-cultural work on politeness – has underlined that Grice's maxims are ethnocentric; so, they must be discarded as possible candidates for the role of pragmatic universals.

3) Conditions of recognizability; these deal with the question "where do you gather it from", with interpretability. This question is related to the study of the different kinds of linguistic and paralinguistic means and markers – lexical, but also morpho-syntactic, textual, prosodic, kinesic – available in different languages[4]. Their con-

[4]The term *metapragmatics* has been applied to comparative lexical research, as it has particularly centered on verbs defining linguistic actions, that is, on speech act verbs. Such an approach, defined as 'empirical-conceptual', moves from assumption that an investigation of the lexical structure, of the semantics of verbs used to describe speech acts, throws light onto the nature of linguistic action (see Verschueren 1985). Such a research has the advantage of bringing the often abstract reflections of classical speech act theory closer to the ways in which linguistic actions are described in individual languages. Now, it is true that the lexicon is an interface between pragmatics and the grammar, and that the study of the lexicon thus represents an important empirical 'anchorage'. It is also true, however, that mere lexical research is inherently inadequate for the analysis of interactive dynamics. It is indeed necessary, if actual interaction is not to become irrelevant, to correlate the investigation of the typologies of verbs that people use to describe linguistic actions with the investigation of what people seem to know 'in real time', 'live', about the use of their own language in context. The study of the types of linguistic items (among them lexical items) must be linked to the study of the types of the underlying contextual features and criteria of appropriateness.
It is also important to clarify the level of abstraction at which one is working, so that pragmatic metalanguage is not at the same time both the *definiens* and the *definiendum*: the interiorized conceptualization of the linguist as a native speaker of a particular language should not pre-determine his or her selection of the relevant features of a speech act in relation to a presumed common core.
This type of metapragmatic research has the merit of positing a methodological connection between speech act taxonomy and folk taxonomies. It is well known that languages, those powerful instruments of conceptualization, segment the external world and natural phenomena

ventional nature is not given once and for all, but changes over time and space. They narrow down the range of possible reasonable interpretations – on the part of the interpreters – of their partners' communicative behaviors, in abductive processes, by trial and error, through which the assignment of signification is negotiated. Obviously, the more the interactants have of shared knowledge, and know they have, the more often they leave out intermediate passages in their dialogues, which, as a result, will be mutually understandable by them, but not by an external observer.

From a logical point of view, the three types of conditions are arranged in a hierarchically descending sequence. From a methodological point of view, the sequence is reversed. From a 'practical' point of view, i.e. from the point of view of what is really happening in human interaction, these conditions come together since the social actors rely and act on the three kinds of conditions simultaneously. The main problem consists in relating these three types of conditions to the conventional intersubjective practices of everyday interaction where cognitive structures and socio-psychological constraints interact.

3. Metapragmatics 3: The Management of Discourse

3.1. The two distinctive features of metapragmatics 3 are the reference to common knowledge – both shared knowledge and folk theories – and reflexivity. Significantly, they coincide with the most resistant barriers that separate artificial intelligence from the human intellect: the common sense (which is epistemological, not ideological, as pointed out by Parret 1983), and the reflexivity, i.e. its possibility of thinking (and speaking) about its own thinking.

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in different ways, from the color spectrum onwards (a much-quoted example both in favor of, and against, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). Unlike colors, though, linguistic actions do not exist *in natura*; they do not come before language use, nor are they separable from it. No matter how powerful the means, a privileged extraterritorial theoretical standpoint from which to look at linguistic actions does not exist.

Reflexivity is also one of the most distinctive features of natural languages marking them off from other semiotic systems: it is their capacity for describing themselves. An aspect of reflexivity can be found in the possibility that speakers have of communicating on the communication they are engaged in, defining it, and confirming or modifying the definitions given by themselves and by their partners. Such 'editing' along with self- or other-initiated repairs, are rooted in metapragmatic reflexivity; so are reformulations, evaluations, metadiscursive comments, and requests for explanations trough which mutual understanding is negotiated. In texts and discourse, there are classes of markers and metacommunicative utterances whose role it is to ensure dialogue management in terms of communicative efficiency.

When tackling a speech sequence, not only can we describe it, give it a name, but we can also judge whether it is appropriate to the situation. We can understand whether we have chosen – among adequate communicative options – the one which best fits the context; if this is not the case, we can retrace our steps and correct ourselves. We can, in an overall communicative strategy, negotiate the degree of directness, explicitness, or politeness as we go along. We can appreciate whether we have said the right thing at the right time in the right way, or whether we have made a tactless remark. We can, if the utterance was too elliptic or reticent, ironic or digressive in relation to a conversational topic (therefore requiring adventurous inferential steps), ask for explanations and re-define the context and its presuppositions, thereby reshuffling the assignment of rights and duties among the partners. At the other end of the scale of metapragmatic awareness are gaffes and jokes. All these skills do not presuppose clumsy beginners (the model readers, in the sense of Eco 1979, of many textbooks and grammars), but social actors who use their communicative know-how not with awe but with pleasure. This shared metapragmatic awareness is not only linguistic, but also semiotic, encyclopaedic, and constitutionally intertextual. It refers to a knowledge which concerns language as social – culturally and historically determined – behavior, our 'being in the world'. The problem of metapragmatic appropriateness, close to the problem of style, lies in that dialectic relationship between expectation and surprise which is peculiar to the communicative exchange and its expressivity (see Bally 1965). Regarding to a given system of expectations, there will be more or less marked choices. A choice is all the more significant when it is less foreseeable (see Arndt and Janney 1987): the more it eludes ceremony and routine, the more it communicates. In this sense the literary text is highly informative in its non-redundancy (see Lotman 1977). Once one is engaged in a routine, and has chosen a communicative register, the most remarkable and revealing choice will be the unexpected one, the sudden change in the linguistic, intonational, and proxemic register.

3.2. A crucial part of metapragmatics in sense 3 can be ascribed to monitoring, to definitions of the situation given by the interactants. Ethnomethodologists call these definitions 'glosses', specifying that these are not an exception but the rule of spontaneous verbal interactions. Interaction management includes a control on discourse which refers to the conditions of feasibility and interpretability I've already mentioned. This monitoring can be found at a macro-level – for instance in the allocation of conversational rights, in the kind of sequence and the thema development of turns – or at a micro-level, in the explicit focusing of speech on speech and on its micro-organization (e.g. utterances like "What I mean is...", or, in written texts, the heading of a paragraph). Every utterance which not only performs some kind of action but also describes it, venturing a description of 'what is happening' (which is up to the hearer to validate), plays a monitoring role. Pragmatics started as the analysis of ritual performative utterances, which do what they say and say what they do. A metapragmatic paradox is that, in everyday speech, if I want to do something, I must not say I am going to do it. In order to 'state', e.g., I must not say "I state that". If I do, it means I am doing something else. In order to perform an action I must avoid naming it. In discourse, however, there can be a syntactic and temporal displacement between an action and its description. This is what happens in the metacommunicative acts which describe a speech sequence from an illocutionary point of view (e.g. "This was a promise, an order, a simple statement etc.", or, with

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a kind of anaphora whose antecedent is an illocutionary force, "This suggestion ..'"). This kind of description is an important means of orienting the interaction processing. The metacommunicative acts can be referred to speech control: they offer a labeling of preceding actions (anaphorically) or subsequent ones (cataphorically), and they focus on the simultaneous presence in discourse of a linearity (a preceding sequence X can be classified as Y), and a depth (the speaker is both the involved participant and the observer of him/herself and of the interaction). Discourse has both a sequential and a hierarchical organization. Finally, it is worth noting that metaillocutionary qualification is often also metatextual and cohesive (e.g."That was a question"), but not vice versa.

From a point of view which is not only terminological: 'metapragmatic' is a hyperonym in relation both to 'metatextual' (comprising those mechanisms which enable us to indicate the way we access the text; example: textual deixis) and to metaillocutionary' (comprising those mechanisms which make explicit the kind of illocutionary act; example: metacommunicative acts). Finally, if 'metacommunication' is meant as something more limited and precise than the definition given by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967), for example if one takes it as qualifying a global communicative modality (e.g. "I was only joking"), then it falls within the range of metapragmatics.

4. Applying Metapragmatics

4.1. It is a well known fact that we can learn physiology through pathology. In the studies of language this is particularly true. Though research on misunderstandings in dialogue is just at the beginning, it seems to be promising. *Being there*, the movie on which I am going to apply metapragmatics, though in a cursory way, offers good examples of dialogic misunderstandings.

Some words are necessary in order to introduce Chance's story (wonderfully played by Peter Sellers) in Ashby's movie[5]. Chance is a retarded gardener who has never set foot outside the garden he takes care of. The owner of the garden is a rich old man who guested him since he was a child and an orphan. He has passed his whole life completely deprived of human relationships; he is hypomaniac and sweet, kindly indifferent and dense. Everything he knows, he knows from television, which is his only pastime and love. When the rich man dies, the attornies send Chance away and he is suddenly catapulted into the world. He is hit by a car. The accident is slight and providential. The owner of the car (Shirley McLaine), worried and anxious to make amends, invites him to her house. She is the wife of a tycoon of national politics, a presidential adviser. His guests come to like him. Chance (in the meantime renamed Chauncey Gardener) makes a quick career. The president and his staff are impressed by his solid good sense. The media are crazy about him. Rumor has is that he will be the next president of the USA.

The movie is in a sense a metapragmatic work which puts us in the privileged position of the observer who knows more than the characters. Besides, it shows us where a lack of metapragmatic awareness could bring us to. The kind of communication which we can observe could break down at any moment. Why this does not happen? In what sense can we say that in this kind of communication something works, at least at a superficial level, and something does not? Chance is like a mirror. A projection. A blank page. Communication between Chance and his addressees takes place with a sort of transfer. Significantly, his speech acts are only reactive ones: he never takes the initiative of speaking, which does not actually interest him.

Metapragmatics in the three senses sketched above helps us to put different sets of questions which are relevant in order to understand the kind of communication

[5]The first time I met Chauncey was in Mey 1982.

between Chauncey and his partners. The answers to these questions would mean to make some steps in understanding 'normal' everyday communication.

4.2. We can start with questions involving metapragmatics in the sense 3. As we can see in the *Appendix*, in *Being there* there are attempts to control and monitor the conversation, in particular there are attempts to signal that communication meets some obstacles both on the part of Chauncey and on the part of his addressees. These attempts fail. As a matter of fact, even after the metacommunicative act, the set of presuppositions is not re-negotiated and the definition of the context does not change.

The metacommunicative attempts involve:

a) words: "move out" (example 1, line 10), "X-ray", "straight out", "claim" (all in example 2 which is basically formed by echo-questions and statements);

b) whole sentences: "My house was shut down." — "You mean your business was shut down." (example 3, line 6-7) where a restatement of a sentence occurs, with the reformulation of the reference act, i.e. "the house" becomes "the business";

c) utterances and utterance sequences. It is probably not by ... chance that the metacommunicative utterances which restate and reformulate preceding speech acts are particularly frequent in the key scene of the dinner, where the source metaphor gardener-businessman is established. The development of the whole misunderstanding is punctuated by utterances like "I know exactly what you mean" by Mr. Rand (example 3, line 9), by Mrs. Rand (line 20), and by Chauncey himself (line 31).

With a mechanism which is well-known in rhetoric (a mechanism which is at work in the use of rhetorical devices and some kinds of markers) the more they get involved into the misunderstanding, the more they signal their mutual comprehension.

On the whole, why can we speak of metacommunicative attempts?

Because on the one hand, Chance lacks the metapragmatic knowledge about the language as well as about the world which is necessary in recognizing the different kinds of speech act which are actually intended. In our words, he is not able to go from the intepretability level to the feasibility one. And what is more, his deficiency concerns the thinkability level. In a word, he lacks a metapragmatic competence, while he does have a linguistic competence and some basic conversational skills. According to Shimanoff's typology (1980:132ff.), his behavior is 'rule-ignorant'. On the other hand, Chance's adressees lack some basic extralinguistic knowledge about him. Besides, they want to avoid any possible risk of conflict, any risk to threat the image of Chauncey that they are building up. This lack both of information and of courage prevents them from correctly understanding Chauncey's utterances, i.e. in a literal way; instead, they need to interpret, to explain, to reconstruct. A common syndrome. Nevertheless, their need to interpret, their compulsion to infer, is realized in too easy a way, i.e. in a way that protects their faces as well as the face of the partner. In particular, they do not make any request for clarification or for more information, i.e. those metapragmatic moves that would have enabled them a readjustment of the context. The point is that in doing so no face at all comes into light. As we can see from the examples in the *Appendix*, they are stubborn in applying the cooperative principle. But are they really cooperative? This takes us back to sense 2 of metapragmatics.

4.3. Chance is the only one who meets the Gricean maxims. He strictly observes the quality maxim and its submaxims, "do not say what you believe to be false" and "do not say what you lack adequate evidence for". It is true that this is a bit at the expense of the maxim of quantity, in particular of the submaxim "make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange" (Grice 1975:101). In Chauncey's utterances there is no difference between the speaker's meaning and the utterance's meaning. The fact that his literally true statements are taken as requiring further interpretation, some kind of implicature, shows that usually Gricean maxims are violated because of a hyperapplication of the cooperative principle. We just cannot believe that someone is respecting them. A common view on misunderstandings is that they are due to a lack of cooperation (see e.g. Marcondes de Souza 1982: 415). In this case the contrary is true: misunderstandings are due to an excess of cooperation. In fact, Chauncey's addressees make too many inferences, taking his literal speech acts as indirect ones or metaphorical ones. They even reconstruct a global strategy underlying his choices, as in example 1 where Thomas takes Chance's replies as deliberate avoidances to take his points into account. In a word, he assigns Chauncey's utterances implicatures that actually were not intended.

Conversely, metapragmatic incompetence makes Chauncey take the indirect speech acts as direct literal ones. He is unable to map syntactic moods onto pragmatic modalities. Besides, since Chauncey does not understand Thomas' illocutionary acts, can we still say that, to take just one example, Thomas has **informed** him that the house is closed and thereby **ordered** him to move out? Without any uptake on the part of the hearer, can we still classify Thomas' illocutionary acts as 'giving information' and 'ordering'? Up to what point is the hearer's uptake necessary for a speech act to take place? Is the hearer's uptake a constitutive rule or a somehow additional felicity condition for illocutionary acts? Significantly enough, this question could also be used as a criterion for distinguishing among different types of speech acts.

All the questions sketched here can be summarized in the following question: What is a happy communication? This takes us back to metapragmatics in its sense 1.

4.4. At this point, the following questions involving metapragmatics in sense 1 are relevant: What are the objects of a pragmatic theory? What is it supposed to explain? If the answer is 'communication', we should ask again: 'What is communication?, namely, 'what a happy, felicitous communication is'? I think we can agree on the fact that the communication between Chauncey and his partners is unhappy. But, is it

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communication at all? And not, for example, an instantiation of reiterated phatic communion (see Haberland 1984)?

Another crucial point we can only hint at here: communication does not involve only cognitive aspects but also emotive aspects. Any pragmatic theory must take this point into account. An emotive feed-back is necessary for a happy communication to take place. Chauncey is not capable of any emotive involvement; significantly, his proxemic and kinesic abilities are deficient. His partners ignore this inability both in the sense they do not see it and in the sense they see it and decide not to take it into account; worse, they may even decide to see it as a sign of self-control, or of another 'positive' quality. To use Arndt and Janney's (1987) distinction among different kinds of interpretation, i.e.descriptive, predictive, explicative interpretation, they confine themselves to a descriptive interpretation, which is related to a lack of emotive involvement[6].

As we have already noted, Chauncey's addressees assign Chauncey's utterances and communicative behavior implicatures that actually were not intended. Why does this happen? Why is there this excess of cooperation? There is a very simple possible answer and is: for fear. Let us try to explain this answer in some provisionary conclusions.

5. Conclusions

Chauncey's paradox is a key useful to read what seems to happen rather often in our conversational and communicative routines. In our everyday communication it may happen that we see in our partners only a reflected image of ourselves.The other is only a projection of ourselves. So, we do not actually say anything to each other; we

[6]As Arndt and Janney (1987:135) claim: "The greater the interpreter's emotional involvement is in a given instance, the greater the likelihood that his interpretation will contain predictive and causal inferences."

do not want to hear anything new; the only things we want are reassurances. Through interaction we do not come to a new knowledge; we just want what we already know to be confirmed. Even before that, we want to be reassured that our knowledge is common and our beliefs are shared. There is no exchange but a mirrors play.

The metapragmatic perspective which enables us to make the conditions of interaction – of a happy one – explicit, can be both preventitive and therapeutic. Metapragmatics specializes in the control of the argumentative conditions and strategies, lending itself easily to becoming a critical instrument of fundamental importance in digging up and highlighting the underlying presuppositions as well as the different kinds of the unsaid. It is clearly helpful – to give but a few examples – in the cross-cultural comparison of the ways in which a linguistic and social group represents and recognizes itself, in the analysis and discussion of any, more or less openly authoritarian and uni-directional, discourse. Metapragmatic competence is potentially subversive, for instance when it enables the hearer to verify that the preparatory conditions of appropriateness of a speech act are fulfilled. Just imagine a patient saying something like "Why are you doing this?" to his/her doctor.

Metapragmatics allows us not only to recognize the several Chaunceys we may run into but also, above all, to recognize the *Being there* characters inside us: on one hand a Chauncey part, a passive onlooker, without emotions, polite and numb. On the other hand Chauncey's addressees' part: people so much identified with their social roles and routines – which are based on our laziness as well as on our fear – that they do not exist beyond them. Beyond them they are "out of existence" (as says the doctor in example 3, line 13-14).

Like philosophy and anthropology, metapragmatics has 'therapeutic' potential. At any level – both theoretical and everyday –, whenever a social group or a speaker look critically at themselves, maybe making corrections, adjustments or clarifying comments on their discourse, the dangerous identification between Self and the point of view is broken, and the road opens up to the legitimization of other points of view. The 'meta' determines that space in which the other's perspective can be accepted. Moreover, metapragmatic awareness enables the speaker not to adhere so strongly to the established sociocommunicative roles and routines as to be totally absorbed by them. Metapragmatic knowledge is a crucial step toward an ecology of communication. Some further steps toward it can be found in the metapragmatic lessons of the fox in *Le Petit Prince* by Saint-Exupéry.

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Appendix

From *Being there*, by H. Ashby, Columbia Pictures (1978).

Example 1. After the Old Man's death, with the attorney.

1 **Thomas**: (-) Mr.Chance I would like to know: what sort of claim(-)
2 You're planning to make against the deceased's estate?

3 **Chance**: (-) Garden is a healthy one, Thomas (- - -) I I have no(-) claim.

4 **Thomas**: I see. Would you be willing to sign a paper to that?

5 **Chance**: I don't know how to sign, Thomas.

6 **Thomas:** Hm (--) very well Mr. Chance, I have no alternative but to
7 inform you that this house is now closed and if indeed you have resided
8 here, you have no legal right to remain. You have to move out by:(--) let's
9 say: : noon: tomorrow.

10 **Chance:** I don't understand 'move out'.

11 **Thomas**: Call me (-) or have your attorney call me, if you change your
12 mind on the sign.

Example 2. After the accident, at Brandy's house.

1 **Doctor**: Now there is no apparent damage to the bone (-) but just to be
2 sure, I'll have Wilson wheel you down for an X-ray.

3 **Chance**: X-ray?

4 **Doctor**: By the way, Mr. Gardener, I'd like to ask you something straight
5 out

6 **Chance**: Straight out?

7 **Doctor**: Yes sir (-). Are you planning on making any sort of claim against
8 the Rands?

9 **Chance**: Claim? Ehm (-) That's what Thomas asked me.

10 **Doctor**: Thomas? (-) Oh, you can pull your trousers up now if you like
11 (-) Who:: Who's Thomas?

12 **Chance**: Thomas Franklin. He's an attorney.

13 **Doctor**: An attorney.

14 **Chance**: Yes.

15 **Doctor**: Then you wish to handle this matter through your attornies?

16 **Chance:** (-) There's no need for a claim (-) hm. I don't even know what
17 they look like.

18 **Doctor**: (-) Oh, Oh, (-) (*laughs*) Well then (-). You caught me off guard
19 there, I must admit.

20 **Chance**: Thank you.

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Example 3. During the supper in the impressive dining room at Rand's (who in the meantime assigned him 'a room upstairs')

1 **Mrs. Rand**: Is there anyone we could know to find for you?

2 **Chance**: No, the old man died and (-) Luise left.

3 **Mrs. Rand**: Oh(-), I'm very sorry(-) well (-) what I do hope your injury
4 won't prevent you from attending to business, Mr. Gardener?

5 **Mr. Rand**: Mhh (-) do you need a secretary?

6 **Chance**: No, thank you (-) My house was shut down(-).

7 **Mr. Rand**: You mean (-) You mean your business was 'shut down'?

8 **Chance**: Yes (-) shut down and closed by the attornies.

9 **Mr. Rand**: What did I tell you? That's exactly what I mean (-) The
10 businessman today is at the mercy of kid lawyers from the FEC.

11 **Doctor**: That' s happening to everyone I'm afraid. The way things are
12 going, they'll probably legislate the medical profession as we know right
13 out of existence.

14 **Chance**: Yes, right out of existence.

15 **Mr. Rand**: Hm (-) It's a damned shame(-) What are your plans now
16 Mr. Gardener (-) or may I call you Chauncey?

17 **Chance**: Chauncey's fine

18 **Mr. Rand:** So then what are your plans, Chauncey?

19 **Chance**: (-) Well (-) I'd(-) I would like to work in your garden.

20 **Mrs. Rand**: Oh(-) Ohh (-) Ben, I know exactly what he means. Isn't
21 it wonderful? To be with the trees and the flowers like that?

22 **Mr. Rand**: Hh (-) I've never had much feel for it myself.

23 **Chance**: I'm a very good gardener.

24 **Mrs. Rand**: It's such a (-) a pleasant way to forget one's troubles.

25 **Mr. Rand**: Now, isn't that what any businessman is (-) a gardener,(-)
26 he(-) he works on flimsy soil to make it productive (-) with the labour
27 of his own hands(-) he waters it (-) with the sweat of his own brow (-)
28 he makes a thing of value(-) for his family(--) and for the community
29 (-). Yes indeed, Chauncey. (-) A productive businessman is a labourer
30 in the vineyard.

31 **Chance**: I know exactly what you mean, Ben(-) the garden that I left
32 was (-) such a place(-).But I don't have that any more. All I have left (-
33 is the room upstairs.

34 **Mr. Rand**: Oh, come now, wait a minute, Chauncey(-). You've got your
35 health (-). For God's sake man, you can't let these bastards get you
36 down YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT (-) and I don't want to hear anymore
37 from you about that room upstairs (-) That's where I'm going (-) too

38 damned soon.

39 **Chance (after a minute's pause)**: It's a very pleasant room, Ben (-).

40 **Mr. Rand**: Yea (-) I' m sure it is (-). That's what they say, anyway.

Example 4. The meeting with the President at Rand's house

1 **President**: (-)(-) Mr. Gardener, do you agree with Ben, do you think we
2 can stimulate growth(-) with temporary incentives?

3 **Chance**: (h) (h) Ehm as long as the roots are not separate, all is well (-)
4 and all will be (-) well in the garden.

5 **President**: (-) In the garden.

6 **Chance**: Yes (-) (-). In a garden (-) growth has its season (-) First come
7 spring and summer (-) but then we have fall and winter (-) and then we
8 get spring and summer again.

9 **President**: (-) (-) Spring and summer.

10 **Chance**: Yes.

11 **President**: Hmm (-) then fall and winter.

12 **Chance**: YES

13 **Mr. Rand (after a minute's pause)**: (-) I think, what our insightful

14 young friend is saying (-) is that we welcome the inevitable (-) seasons
15 of nature (-) but we are upset by the seasons of our economy.

16 **Chance**: Yes (-) there will be growth in the spring, hm hm

17 **Mr. Rand**: Hmm

18 **Chance**: Hmm

19 **President**: Hmm (-) Mr. Gardener, now I must admit that is one of the most
20 refreshing and optimistic statements I have heard in a very very long time (-)
21 I admire your good solid sense.

Example 5. At the party

1 **Chance**: Hello Ronald, how are you?

2 **Ronald**: Just fine.

3 **Chance**: Good. I'm fine too.

4 **Ronald**: Good (-) Good.

5 **Chance**: Yes - Good - We are fine.

6 **Ronald**: Yes, we are fine (-). Ehm (-) Mr.Gardener (hm) my editors and I
7 have been wondering if you would consider writing a book for us (-)
8 something about (ehm) your (-) political philosophy. (-) what do you
9 say?

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10 **Chance**: I can't write.

11 **Ronald**: Ha, of course not, who can write nowadays? Listen, I've trouble
12 writing a postcard to my children (--).Look (--) we can give you a six
13 figure advance and provide you with the very best ghost writers, proof
14 readers

15 **Chance**: I can't read.

16 **Ronald**: Course you can! No one has the time (-) .We we glance at
17 things (-) we watch television.

18 **Chance:** I like to watch TV.

19 **Ronald**: Oh, Oh, I'm sure you do. No one reads.

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