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**H.E.L.**

LE LOCUTEUR NATIF

## LE LOCUTEUR NATIF ET SON IDÉALISATION : UN DEMI-SIÈCLE DE CRITIQUES

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« Fardeau », « tromperie », « mythe », symbole « impérialiste »..., qu'il soit vivant ou « mort », le *locuteur natif* n'échappe en tout cas pas aux foudres de ses nombreux critiques (Phillipson 1992 ; Rajagopalan 1997 ; Davies 2003 ; Canagarajah 1999 ; Paikeday 1985). Alors que le terme français *locuteur natif* n'a presque jamais fait l'objet de publications lui étant explicitement et exclusivement consacrées (Renaud 1998), le terme *native speaker* a, dans le domaine de langue anglaise, suscité depuis plus d'un demi-siècle une littérature considérable. Ce numéro d'*Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage* propose donc de revenir sur l'histoire d'un débat qui s'inscrit dans l'époque contemporaine : l'anthropologie américaine des années 1960 et la linguistique appliquée britannique des années 1970 sont les temps et espaces disciplinaires dans lesquels s'ouvre une critique épistémologique ; l'émergence des « World Englishes » dans les années 1980 lui donne un tour résolument politique.

Si on la dessine à grands traits, l'on pourrait dire que l'histoire du *locuteur natif* est celle des *langues* : assumer l'existence de langues distinctes, c'est aussi leur attribuer une communauté de locuteurs qui les possèdent et se définissent, au moins partiellement, par elles. Ces trois notions néanmoins – *locuteur natif*, *langue*, *communauté linguistique* – sont problématiques, et la position théorique dominante dans la sociolinguistique contemporaine est celle d'un abandon pur et simple de ces catégories comme outils d'analyse :

[...] although notions like “native speaker”, “mother tongue” and “ethnolinguistic group” have considerable ideological force (and as such should certainly feature as objects of analysis), they should have no place in the sociolinguistic toolkit itself (Blommaert & Rampton 2011, p. 6).

Les sciences du langage devraient donc se défaire de termes dont les usages communs répondent à des vues culturalistes et essentialistes – à rebours de ce que les sciences sociales montrent de la fluidité et de la mobilité des identités réelles. Dans cette perspective, le *locuteur natif* est donc avant tout une construction idéologique qui sert à désigner celui qui possède la langue qui lui est première, maternelle. Aux autres revient alors l'identité, parfois infamante et meurtrière, de locuteurs non natifs, d'étrangers au groupe, de barbares. Le récit biblique du *schibboleth* illustre d'ailleurs avec force la violence de cette catégorisation : ne pas être capable de prononcer un mot *comme un natif* trahit l'origine géographique, sociale, ethnique – et entraîne la mort <sup>1</sup>. Or, ce que dénoncent les critiques actuels du *locuteur natif*, c'est précisément le pouvoir de stigmatisation et de discrimination d'un terme qui évoque l'idéal inaccessible de l'apprenant de langue seconde, ou encore la condition indispensable pour obtenir certains postes d'enseignement :

On Thursday, 12 July, 1990, *The Straits Times* of Singapore carried an advertisement which began as follows: "Established Private School urgently requires NATIVE SPEAKING, EXPATRIATE ENGLISH TEACHER FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS". Two days later, on Saturday, 14 July, the very same advertisement reappeared, with just a single real change, the revealing replacement of one plain-spoken term with another within the portion in capitals, which caused this portion to read now as follows: NATIVE SPEAKING, CAUCASIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS.

In the highly cosmopolitan multilingual/multicultural, yet English-dominant, city state that Singapore is, one does not have to strain too hard to guess at what had happened on that unpropitious Friday the thirteenth that separated the two versions of the advertisement (Kandiah 1998, p. 79-80).

Le terme « natif » est donc également porteur d'une valeur ethnico-raciale implicite : l'authenticité et la légitimité du *locuteur natif* tiennent à l'appartenance culturelle qu'on lui prête – voire à son phénotype comme dans l'exemple ci-dessus. On voit quels raccourcis il a soudainement fallu accepter, pour que la « compétence » supposée d'un locuteur se retrouve corrélée à son origine ethnique. Et pourtant, la construction d'inégalités sociales à partir de ce présupposé est monnaie courante, et il y aurait bien ainsi des *natifs* qui seraient plus *natifs* que d'autres : c'est sur

1 *Livre des Juges*, 12 : 5-6.

la déconstruction de cette idéologie que repose le mouvement en faveur de la reconnaissance des « World Englishes ». L'entrée dans un monde post-colonial et multipolaire se traduit en effet en sciences sociales par la prise en compte de voix qui s'autodésignent comme « subalternes » (Merle 2004) : la domination de la perspective européano-centrée est fondamentalement remise en question. En linguistique, le terme « World Englishes » rappelle alors la pluralité des pratiques de l'anglais, et interroge leur hiérarchie : quand les anglais américain, britannique et australien se verraient préservés par leur légitimité historique – « Old Native » – les Anglais singapourien, nigérien, indien seraient relégués à la périphérie en tant que « New Native » (Platt *et al.* 1984) voire « Non-native » (Singh, D'souza, Mohanan & Prabhu 1998). Ces variétés plus récentes, produits de l'histoire coloniale, ne constituent pas des objets d'enseignement légitimes dans les classes de langue anglaise, l'implicite étant toujours qu'on y enseigne un anglais dit standard – et les locuteurs de ces langues ne peuvent prétendre aux postes d'enseignants « natifs », au motif qu'ils parlent un anglais sans valeur sur le marché linguistique (Bourdieu 2001). La métaphore du marché, on le voit, prend parfois un sens économique réel dans la vie sociale.

L'histoire de la notion de *locuteur natif* et de ses liens avec les idéologies communautaires a été retracée avec soin par Bonfiglio (2010). De l'hégémonie de la langue latine dans l'empire romain à l'émergence des vernaculaires à l'époque médiévale, il montre que les « natifs » sont avant tout attachés à un lieu d'origine, que leur façon de parler indique. C'est donc bien l'idée de *naissance*, et de *lieu de naissance* même, qui est invoquée. Le terme « locuteur natif » n'est alors pas lui-même en circulation (*lingua materna* apparaît sous la plume de Dante), mais Bonfiglio voit la notion à l'œuvre dans les discours qui distinguent les locuteurs les uns des autres selon des critères culturels et linguistiques. C'est avec la construction des États-nations que la notion de *locuteur natif* prend un relief nouveau, et se dote d'une signification politique explicite : le *natif* devient *national*, le porteur d'un ordre politique et social, le représentant d'une « communauté imaginée » (Anderson 1982). L'idéologie nationale se construit en effet autour du monolinguisme : l'effacement des particularismes dialectaux et des identités minoritaires constitue sa ligne directrice. Le *locuteur natif* est dès lors l'archétype du membre légitime du groupe national, celui qui en connaît parfaitement la langue et la fait vivre. Cette définition, clairement

politique donc, fait écho, dans la négation de la diversité qu'elle suppose, au modèle du *locuteur-auditeur idéal* que propose Chomsky. Je rappelle ici les termes exacts de ce dernier :

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly [...] (Chomsky 1965, p. 3).

La réception de cet énoncé peut être détaillée ainsi :

- i) d'abord, l'idéalisation chomskyenne, en faisant de la variation linguistique une quantité négligeable dont le scientifique devrait se défaire <sup>2</sup>, aurait contribué à renforcer la centralité du *locuteur natif* et de la *langue standard* dans les sciences du langage ;
- ii) or, ces deux notions sont des idéologies politiques, associées à la discrimination ethnique et à l'homogénéisation forcée des pratiques linguistiques ;
- iii) pourtant, la définition chomskyenne est apolitique, décontextualisée, sans aucune dimension sociale et sociologique ;
- iv) un modèle apolitique dans sa conception première, celui du *locuteur-auditeur idéal*, devient donc paradoxalement le symbole de l'oppression de l'État-nation et de l'oppression coloniale.

On pourra reprocher à cet enchaînement apparemment logique la confusion de deux ordres : celui du *natif*, description commune à valeur sociale et politique, et celui de l'*idéal*, modélisation scientifique explicitement « réductionniste » et « extractionniste » (Agha 2007) – c'est-à-dire extrayant de son contexte social l'objet langage, et le réduisant à l'entité abstraite du système de la langue. Néanmoins, Chomsky étant lui-même passé, sans justification préalable, entre 1957 et 1965, de *locuteur natif* à *locuteur-auditeur idéal*, il aura largement contribué à l'amalgame. De fait, ignorant l'histoire sémantique trouble du *natif*, et continuant à l'utiliser indifféremment aux côtés de l'*idéal*, Chomsky n'aura jusqu'à aujourd'hui pas éteint le feu nourri de la critique sociolinguistique.

2 Cette élimination de la quantité négligeable renvoie au « style galiléen » dont Chomsky se réclame. Voir Botha 1981.

C'est cette confusion entre les termes qui explique que le débat se structure depuis un demi-siècle selon deux lignes de critiques, qui à la fois évoluent séparément et se rejoignent sans cesse :

1. une critique politique, revendiquant l'égalité de traitement des variétés linguistiques et dénonçant les effets stigmatisants de la catégorie « locuteur natif » ;
2. une critique plus clairement épistémologique, montrant les limites du projet chomskyen, voire son impossibilité – le langage étant un objet social, non réductible à un mécanisme cognitif interne.

Deux objets distincts, *locuteur natif* et *locuteur-auditeur idéal*, sont donc régulièrement présentés comme des équivalents : pourtant, ils apparaissent clairement comme étant de faux jumeaux. *Natif* est un terme courant, dont les valeurs sémantiques, nombreuses et parfois mêmes contradictoires (voir Muni Toke, *infra*), se sont construites au gré de sa circulation à travers les âges – l'émergence des États-nations constituant une date importante dans ce processus. Lorsque Chomsky l'utilise en 1957, il n'invente donc rien, puisqu'il a recours à un terme présent dans l'usage courant, et par ailleurs déjà largement utilisé par la tradition d'anthropologie linguistique et de linguistique descriptive. Sa définition même du *natif*, si l'on excepte la dimension cognitive qu'il y apporte, n'est pas nouvelle : le *locuteur natif* est l'informateur (*informant*) de choix, celui qui sait mieux que les autres et a fortiori mieux que les « non-natifs ». *Idéal*, dans le sens chomskyen de 1965, est au contraire un terme technique, qui réfère au résultat d'un processus de modélisation scientifique. Que cette modélisation soit discutable est une évidence – et toute la ligne de la critique interactionniste, notamment, s'emploie, à la suite de Hymes, à réintroduire la notion de communication et d'interaction dans l'étude du langage. Chez Chomsky en effet, tout du moins dans ses travaux linguistiques, on ne trouve ni communication ni interaction : ce que le locuteur dit est avant tout pensé, relève d'une connaissance de la langue (*competence*), et n'est en aucun cas envisagé sous l'angle de sa réalisation et de son adresse (*performance*). Ainsi, au-delà de la question de la valeur politique du terme *locuteur natif* et de ses conséquences sociales potentielles, se pose une question épistémologique d'importance :

In justifying idealization as a necessary part of rational conduct in intellectual work, Chomsky [...] states that “[...] when you work within some kind of idealization, perhaps you overlook something which is terribly important. That is a contingency of rational inquiry that has always been understood. One must not be too worried about it.” Is variation in language one such terribly important thing which was overlooked by idiolect grammars based on introspective evidence? Has the attempt to eliminate from the analysis non-pertinent factors led to the exclusion of a very pertinent, even essential factor? Is the homogeneity postulate a caricature rather than an idealization? (Coulmas 1981, p. 16).

Chomsky envisage donc la possibilité que la variation ne soit pas une quantité négligeable mais au contraire un point crucial pour l'étude du langage : néanmoins, il justifie par son rationalisme (Chomsky 1966) le refus de toute concession à l'empirique – une position qui fait de l'objet qu'il étudie une entité à ce point artificielle que l'on peut douter de sa valeur heuristique :

[...] le locuteur/auditeur idéal n'est pas une bonne idéalisation. Il ne permet ni de comprendre comment les sujets parlent réellement, ni d'aborder la psycholinguistique ou la sociolinguistique. L'ontologie de la langue correspondant au locuteur/auditeur idéal de Chomsky est celle des outils linguistiques traditionnels en Occident, pas de l'activité linguistique réelle des êtres humains (Auroux 1998, p. 269).

Il faut en effet revenir aux modalités mêmes de l'idéalisation chomskienne : celle-ci n'est possible que si l'on accepte que le langage est un objet réservé aux sciences cognitives – et non pas aux sciences sociales – et que l'on adopte une conception internaliste de la cognition. Or, c'est au contraire une théorie externaliste de la cognition, parce qu'elle est articulable à une théorie sociale, qui permet de rendre compte de l'observation empirique des pratiques linguistiques :

Ce que l'on peut opposer au rationalisme c'est le fait que la connaissance est un processus tout à la fois matériel, social et collectif, jamais limité, enfermé, préservé ou produit par des compétences individuelles qui n'en concernent que des moments ou des fragments. Un individu isolé ne saurait être intelligent, non pas simplement que son intelligence manquerait à être développée (ce qui est une trivialité), mais plus fondamentalement parce qu'il n'aurait pas accès à la machinerie de l'intelligence. On peut dire que les



théories de la connaissance ont tendance à trop mettre dans la « tête » des gens et à imaginer que ce qu'il y aurait dans cette « tête » est toujours un préalable tout fait qui est la racine même des capacités cognitives (Auroux 1998, p. 7).

Cette dernière formulation fait écho à la position ethnométhodologique de Garfinkel :

“There’s nothing in heads but brains... What you want to do is find yourself in the midst of [people’s] lived activities” to make observable “just what they are doing that is inspectably so” (Garfinkel 2002, p. 211, cité par Nevile 2009, p. 167)

Et de fait, le courant interactionniste poursuit aujourd’hui avec constance la critique épistémologique de la notion de *compétence* induite par l’idéation chomskyenne :

[...] in contemporary formal linguistics [...] all relevant linguistic activity is lodged within the idealized speaker, an entity able to construct the complex symbolic structures that constitute the grammatical sentences of a language (Chomsky 1965). [...] Other meaning making practices that constitute the hearer as a consequential actor in the production of talk, such as embodied signs for displaying orientation toward the speaker [...], are irrelevant and absent from the geography of cognition put in place by the notion of an ideal speaker-hearer. [...] (Goodwin 2004, p. 152-153).

Le débat autour du *locuteur natif* et de son idéalisation est donc toujours d’actualité. Au vrai, il est le symptôme d’une fracture disciplinaire au sein des sciences du langage. Les sous-disciplines faisant l’hypothèse de l’existence de langues distinctes, portées par des communautés linguistiques, ont recours au *natif*. Les sous-disciplines travaillant sur les pratiques langagières comme des pratiques sociales ne peuvent, ainsi que Blommaert & Rampton (2011, p. 6) le rappellent, utiliser de telles catégories sans distance critique.

Ce numéro d’*Histoire Épistémologie Langage* donne principalement la parole à l’*applied linguistics* : parce qu’elle est en prise avec le « monde réel » (Brumfit 1997), et parce qu’elle problématise la confusion entre *natif* et *idéal* (Leung, Harris & Rampton 1997), elle s’est positionnée dans le débat comme l’un de ses acteurs principaux.

Alan Davies (Davies 1991 ; Davies 2003 ; Davies 2013) est l’un des auteurs dont l’apport à la discussion sur le *native speaker* a été crucial :

à Édimbourg, lieu de prédilection d'une linguistique appliquée attachée notamment à la question de l'acquisition et de l'enseignement des langues dites « secondes », il a travaillé à explorer les fondements scientifiques, et avec eux les errements injustifiables, des usages et des définitions du *native speaker*. Il est l'un des rares auteurs à tenter un travail de synthèse des différents points de vue disciplinaires (sociolinguistique, didactique et psycholinguistique, alors même que cette dernière peut faire appel à des conceptions cognitives internalistes), cherchant à comprendre comment la figure du *native speaker*, pour une large part « mythique » selon ses propres mots, sert à la fois des buts pratiques, théoriques et idéologiques.

John E. Joseph a justement décrit le contexte historique de la « voie radicale » qu'a empruntée la linguistique appliquée à Édimbourg. Sous l'influence de Pit Corder notamment, et avec la création du concept d'*interlangue*, cette université s'est distinguée par ses positions à contre-courant dans le champ de l'enseignement des langues dites secondes :

Le but n'était plus de rendre l'étudiant aussi difficile à distinguer que possible d'un *native speaker* ; dès lors, on voyait un tel but comme autodestructeur, car il rendait la plupart des étudiants incapables de communiquer, tant ils avaient peur d'échouer devant cet idéal de perfection linguistique que le *native speaker* représentait (Joseph 2012, p. 5).

La mise à distance de l'idéal du natif a constitué alors une rupture dans la doxa didactique : sans doute a-t-elle eu un réel succès théorique, mais une influence limitée en pratique. L'imitation parfaite du « bon accent », la traque des « solécismes » et autres « barbarismes » restent à n'en pas douter des représentations fort influentes dans le domaine scolaire. Le locuteur natif n'est pas mort, il a de beaux jours devant lui – et John E. Joseph montre ici que la notion bourdieusienne d'habitus est à même de rendre compte des pratiques sociales qui le font exister au quotidien.

Bernadette O'Rourke, de l'Université Herriot-Watt à Édimbourg, travaille avec Joan Pujolar, de l'Université de Catalogne, sur le concept de *new speaker*. Au centre du réseau de recherche européen qu'ils dirigent actuellement<sup>3</sup>, le nouveau locuteur, ou « néo-locuteur », renvoie au contexte actuel de promotion, voire de revitalisation des langues minorisées, telles que le gallois ou le breton. Ces langues ont en effet perdu leurs

3 *New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges.*

*locuteurs natifs*, ceux qui les apprennent dès l'enfance : elles regagnent actuellement de nouveaux locuteurs, à savoir tous ceux et toutes celles qui les apprennent comme langues seconde et, le cas échéant, les transmettent ensuite dans le cadre familial. Les modalités de ce qui apparaît alors comme un processus de « renativisation » sont ici interrogées, ainsi que la hiérarchisation sociale des usages qui leur sont associés.

Ma propre contribution est écrite du point de vue de l'histoire et de l'épistémologie des théories linguistiques, développée en France au laboratoire HTL (CNRS & Université Paris 7-Denis Diderot). Je pars du fait que le terme *natif* est un terme politique qui a de fait nourri la politisation du débat en linguistique : néanmoins, sa confusion avec le *locuteur idéal* aboutit à un rejet du politique hors du discours scientifique, au sens où sa valeur idéologique est considérée comme incompatible avec la théorisation du langage comme objet social. Le positionnement de Hymes est de ce point de vue particulièrement intéressant : se déclarant de gauche, et proche des idées politiques de Chomsky, il est l'un des tout premiers opposants déclarés au modèle du *locuteur-auditeur idéal*. Il inaugure donc avec la notion de *compétence communicative* plusieurs décennies d'un débat polyphonique, lequel définit selon les contextes et les périodes la nature de l'oppression qu'il dénonce (de la « norme scolaire » à « l'impérialisme ») – le *locuteur natif* et son faux jumeau le *locuteur-auditeur idéal* représentant la figure de l'opresseur.

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# IS THE NATIVE SPEAKER DEAD?

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## *Résumé*

Thomas Paikeday (1985) était à n'en pas douter en colère lorsqu'il a publié son attaque contre le locuteur natif. Bien d'autres l'ont suivi sur ce point, assurant que l'on n'avait plus besoin de recourir à la norme du locuteur natif, et que l'on pouvait trouver d'autres modèles dans les différentes variétés d'anglais dans le monde (« World Englishes »), dans les apprenants avancés de langues secondes, et, ce qui est une proposition plus radicale, dans les langues ayant fonction de lingua franca – l'anglais par exemple. Explorant les arguments de sociolinguistes, de spécialistes de l'éducation, mais également de psycholinguistes et de spécialistes de l'acquisition en langue seconde, cet article pose quatre questions : 1. L'anglais constitue-t-il un cas spécifique ? 2. Que peut faire le locuteur natif que le non-natif ne pourrait pas faire ? 3. Quelle est l'importance de la culture ? 4. Une langue peut-elle survivre sans locuteurs natifs ? La conclusion est que les modèles, échelles et examens qui utilisent le critère du locuteur natif ne le comprennent pas dans son sens le plus commun – n'importe quel locuteur natif. Ce à quoi ils se réfèrent est une version idéalisée du locuteur natif.

## *Mots-clés*

Linguistique appliquée, acquisition en langue seconde, « World Englishes », lingua franca

## *Abstract*

Thomas Paikeday (1985) was undoubtedly angry when he published his attack on the native speaker. Many others have subsequently agreed with him, maintaining that we no longer need the native speaker as a norm, that there are models in World English varieties, in proficient second language speakers and even, more radically in lingua franca varieties such as English as a Lingua Franca. Exploring the argument of sociolinguistic and educational scholars but also of psycholinguistic and Second Language Acquisition scholars, this paper raises four questions: 1. Is English a special case? 2. What can the native speaker do which the non-native speaker cannot? 3. How important is culture? 4. Can a language survive without native speakers? The conclusion is that models, scales, examinations which use as criterion the native speaker do not mean any or all native speakers. What they mean is the (idealized) native speaker.

## *Keywords*

Applied Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), World Englishes, Lingua Franca

Thomas Paikeday (1985) was undoubtedly angry when he published his attack on the native speaker. Many others have subsequently agreed with him (Braine 1999, Edge 2006, Holliday 2008), maintaining that we no longer need the native speaker as a norm, that there are models in World English varieties, in proficient second language speakers and even, more radically in lingua franca varieties such as English as a Lingua Franca (Seidlhofer 2011).

Two aspects of these attacks are noteworthy. The first is that they all come from sociolinguistic, applied linguistic, educational scholars. Little attention seems to be paid to the research of psycholinguistic and Second Language Acquisition scholars (Sorace 2003) who take the view that there is a cognitive disjunction between native speakers (NS) and non native speakers (NNS). The research of Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) is particularly convincing.

The second aspect is that most of the research that agrees with Paikeday refers to English which, because of its world-wide spread, first through colonisation and settlement, then through business, finance and media interests, has spread in three ways: first as a more or less unitary Standard English, mainly recognised for writing, second as a range of, generally intelligible, L1s (Scottish, English, American, Australian...), and third as a growing number of post-colonial lects (Singapore, Nigerian, Indian...) (Davies 2003).

None of this holds for minority languages which may have no standard and which tend, to a large extent, towards cultural identity within a confined land mass.

The native speaker is attacked even more widely. The American Charles Ferguson, first Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, wrote:

Linguists ... have long given a special place to the native speaker as the only true and reliable source of language data ... much of the world's verbal communication takes place by means of languages which are not the users' mother tongue, but their second, third or nth language, acquired one way or another and used when appropriate. This kind of language use merits the attention of linguists as much as do the more traditional objects of their research ... the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should preferably be quietly dropped from the linguists' set of professional myths about language (Ferguson 1983, p. vii).



And Chomsky, no doubt mindful of what he considered to be the ubiquity of Universal Grammar, goes even further:

the question of what are the “languages” or “dialects” attained and what is the difference between “native” and ‘non-native” is just pointless (Chomsky 1985).

Should we acquiesce? Is the native speaker dead? Let me turn to my four questions.

### QUESTION 1

#### ENGLISH: A SPECIAL CASE?

Underlying many of the remarks by postcolonial apologists is their failure to acknowledge that English in the world at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a special case. This denial of a special status for native speakers of English is surely ideological, belonging to an argument about the role of English in a world filled with World Englishes, where there are more L2 than L1 speakers of English. In this context there is a political point to be made in opposing the privileged position of the Old Variety of English (OVE) native speaker/user. Rajagopalan maintains: “the quest for the pure native is part of a larger agenda that in other epochs manifested itself – and in some quarters still does – as the quest for the pure race” (1997, p. 229). Since there are no “viable and fool-proof criteria for identifying a native” (*ibid.*, p. 228) then all that is left is the “myth of nativity” (*ibid.*, p. 229).

Are such sentiments specific to English? Or are they generalisable? Would these critics make the same point about Welsh or Basque or Menomoni or Kikuyu? Clearly they are making a political point and an understandable one, given the inequities of the world. It is worth remembering that English is not itself a cause of those inequities, rather, it is a correlative. There are after all countries and societies with high levels of English (e.g. Kerala) which remain very poor. But that said, if native speakers’ privilege is controlled is it still the case that there is no special status to be accorded to native speakers of English? Graddol writes of the “decline of the native speaker” and asks the “tantalising question: [...] large numbers of people will learn English as a Foreign Language in the 21<sup>st</sup> century [...]. But will they continue to look towards the native speaker for authoritative norms of usage?” (1999, p. 68).

It is this question of authority that worries Greenbaum when he writes of the inherent instability of a new variety of English: “what is in dispute is the acceptance of the national characteristics and their institutionalisation” (Greenbaum 1985, p. 243).

Where does this leave the Singapore native speaker/user of English? James (1999) maintains that there is good documentary evidence for the existence of Singapore English, a view attested to by Tay (1982). Surely, the answer is that it leaves Singapore English exactly where it leaves, say, Glasgow English. Singapore is in fact in a stronger position: it has statehood and therefore a centralising force for language planning and norms. We might speculate on what would be the position of English if Scotland became independent. Would there be a deliberate scotising of norms? Or would Scotland go the way of Ireland. There, the rich vein of creative writing in English has never been supported by – or itself supported – the demand for the development of a Standard Irish English. True, there has been research into and discussion of Hiberno-English (Harris 1985) but little sign of different norms for education and publishing and the media (as in the USA, Australia). Perhaps Ireland – the oldest British colony – has had enough confidence not to insist on making that difference explicit. Or perhaps the presence of the Irish Gaelic language has provided a sufficiently separate identity and taken up the space that a Standard Irish English movement might have filled.

The theoretical debate about native speakers may be unresolved, but in the daily practice of language teaching and testing resolution is necessary and agreement on a model and a goal required. Even so Leung *et al.* (1997) argue for flexibility:

Little development of such an expanded pedagogy is possible without the displacement of conventional notions of the “native speaker” of English (what we here label the “idealised native speaker”) (p. 1).

While this approach makes sense for individuals it is hard to see how it would lead to a language teaching policy for whole populations. Cook (1993) argues for the second language (the near-native speaker) model to replace the native speaker in order to consider the harmful effects of privileging an inappropriate communication model in countries such as Japan.

(Until the beginning of the current century the teaching of English in Japan was not very successful. Leung et al attribute this failure, in part, to the presentation of the unattainable native speaker as model rather than, as Cook proposes, the near native speaker, a model which is clearly attainable.)

What both Rajagopalan (1999) and Canagarajah (1999) helpfully do is to argue strongly (as Medgyes 1999 does) for the valorising of the L2 teacher of English while at the same time reassuring professional colleagues that in teaching English as a Foreign Language (or indeed ESL) they are not acting as instruments of linguistic imperialism. This needs to be said by those who, it has been claimed, are victims of this globalising process. Rajagopalan attacks the “alarmist thesis that the teaching of English to speakers of other languages is an outrageous act of aggression” (1999, p. 202). And Canagarajah, who yields to no-one in his critique of the power of English in the periphery, makes very clear that scholars and teachers in the periphery are not dupes, that they are perfectly capable of operating “subtle forms of resistance to English”, appropriating from it what they need. (1999, p. 3). And he puts a question mark against the absolutist strategy advocated by Ngũgĩ: “there are many reason why (his) oppositional strategy may be ill conceived ... this is not a solution to the ideological challenges, but an escape from it” (Canagarajah 1999, p. 177). This is the argument presented by Agnihotri and Khanna (1997) following their survey of young people in India’s views on “the space of English in tomorrow’s India” (1997, p. 50). What they conclude is that English is indeed an Indian language and needs to be problematised in the Indian contexts, that it must be accorded its proper role within the ‘complementarity’ of the English language” (*ibid.*, p. 139). But what they do not do is to raise the question of which model of English is appropriate in India.

## QUESTION 2

WHAT CAN THE NATIVE SPEAKER  
DO WHICH THE NON-NATIVE SPEAKER CANNOT?

The native speaker (and this means all native speakers) can be characterised in these 6 ways:

1. The native speaker acquires the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker in childhood,

2. The native speaker has intuitions (in terms of acceptability and productiveness) about his/her idiolectal syntax,
3. The native speaker has intuitions about those features of the Standard Language grammar which are distinct from his/her idiolectal syntax,
4. The native speaker has a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse, which exhibits pauses mainly at clause boundaries (the “one clause at a time” facility) and which is facilitated by a huge memory stock of complete lexical items (Pawley and Syder 1983). In both production and comprehension the native speaker exhibits a wide range of communicative competence,
5. The native speaker has a unique capacity to write creatively (and this includes, of course, literature at all levels from jokes to epics, metaphor to novels,
6. The native speaker has a unique capacity to interpret and translate into the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker. Disagreements about an individual’s capacity are likely to stem from a dispute about the Standard or (standard) Language.

All except (1) are contingent issues. In that way the question: “can a second language learner become a native speaker of a target language?” reduces to: is it necessary to acquire a code in early childhood in order to be a native speaker of that code? Now the answer to that question, and this is where the circularity lies, is to ask a further question, what is it that the child acquires in acquiring his/her L1? But I have already answered that question in my criteria (2)-(6) above, and so the question again becomes a contingent one. But we do need in (2) and (3) above to ensure a cultural dimension since the child L1 acquirer does have access to the resources of the culture attached to the language and particularly to those learnt and encoded or even imprinted early. Still, having said that, what of subcultural differences between for example the Scots and the English; of different cultures with the same Standard language (for example the Swiss, the Austrians, the West Germans and the East Germans). What too of International English and of an isolated L1 in a multilingual setting (for example Indian English)?

Given the interlingual differences and the lack of agreement and norms that certainly occur among such groups it does appear that the post-pubertal second language learner has a difficult but not an impossible task to become a native speaker of a target language which can contain such

wide diversities. The answer to the question of L2 learners evolving into native speakers of the target language must therefore be “Yes”: but the practice required, given the model of the child L1 acquirer who for 5/6 years spends much of his/her time learning language alone, is so great that it is not likely that many second language learners become native speakers of their target language. The analogy that occurs to me here is that of music where it is possible to become a concert performer after a late start but the reality is that few do. The more exact analogy of learning to play the piano as a child and switching to, say, the cello later on is common but is not the relevant comparison I wish to make.

It is difficult for an adult non-native speaker to become a native speaker of a second language precisely because I define a native speaker as a person who has early acquired the language. However, the limitations imposed by the later acquisition, when it is very successful, are likely to be psycholinguistic rather than sociolinguistic. The adult non-native speaker can acquire the communicative competence of the native speaker; s/he can acquire the confidence necessary to membership. What is more difficult is to gain the speed and the certainty of knowledge relevant to judgements of grammaticality (Sorace 2003, Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2003). But as with all questions of boundaries (for the native speaker is a boundary that excludes) there are major language differences among native speakers. Native speakers may be prepared to make judgements quickly about grammaticality but they do not necessarily agree with one another. And so I am left asking to what extent it matters. If a non-native speaker wishes to pass as a native speaker and is so accepted then it is surely irrelevant if s/he shows differences on more and more refined tests of grammaticality. That may be of interest psycholinguistically but for applied linguistic purposes I maintain that it is unimportant.

Escudero and Sharwood Smith (2001) argue that it is possible to be precise about the concept of native speaker using Rosch's prototype theory (1973). But that assumes that we have the definition native speaker to hand to start with and in any case the distinction native speaker-non-native speaker, like all majority-minority power relations, is at bottom one of confidence and identity. What that means, as Tajfel (1981) points out, is that we define minorities negatively against majorities which themselves we may not be able to define. To be a native speaker means not being a non-native speaker. Even if I cannot define a native speaker I can define

a non-native speaker negatively as someone who is not regarded by him/herself or by native speakers as a native speaker. It is in this sense only that the native speaker is not a myth, the sense that gives reality to feelings of confidence and identity. They are real enough even if on analysis the native speaker is seen to be an emperor without any clothes.

### QUESTION 3

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS CULTURE?

Let me now turn to the anthropological approach to categorization, the anthropological. Frederik Barth (1969), discussing ethnic groups and boundaries, argues that:

Socially relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership not the overt “objective” differences which are generated by other factors. It makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behaviour – if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behaviour be interpreted as A’s and not as B’s; in other words, they describe their allegiance to the shared culture of A’s (*ibid.*, p. 15).

This, claims Barth, follows from what he regards as the primary criterion of ethnicity: self-ascription:

ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristics of organizing interaction between peoples” (*ibid.*, p. 10).

What Barth is saying is that social categories are defined by their boundaries not by what they contain: “socially relevant features alone become diagnostic for membership, not the overt ‘objective’ differences which are generated by other factors” (*ibid.*, p. 15). No prototype gradation here, then, no criteria to differentiate core and periphery membership. Now from a social point of view, such a challenge to our concern with the native speaker deserves close attention. After all, social membership, membership of groups is accepted, taken for granted. There are exceptions, but in general, boundaries are maintained and the assumed norms within them followed, national, gender, less often perhaps religious.

We take it for granted that we belong to communities within those boundaries, communities of whose members we have very little personal knowledge or contact. They are indeed, as Anderson (1991) remarked of the nation, an “imagined community”.

Can the same be said of the native speaker? When we say we are native speakers of X, what exactly do we mean, other than our acceptance of a particular community membership? As Escudero and Sharwood-Smith (2001) ruefully remark, we are quite uncertain as to what we mean: we gloss over a definition, assuming that we know that we are all talking about the same thing. When Sorace investigates her near-natives it is noticeable that the NSs she uses as her controls are all educated and what their education has provided them with is a facility in Standard English. In other words, her experiments ignore NS variation.

#### QUESTION 4

##### CAN A LANGUAGE SURVIVE WITHOUT NSs?

Language and culture are not isomorphic: hence a culture can change while the language remains relatively stable (as we see in various standard Englishes. Can a language change while culture remains stable, producing one culture: two languages? This is less obvious and raise the question of what the same language means (Serbian and Croatian?) Cultures are not discrete, they overlap : Scottish, English, /American, Canadian and so on. They share and are not identical any more than Sussex and Lancashire are. Cultures, like language vary.

Language is in part about identity but identity can be achieved and maintained through an attained culture (Irish without Gaelic, Fishman’s *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival* (1985). Are there examples of language survival without native speakers? Latin? Hebrew? Esperanto? It seems that such survival requires a literary/literacy maintenance. Minority languages can survive without native speakers if there are written texts and the desire (scholarly, religious etc.) to maintain their use. But until they find new native speakers, it is difficult for them to avoid fossilization.

## CODA

There are native speakers and there is *the native speaker*: the first is all of us, the second an idealization. We are all native speakers of one or other code, language, idiolect. Some of us are educated, some not, some literate, some not, some creative orators, some not, and so on. The idea that all native speakers are at level C2 on the Common European Framework<sup>1</sup> scale makes no sense. Some perhaps are, but they are unusual. C2 is the level of *the native speaker*, an idealization (isomorphic with the Standard Language, itself an idealization). Models, scales, examinations which use as criterion the native speaker do not mean any or all native speakers. What they mean is *the (idealized) native speaker*. It is not surprising, therefore, that a group of educated non-native speakers may out-perform a group of native speakers on a proficiency test. What their education has done for the non-native speakers is to imbue them with the knowledge of *the (idealized) native speaker*, that is of the Standard Language. Proficiency tests are all about knowledge of the Standard Language, which is exactly what non-native speakers have been trained in.

1 The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment was put together by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996 to provide a method of learning, teaching and assessing for all European languages. It consists of a scale of six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, the highest level) on which to place learners and materials. Stakeholders decide for themselves how to determine placement. The CEFR is increasingly being used beyond Europe.



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## LE CORPS DU LOCUTEUR NATIF : DISCIPLINE, HABITUS, IDENTITÉ

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### *Résumé*

La question fondamentale est la suivante : comment le locuteur natif a-t-il cessé d'être un concept utile dans l'analyse et la pédagogie linguistiques, pour devenir un symbole d'oppression ? A-t-il toujours représenté une oppression, mais qui n'aurait pas été reconnue comme telle ? Ou bien d'autres changements, d'ordre social en particulier, ont-ils modifié ses conditions d'application, de telle sorte que l'oppression ne s'est fait sentir que progressivement ? Et notre perception du concept comme une oppression est-elle un produit temporaire de notre façon actuelle de voir les choses ? En posant ces questions dans une perspective historique, cet article montre que la notion bourdieusienne d'habitus aide à comprendre comment l'ensemble des pratiques que nous appelons « une langue » devient, en partie, incorporé, physiquement matérialisé en nous. Les normes linguistiques existent dès lors pour empêcher les locuteurs de parler « nativement », c'est-à-dire, corporellement. Voilà la discipline ultime : la mortification de la chair langagière. La « langue standard » apparaît donc comme ce que nous avons de plus proche du langage des anges, ces êtres sans corps.

### *Mots-clés*

Habitus, éthique, oppression, discipline

### *Abstract*

How did the native speaker, having being considered a useful concept in linguistic analysis and pedagogy, finally become a symbol of oppression? Has it always represented an oppression – but one that wasn't recognized as such? Or did other changes, social changes in particular, modify the applicability conditions of the concept, so that the oppression was felt progressively? Is our contemporary perception of the concept as an oppression a temporary product of our present way of seeing things? Raising these questions in a historical perspective, this paper shows how Bourdieu's notion of habitus sheds some light on how the practices that we name “a language” become partly embodied, physically materialized in us. Linguistic norms thus exist in order to prevent speakers from speaking “natively” – i.e., bodily. This is the ultimate discipline: the mortification of the flesh. The “standard language” therefore appears the closest we have to the language of angels, these beings without bodies.

### *Keywords*

Habitus, ethics, oppression, discipline

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Le native speaker* est une idée moderne, que l'on ne trouve pas dans son sens actuel avant les années 1890. Sans doute, l'expression nomma quelque chose qui était déjà implicite dans la pensée antérieure – les idées de Humboldt sur le lien entre la typologie linguistique et la puissance intellectuelle d'un peuple, par exemple, ou celles de Fichte sur la création d'un peuple par une langue commune, qui lie ce peuple à un lieu particulier. Ces modes de penser la langue semblent s'appliquer uniquement à ce que nous appelons des locuteurs natifs. Et pourtant, la philosophie de Humboldt ou de Fichte ne reprend qu'une partie de ce dont il s'agit dans ce concept.

Valelia Muni Toke (Muni Toke 2013) nous a donné une analyse approfondie de la façon dont ce concept se développa en France pendant la première moitié du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans l'espace linguistique, psychologique et politique habité par Damourette et Pichon. Alan Davies (Davies 1991 ; Davies 2003 ; Davies 2013) expose depuis plus de trente ans les problèmes didactiques ainsi que socio-politiques soulevés par ce concept, surtout mais non exclusivement dans le contexte anglophone. Par rapport à mes deux collègues, ma propre contribution à la question a été tangentielle. Mais je porte un vif intérêt à l'essor du concept de locuteur natif : pourquoi a-t-il paru à un moment historique donné ? Pourquoi, quelques années plus tard, sera-t-il perçu comme problématique ? Ces questions sont au centre de mes propres préoccupations concernant la langue et l'identité nationale, la politique et les pratiques pédagogiques, et le développement historique de la théorie linguistique : car le locuteur natif est l'une des idées-clés qui distinguent la linguistique chomskienne de l'approche néo-bloomfieldienne dont elle est issue.

La question fondamentale est la suivante : comment le locuteur natif a-t-il cessé d'être un concept utile dans l'analyse et la pédagogie linguistiques, pour devenir un symbole d'oppression ? A-t-il toujours représenté une oppression, mais qui n'aurait pas été reconnue comme telle ? Ou bien d'autres changements, d'ordre social en particulier, ont-ils modifié ses conditions d'application, de telle sorte que l'oppression ne s'est fait sentir que progressivement ? Et notre perception du concept comme une oppression est-elle un produit temporaire de notre façon actuelle de voir les choses ? Le locuteur natif sera-t-il ressuscité, même réhabilité ?

## 2. LE LOCUTEUR NATIF ET LA DIDACTIQUE DES LANGUES

Déjà en 1890 le linguiste américain C. H. Grandgent lançait cet appel :

L'objet principal de nos cours de langues modernes est, comme je l'ai dit ci-dessus, la capacité à lire le français et l'allemand ; mais pour faire cette lecture d'une façon intelligente, l'étudiant doit connaître plus que les définitions des mots qu'il voit ; il doit pouvoir imaginer les phrases sortant de la bouche d'un Français ou d'un Allemand – il doit savoir comment elles sonnent à l'oreille d'un *native hearer*, et comment elles se construisent ensemble dans l'esprit d'un *native speaker* (Grandgent, 1891, p. 59) <sup>1</sup>.

Il est à remarquer que ce qu'il propose en invoquant le *native speaker* et le *native hearer* est néanmoins une contribution des linguistes à la capacité à lire la langue étrangère.

Le Séminaire de français moderne de l'Université de Genève, dont l'un des enseignants était Ferdinand de Saussure, est l'un des premiers programmes universitaires à s'écarter de ces préjugés « visuels » ; mais Saussure lui-même a dispensé un cours de versification dans la poésie française de la période classique (voir Joseph 2012). Soixante-dix ans plus tard, S. Pit Corder, Henry Widdowson et leurs collègues de l'Université d'Édimbourg contribuaient à l'abandon quasi total de l'analyse linguistique et même de l'enseignement d'une langue, en montrant que l'acquisition réelle d'une deuxième langue est un processus naturel, pour lequel la contribution du professeur consiste à créer des situations de communication authentiques et à fournir un modèle, ou simplement une source de mots et de phrases pour atteindre les objectifs de la communication. Dans la seconde moitié des années 1980, le *communicative language teaching* est devenu la norme à travers le monde, et on a vu l'essor d'une industrie pour la rééducation des enseignants de langue, un peu comme la révolution culturelle chinoise. Le rejet presque total de la grammaire provoqué par cette rééducation était excessif, mais il a suffi de deux ou trois ans pour que

1 « The chief object of our modern language courses is, as has been said, the ability to read French and German; but to do this reading intelligently, the student must know more than the definitions of the words he sees; he must be able to imagine the phrases coming from the lips of a Frenchman or a German – he must know how they sound to a native hearer, and how they put themselves together in the mind of a native speaker. »

les linguistes appliqués trouvent un moyen de redresser la barre, en réintroduisant la grammaire et la phonologie sous le pseudonyme de *focus on form*. Le mot « grammaire » est resté tabou.

La citation de Grandgent contient l'une des premières occurrences de *native speaker* dans son sens actuel <sup>2</sup>. C'est un concept moderne, et on voit chez Grandgent comment ce concept est entré dans l'enseignement des langues modernes : comme correctif du réductionnisme d'une méthode où la simple mémorisation suffisait. Pour *bien lire*, il faut, selon Grandgent, une compréhension organique de la langue que seul le locuteur natif possède dans une forme parfaite. Cela n'a pas changé avec la théorie de l'interlangue ; au contraire, la place du *native speaker* est devenue plus importante, en tant qu'il fournit des situations de communication et d'*input* authentiques, au fur et à mesure que la place de l'enseignant a été réduite. De plus, la réorientation de la linguistique théorique effectuée par Chomsky, qui a placé au centre la grammaire possédée par un « locuteur-auditeur idéal, dans une communauté linguistique parfaitement homogène, qui sait parfaitement la langue de cette communauté <sup>3</sup> », a renforcé l'importance du locuteur natif pour une linguistique appliquée qui voulait s'écarter le moins possible de la théorie la plus puissante du moment – d'autant plus que la compétence du locuteur natif comme cible de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage des langues, au lieu de la maîtrise de la littérature, s'accorde bien avec l'idéologie anti-élite de la pédagogie des années 1960.

Mais qui est locuteur natif d'une langue post-coloniale comme l'anglais ou le français ? Pour l'Américain Chomsky, c'est toute personne qui parle cette langue depuis l'enfance. Pour les linguistes appliqués d'Édimbourg, c'était moins évident. Il s'agissait d'une hypothèse fondamentale qu'il aurait semblé ridicule de mettre en question : l'anglais est la langue des Anglais, et aussi des Écossais d'Édimbourg, sous sa forme « éduquée », ce qui exclut tout dialecte du nord et de l'ouest de l'Angleterre. En effet, c'était l'anglais des universités d'Oxford, de Cambridge et de Bloomsbury à Londres, mais surtout – enseignait-on chez nous – l'anglais de l'Université d'Édimbourg, qui était le plus clair et le moins marqué par des distinctions de classe sociale, l'Écosse étant beaucoup plus égalitariste à cause de son héritage calviniste. Ce sont là des préjugés que l'on entendait jusqu'à très récemment.

2 Voir Joseph 2003.

3 Chomsky 1965, p. 3.

### 3. DAVIES : LE LOCUTEUR NATIF COMME MYTHIQUE

Pour Davies, le locuteur natif est un mythe aux conséquences dangereuses et destructrices pour l'enseignement des langues et surtout pour l'évaluation des étudiants<sup>4</sup>. Il est mythique parce que, en réalité, il n'y a aucune frontière claire entre les locuteurs natifs et non natifs. Il y a des personnes qui, même après l'enfance, acquièrent une langue jusqu'à un tel niveau de compétence qu'on ne peut guère les distinguer des locuteurs natifs. Ma collègue Antonella Sorace<sup>5</sup> insiste sur le fait qu'il y a toujours des différences minimales dans les jugements de grammaticalité – mais de tels jugements appartiennent au laboratoire de recherche, et non à la vie quotidienne. Selon Davies, ce mythe est destructeur d'abord parce qu'il transmet aux apprenants le message qu'ils ne pourront jamais atteindre le but ultime du processus d'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère, malgré leur motivation et leurs efforts, en raison de leur naissance et d'autres paramètres hors de leur contrôle. C'est donc une forme d'exclusion sociale injustifiable, que la linguistique appliquée devrait combattre plutôt que renforcer.

Dans un certain sens, la critique daviesienne du locuteur natif est une extension naturelle du concept d'*interlangue* de Corder (Corder 1981). Celui-ci a reconnu la valeur positive des connaissances grammaticales acquises par l'étudiant, au lieu de les réduire à une forme inférieure de la grammaire du locuteur natif. Davies a étendu cette valorisation en effaçant la distinction entre l'idéal que le locuteur natif est censé représenter et la réalité, non seulement de la quasi-totalité des étudiants mais même de la majorité des gens qui parlent la langue-cible couramment depuis l'enfance, mais non sous forme « légitime ». Pour la pédagogie, l'effet de la critique de Davies n'était pas moins radical que celui de Corder : l'un et l'autre remettent en question une pierre angulaire du sens commun de la linguistique appliquée. Il se peut même que la théorie de Davies ait été plus difficile à comprendre pour les linguistes appliqués. Le locuteur natif – bien qu'idéalisé – semblait définir un but à atteindre pour l'étudiant d'une langue étrangère. Qu'est-ce qui pouvait le remplacer comme cible objective et universelle ?

4 Voir A. Davies 1991 et 2003.

5 Voir par exemple Sorace & Filiaci 2006.

La réponse à cette question est très simple : rien ne pouvait le remplacer. Ainsi, il en a résulté une sorte de rupture. D'un côté, une linguistique appliquée orientée vers la méthodologie pédagogique a continué à opérer avec une version de la compétence du locuteur natif comme but ultime de l'étude d'une langue. De l'autre côté, une linguistique appliquée orientée vers la compréhension des contextes dans lesquels s'inscrit l'enseignement des langues a commencé à explorer les aspects *fonctionnels, sociaux et politiques* des interlangues – conçues alors non pas comme un état d'équilibre de l'individu progressant vers la compétence native ou *native-like*, mais comme des *World Englishes* : les anglais indien, singapourien, nigérien et ainsi de suite.

Disons que nous acceptons avec Davies que le concept de locuteur natif n'est ni bien défini ni souhaitable éthiquement. Pourquoi néanmoins les locuteurs natifs semblent-ils la plupart du temps être différents des locuteurs non natifs ? C'est une question qui paraît mettre en cause la théorie de Davies – mais c'est en même temps une question que sa théorie a rendue possible, même nécessaire. Avant de formuler une réponse, il faut se rappeler que l'acquisition de notre langue maternelle est un long apprentissage, qui occupe presque tous nos moments de veille pendant les trois ou quatre premières années de notre vie, et qui continue après. Avec la langue, on nous transmet le contenu de notre « culture » ; on peut dire que la langue est le texte primaire par lequel une culture est transmise. Au cours de cet apprentissage enfantin, les connaissances acquises font partie non seulement de notre mémoire, mais de tout notre système nerveux – notre *extended mind* (esprit étendu), ou *cognition distribuée* si l'on préfère –, c'est-à-dire de notre corps. Ma première langue ne limite pas ce que je suis désormais capable de penser ou de faire mais au contraire elle rend certaines choses plus faciles, certaines inclinations plus naturelles, alors que d'autres demandent plus d'effort. Cette réponse puise son inspiration chez Merleau-Ponty, puis chez Bourdieu. Être locuteur natif est un fait historique qui concerne la formation de l'*habitus*, l'ensemble des dispositions, schèmes d'action ou de perception que l'individu acquiert et incorpore à travers son expérience sociale. Ces dispositions, qui nous sont inculquées dès la première enfance, engendrent des pratiques qui sont régulières sans être gouvernées par aucune « règle ».

Ainsi peut-on redéfinir le locuteur natif sans avoir recours à sa compétence linguistique. La compétence est un sous-produit de l'*habitus*. On peut,



avec difficulté, atteindre une compétence impossible à distinguer de celle d'un locuteur natif plus tard dans la vie, sans avoir appris l'*habitus* du locuteur natif. Mais tant que l'apprenant d'une deuxième langue ne montre pas l'intégralité de l'*habitus* attendu comme complément de la compétence native, il reste simplement *native-like* dans le jugement des autres.

#### 4. LE LOCUTEUR NATIF ET LA LANGUE STANDARD

Alan Davies a été parmi les premiers dans le monde anglophone à dénoncer l'injustice que le concept du locuteur natif représente pour les habitants des pays asiatiques et africains où l'anglais reste une langue officielle, parfois la langue exclusive de l'éducation formelle – mais où la population est divisée entre une élite qui la parle sous une forme plus ou moins légitime, et la masse de locuteurs dont la forme de langue est tellement locale qu'on ne les compte pas comme locuteurs natifs, bien qu'ils parlent anglais depuis la prime enfance.

Pour moi, l'une des idées les plus fécondes de Davies est que le locuteur natif est une sorte d'incarnation conceptuelle d'une autre construction linguistique sujette à caution, la *langue standard*. « A standard language, dit-il, needs as its members those who uphold its norms by taking on the responsibility of being its native speakers. Native speakers represent standard languages: it is the standard language they are native speakers of<sup>6</sup>. » En considérant la question du point de vue de la didactique de la langue, on peut mesurer la vérité de cette remarque. Mais ce n'est pas la vérité entière. Tous les locuteurs natifs ne parlent pas la langue standard. On la leur enseigne, et ils se situent dans une hiérarchie sociale dans laquelle leur position dépend en grande partie de leur utilisation de la langue standard.

Mais pour les locuteurs natifs, ne pas utiliser la langue standard n'est pas une simple question de défaut d'exposition linguistique. Il s'agit, pour la plupart des gens, d'une question d'identité : utiliser la langue standard risque de les séparer de leur réseau social, de les aliéner vis-à-vis de leurs proches. Les avantages socio-économiques ne compenseraient pas un tel déracinement. Ce n'est pas une décision que la plupart des gens prennent

6 Davies, 2003, p. 197.

explicitement ou délibérément. On peut presque dire que la décision est prise pour eux par leur corps : leur *habitus*, si je me permets d'employer ce terme que Pierre Bourdieu a emprunté aux philosophes médiévaux tel Thomas d'Aquin.

Avant d'analyser plus profondément le concept d'*habitus*, je voudrais réfléchir un instant sur ces deux hommes auxquels il est associé. Nés à sept siècles d'intervalle, l'un et l'autre ont quitté leur lointain lieu d'origine pour dominer la scène universitaire parisienne. À l'époque de Thomas d'Aquin, les universités utilisaient le latin, qui n'était la langue maternelle de personne. Thomas d'Aquin commença à l'apprendre pendant son enfance, et l'apprit très bien, comme tout écolier sérieux. Il est probable que personne à Paris ne l'a jamais entendu parler sa langue maternelle. Sans doute, parlait-il latin avec un accent régional – c'était le cas de tout le monde. Sans doute, l'Université de Paris comptait-elle une masse critique de Parisiens qui avaient leur façon particulière de parler latin ; mais que ces gens se soient moqué de ceux qui avaient un accent provincial, c'est ce dont je n'ai jamais rencontré de trace textuelle. Ils se moquaient de ceux qui mélangeaient des *mots* de leur langue maternelle avec le latin, mais pas des sons produits. Ils ne toléraient pas la grammaire fautive, mais là encore ce qui était visé était l'apprentissage, plutôt que la provenance de l'individu.

L'expérience de Bourdieu fut tout autre. Venu à Paris du Béarn pour faire ses études, il n'avait qu'à prononcer une syllabe pour provoquer des sourires de dérision. Il était en principe un locuteur natif du français, mais pas de ce qu'il appellera plus tard la version *légitime* du français – une variété limitée à un lieu particulier et à une couche sociale particulière. Le jugement que les gens portaient sur lui ne visait pas son niveau d'éducation, mais le faible degré de ses connaissances sociales. Il savait parfaitement s'exprimer, et se faire entendre, et pourtant on n'appréciait pas ses dons extraordinaires car, quand on entendait son accent, on considérait ce jeune homme comme un bouffon de province. Il raconte dans ses ouvrages qu'il lui fallut peu de temps pour perdre complètement les habitudes langagières de sa vie passée et pour acquérir celles de son nouvel environnement. Il s'est rendu compte de sa propre complicité dans la « violence symbolique » dont il a été victime : bien des Béarnais visitent Paris sans remarquer les sourires condescendants de ceux qui les entendent. L'humiliation demande une reconnaissance active de la part de la victime.

Le propre de la domination symbolique réside précisément dans le fait qu'elle suppose de la part de celui qui la subit une attitude qui défie l'alternative ordinaire de la liberté et de la contrainte : les « choix » de l'habitus (celui par exemple qui consiste à corriger le *r* en présence de locuteurs légitimes) sont accomplis, sans conscience ni contrainte, en vertu de dispositions qui, bien qu'elles soient indiscutablement le produit de déterminismes sociaux, se sont aussi constituées en dehors de la conscience et de la contrainte. [...] l'*intimidation*, violence symbolique qui s'ignore comme telle (dans la mesure où elle peut n'impliquer aucun *acte d'intimidation*), ne peut s'exercer que sur une personne prédisposée (dans son habitus) à la ressentir alors que d'autres l'ignorent (Bourdieu 2001, p. 79).

Ce qui est extraordinaire, c'est que Thomas d'Aquin, qui habita un Paris et une université encore plus stratifiés et socialement déterminés que ceux du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et dont la conception de l'habitus fournira à Bourdieu la clé pour comprendre sa propre situation linguistique, ne connut jamais lui-même une telle situation.

## 5. LES LOCUTEURS NATIFS ET LA DISCIPLINE

L'habitus nous aide à comprendre comment l'ensemble des pratiques que nous appelons une langue devient, en partie, incorporé, physiquement matérialisé en nous. Pour savoir comment cela se produit, il faut considérer l'habitus du point de vue de Foucault, selon qui c'est la discipline qui crée l'identité. Nous appréhendons la langue standard comme un ensemble de normes linguistiques, c'est-à-dire de règles portant moins sur la façon de parler que sur la façon de ne pas parler. Il y a trop de façons correctes de parler l'anglais ou le français pour les décrire toutes en termes positifs. Au lieu de cela, on décrit des éléments qui, lorsqu'ils ne sont pas respectés, sont perçus comme des marques d'un parler non standard. Cela s'accorde avec la maxime de Saussure selon laquelle une langue n'est pas constituée de termes positifs, mais seulement de différences, de termes négatifs. Saussure appliqua cette idée à la fonction sémiologique des signifiants et des signifiés *stricto sensu* ; mais elle s'applique aussi à ce qu'en parlant nous signifions à propos de nous-mêmes, ou plutôt à ce que nos auditeurs interprètent comme des indices sociaux et personnels. Ces indices sont inséparables des informations que nous essayons de transmettre, et ce sont

souvent les indices qui importent plus que le contenu informationnel, surtout dans les échanges phatiques.

Cette conception d'une langue standard formée de normes linguistiques qui peuvent être violées s'accorde avec les idées foucauldienne sur l'essor de l'identité au moyen de la discipline. Les normes linguistiques sont une forme de discipline linguistique, dans tous les sens du terme : elles doivent être maintenues, supervisées, sanctionnées. Grâce à ce travail institutionnel et interpersonnel, la langue standard a une existence réelle, mais non ce genre d'existence réifiée qu'elle semble avoir dans notre façon d'en parler métaphoriquement – comme une chose que l'on peut posséder, ou à laquelle on a accès, et qui semble exister séparément des locuteurs, forte de sa propre puissance. L'anglais ou le français non standard n'ont pas le même genre de discipline derrière eux, ou au-dessus d'eux, au sens où ces variétés ne sont pas enseignées à l'école, où leurs normes ne sont pas examinées et où il n'y a pas d'institution pour les faire respecter dans l'usage public à l'échelle nationale. D'où la perception que les locuteurs natifs se comportent d'une façon « naturelle » en parlant leur langue maternelle, une perception renforcée par la racine linguistique commune de *natif* et *naturel*. Il paraît également « naturel » que ceux qui parlent une langue étrangère présentent des « interférences » venant de leur langue maternelle : c'est leur habitus incorporé qui se fait entendre dans cette langue qui ne leur est pas native. Il est inquiétant d'entendre quelqu'un parler une langue étrangère sans aucune trace d'accent étranger : c'est comme si son corps était possédé par une autre âme, ou tout au moins doublé par un réalisateur italien.

Les normes linguistiques existent pour empêcher les locuteurs de parler « nativement » – c'est-à-dire, corporellement – au lieu d'utiliser la langue pour des buts purement rationnels, ce que notre tradition philosophique et religieuse considère comme son intention initiale et sa perpétuelle raison d'être. Voilà la discipline ultime : la mortification de la chair langagière. La langue standard est ce que nous avons de plus proche du langage des anges, ces êtres sans corps.

Mais du point de vue de celui qui apprend une langue étrangère, tout locuteur natif possède la « langue standard ». Si j'enseigne l'anglais à Dijon, qu'importe si je parle « le Brummie », le dialecte de Birmingham, pourvu que je le parle en mode « natif ». Les chercheurs ont montré que les étrangers perçoivent le Brummie des gens de race blanche comme plus natif et même comme plus « standard » que l'anglais de leurs

compatriotes d'origine pakistanaise qui parlent néanmoins le dialecte d'Oxford. Ici encore, le *corps* du locuteur natif empiète sur l'identité perçue de la langue qu'il produit. Voici encore un *caveat* à l'idée de Davies sur l'inséparabilité du locuteur natif et de la langue standard, une idée qui, je le répète, reste entièrement valide dans le contexte de l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère.

Évitons de dire que la langue non standard n'a pas de discipline derrière elle, disons plutôt qu'elle n'a pas le même genre de discipline que celle de la langue standard. Nier, comme Chomsky l'a toujours fait, que la langue maternelle nous soit « enseignée », c'est fermer ses oreilles aux innombrables heures de travail langagier entre mères et enfants, et – souvent plus brutalement – entre enfants. Ce travail commencerait déjà *in utero*. En étendant le modèle de réflexivité de Talbot Taylor (Taylor 2000), on peut voir comment la langue devient partie intégrante de l'habitus linguistique au moyen de la discipline effectuée par des métacommentaires quotidiens tels que « Yes, that's a rabbit », ou « Don't say *brung*, say *brought* ». Les petits locuteurs natifs de l'anglais passent dix ans ou plus en cours d'« anglais », où une grande partie du travail consiste à enseigner la langue standard, orale et écrite, dans des contextes où l'emploi du dialecte « naturel » (dans la mesure où il s'écarte de la langue standard) est interprété comme la marque d'une éducation insuffisante.

L'apprentissage des normes linguistiques est une sorte de nage à contre-courant. S'il rehausse le statut social de ceux qui l'acceptent, il les rend en vérité moins « locuteurs natifs » que s'ils parlaient plus « naturellement ». Là n'est pas simplement la perception des linguistes, mais celle des communautés linguistiques qui excommunient les locuteurs de la langue standard comme des traîtres à leur classe sociale. Le corps du locuteur natif doit faire face au corps *des* locuteurs natifs, qui applique sa propre discipline de conformité et de résistance.

## 6. LE LOCUTEUR NATIF ET LA LANGUE STANDARD COMME PROJECTIONS CORPORELLES ET SPIRITUELLES

La principale institution moderne contre laquelle cette résistance est dirigée est, bien sûr, l'éducation. Le concept du locuteur natif est plus ou moins contemporain de l'introduction de l'éducation universelle en Europe.

Si nous remontons quelque trois siècles en arrière, à la recherche de l'origine des institutions de la discipline linguistique, nous trouvons des livres de deux sortes : le dictionnaire et la grammaire. Ils ont survécu pour devenir les piliers de l'éducation moderne, et finalement pour être projetés dans le cerveau universel par Chomsky. Au début, il ne s'agissait dans les dictionnaires que de la signification ; les indications de la prononciation correcte sont un ajout assez récent. Dans les grammaires aussi, l'intonation est rarement mentionnée avant la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, même quand elle est significative. Avant ces ajouts, le dictionnaire et la grammaire étaient destinés à discipliner l'esprit seulement.

Quand il esquissait ses idées sur la linguistique dans les années 1890, Ferdinand de Saussure pensait que la phonologie – qui à cette époque-là correspond à notre phonétique – devait être une entreprise fondamentalement différente de la morphologie, plutôt qu'un niveau différent d'une même structure. Dans la phonétique il s'agit purement de sons – de production corporelle – dont les changements ne sont pas rationnels, mais obéissent à leurs propres lois quasi mécaniques, sauf pour les incursions assez rares de la raison sous la forme de l'analogie.

Mais dès qu'il s'agit de la signification, nous quittons le domaine de la phonologie pour celui de la morphologie, royaume des signes, qui sont le fondement de la pensée rationnelle. Saussure pensait que la linguistique, en tant qu'étude historique des langues dans le temps qu'elle était à cette époque-là, devait se limiter aux sons. Il a insisté sur les différences entre le travail des linguistes et celui des grammairiens : c'est parmi ceux-ci qu'il se plaçait lui-même. L'analyse faite par le grammairien demande que le temps s'arrête, parce que les aspects de la langue dont il s'agit dans cette analyse sont des valeurs qui existent dans un système. La valeur de chaque élément est générée par sa pure différence avec tout autre élément du système, à un moment donné. L'on pourrait comparer l'analyse synchronique d'un système linguistique du X<sup>e</sup> siècle avec celui possédé par « le même peuple » au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle : mais évidemment les locuteurs ne sont pas les mêmes personnes qu'auparavant, même s'ils ont la même identité en tant que « peuple ». Pareillement, les systèmes linguistiques ne sont pas les mêmes, bien qu'ils portent le même nom (par exemple *le français*, ancien et moyen). On pourrait donc les comparer diachroniquement comme deux systèmes différents – deux langues différentes. Mais les traiter historiquement, comme une même langue

ayant une existence permanente dans le temps, équivaldrait à succomber à un mythe.

La « grammaire » sémiologique et synchronique fut la continuation d'un héritage antique qui subsistait dans la tradition française : celui de la « grammaire générale » – une tradition que l'on enseignait toujours à Genève lorsque Saussure était jeune, trente ans après sa disparition en France. La « linguistique » diachronique des sons fut cette entreprise moderne qui, selon Saussure, n'est arrivée à l'état de science sérieuse que dans les années 1870, quand l'autre tradition était sur le point de disparaître. Saussure a assisté à la mort de l'une et à la naissance de l'autre, en arrivant à Leipzig en 1876, exactement au moment où Brugmann et Osthoff proclamaient le manifeste de la *junggrammatische Richtung*.

Le concept de locuteur natif n'aurait pas pu voir le jour avant le moment néo-grammairien, avec sa séparation absolue entre les changements phonétiques spontanés et l'analogie. Si le locuteur natif est en partie une projection de la langue standard, la langue standard est elle-même un autre type de projection, impliquant d'abord la dimension rationnelle, et reléguant la dimension non rationnelle au second plan. Le fait que le locuteur natif, en revanche, soit pour nous un concept résolument *anti*-rationnel est attesté par notre méfiance envers les données linguistiques recueillies auprès de locuteurs qui contrôlent le registre standard ; et par le refus de certains d'entre nous d'accepter que la langue standard ait des locuteurs natifs.

Peut-on dire que le locuteur natif est essentiellement une projection du corps, et la langue standard essentiellement une projection de l'esprit, rationnelle ? Je pense que oui : mais une telle conclusion n'est pas évidente si l'on considère l'histoire complexe de la linguistique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle après Saussure. Dans certains cas, le locuteur natif a acquis une dimension naturaliste- raciale, notamment chez Damourette et Pichon mais pas uniquement chez eux. La langue standard a subi un développement semblable, par exemple dans le cas de la LTI, la *lingua tertii imperii* du Troisième Reich telle que Victor Klemperer l'a documentée. Dans ce cas, il n'est guère besoin de rappeler la dimension raciale. Après la guerre, les linguistes appliqués ne savaient plus si c'était la langue standard ou le locuteur natif qui devait être la cible de l'enseignement des langues. La méthode traditionnelle fondée sur la grammaire et la traduction prenait la langue standard comme cible implicite, tandis que les nouvelles méthodes audio-linguale

et communicative réorientaient progressivement la cible vers le locuteur natif – le plus souvent, mais pas toujours, un locuteur de la langue standard, bien que, répétons-le, du point de vue de l'étudiant, cela ait peu importé.

## 7. LE LOCUTEUR NATIF ET L'OPPRESSION

Comment alors le locuteur natif est-il devenu oppresseur ? C'est à cause de sa *physicalité* qu'il se pose comme un but impossible, ou tout au moins utopique, dont les étudiants de langues étrangères atteignent rarement le simulacre. Aux États-Unis, dans les années 1980, il était encore très commun de voir des annonces pour des postes de professeur universitaire de langue étrangère qui spécifiaient une préférence pour les locuteurs natifs. Dix ans plus tard ce n'était plus possible, de telles annonces ayant été jugées discriminatoires. Comme la discrimination fondée sur des motifs raciaux ou sexuels, il s'agissait d'une préférence pour les personnes ayant une histoire sinon une ethnicité particulières – surtout une enfance particulière, passée dans des circonstances linguistiques établies pour eux par leur famille ou une institution. Peu importe comment l'on avait travaillé et maîtrisé son sujet, cet obstacle ne pouvait être surmonté. Ainsi, un consensus a été trouvé pour annihiler ce concept oppresseur. Ce ne fut fait, bien sûr, qu'au niveau des annonces. Une préférence pour les locuteurs natifs peut très bien continuer à être exercée, mais on ne parle pas de ce sujet tabou.

Dans le même temps, la méthodologie didactique passait de la méthode grammaire-et-traduction, qui fut parfaitement adaptée aux capacités des enseignants de langues qui n'étaient pas des locuteurs natifs, à une méthode dite « communicative » dans laquelle – curieusement – seuls les enseignants de langue maternelle pouvaient vraiment exceller. Les enseignants furent rééduqués dans la méthode communicative, qui les décourageait d'enseigner, et qui interdisait l'explication grammaticale comme « non naturelle ». Ils sont devenus plutôt des sources d'*authentic input*, de données linguistiques authentiques. Pour cela il a fallu soit qu'ils fassent semblant d'être locuteurs natifs, soit qu'ils passent leur temps à montrer des cassettes vidéo et audio, à faire lire des revues, etc. Quant aux étudiants, ils ont continué à être évalués en grande partie par des examens, c'est-à-dire, encore une fois, par des exercices pour lesquels la préparation la plus directe est probablement fournie par la méthode grammaire-et-traduction. Il y a eu des



tentatives pour construire une évaluation de la « compétence » – la capacité de comprendre et surtout de se faire comprendre dans la langue cible – mais là encore on soupçonnait une discrimination, d’autant plus que les linguistes répétaient sans cesse leur doctrine selon laquelle l’acquisition d’une langue est un procédé « naturel », et que les obstacles à sa réalisation sont essentiellement psychologiques. Est-il vraiment juste de donner une mauvaise note à un étudiant qui travaille dur à cause d’un obstacle posé par son « filtre affectif », pour employer le terme de Stephen Krashen (Krashen 1982), chose qu’il ne peut pas contrôler ? Est-ce différent de la préférence pour un locuteur natif par rapport à un locuteur non natif comme professeur de langue ?

L’idée fondamentale du *communicative language teaching* n’était pas du tout nouvelle. Déjà, dans les années 1880, la « méthode directe » de Berlitz, avec ses nombreux imitateurs, a connu un grand succès, et a inspiré le développement en Grande-Bretagne du mouvement pour la réforme de l’enseignement des langues, surtout dans les lycées. Cette méthode a ouvert une place plus large aux dialogues et à la production active, en réduisant la prédominance de la grammaire et de la traduction <sup>7</sup>. Mais l’enseignement des langues modernes dans les lycées et les universités était lui-même radical à l’époque, et afin d’être pris au sérieux, il était nécessaire de le lier étroitement à la littérature et la culture.

Ces changements se déroulaient dans une période de mondialisation, de sorte que les questions posées par le concept du locuteur natif se confondaient inévitablement avec des préoccupations sur l’identité. On a vu l’essor d’un mouvement néo-humboldtien pour protéger des « langues menacées » des effets des « langues tueuses », principalement l’anglais, mais aussi le français et les autres langues de diffusion mondiale. Mais puisqu’une langue ne peut pas vraiment en « tuer » une autre, il est évident que quelque chose de métaphorique se passe, où la langue prend la place de ses locuteurs. Du point de vue des universitaires européens qui ont lancé cette croisade, les méchants étaient des sociétés internationales, qui exerçaient une hégémonie sur les « pauvres », les Asiatiques, les Africains, les forçant à leur insu à abandonner leur langue maternelle. Toutefois, ces « pauvres » eux-mêmes voient parfois les choses autrement. Ils apprécient leur langue maternelle, mais ils apprécient aussi leurs enfants, pour lesquels ils désirent

7 Voir Howatt & Widdowson 2004.

les possibilités d'une vie meilleure qu'offre l'éducation. L'éducation a toujours impliqué un élargissement linguistique. Je ne parle certes pas ma version « maternelle » de l'anglais, dont je suis tout de même locuteur natif. Et c'était ma mère qui voulait plus que tout autre chose que ce soit ainsi. Voilà ma « langue maternelle » réelle : les coups de fouet de la langue de ma mère me disant chaque jour de ne pas parler aussi « mal » qu'elle. Si je n'avais pas appris à parler comme mes professeurs, quel aurait été le sens de sa propre vie, du travail éreintant qu'elle a dû fournir depuis son adolescence pour réaliser le rêve d'épargner une telle existence à son enfant ?

Rien n'est plus contraire à l'éthique que de dénier le libre choix aux autres. Les sociétés multinationales sont capables de le faire, oui ; mais aussi les théoriciens de l'hégémonie qui refusent d'accepter que les pauvres du monde font des choix qu'eux, leurs supérieurs sociaux, ne sanctionnent pas dans leur idéologie. Quand ils essaient, comme Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000), de convaincre l'Unesco que l'éducation est une forme de génocide, parce qu'en tuant la langue maternelle elle tue aussi l'enfant psychologiquement, ces « experts » sortent du royaume de la théorie pour exercer une oppression réelle. Selon les mots de Kwame Anthony Appiah, nous ne pouvons pas « demander aux autres de maintenir la diversité des espèces au prix de leur autonomie individuelle. Nous ne pouvons pas exiger que d'autres gens nous fournissent un musée culturel pour que nous en fassions le tour <sup>8</sup> ».

Cette dimension politique de la notion de locuteur natif ne pouvait se poser historiquement avant la diffusion de l'éducation universelle. Avec la « naturalisation » de la langue, c'était une étape nécessaire dans la création de la « diglossie interne » qui a tellement frappé Bourdieu, et que Thomas d'Aquin n'a pas connue. Alors qu'au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle seuls les garçons privilégiés tels que Thomas d'Aquin avaient accès à l'éducation, dans le monde du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle tout le monde a dû faire un choix actif, celui de résister à la langue dominante ou à la variété légitime, ou bien de se livrer à elles. L'un et l'autre choix ont apporté leurs propres bénéfices et leurs propres sanctions.

8 Appiah 2005, p. 268 : « [...] ask other people to maintain the diversity of the species at the price of their individual autonomy. We can't require others to provide us with a cultural museum to tour through. »

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**FROM NATIVE SPEAKERS TO “NEW SPEAKERS” –  
PROBLEMATIZING NATIVENESS IN LANGUAGE  
REVITALIZATION CONTEXTS**

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*Résumé*

Dans le champ de la linguistique appliquée, le concept de locuteur natif est reconnu comme problématique depuis plusieurs décennies. Sa problématisation est néanmoins plus récente dans d’autres sous-champs des sciences du langage – comme celui des langues minoritaires et de la revitalisation des langues, auquel nous nous intéressons plus particulièrement dans cet article. Les chercheurs qui travaillent sur les langues de communautés minoritaires, comme l’irlandais, le basque, le gallois, le corse, etc., et les processus de changement linguistique et de revitalisation qui leur sont associés, ont dans l’ensemble eu tendance à privilégier l’étude des communautés « natives ». Une attention bien moindre a été portée au locuteur « non natif », ou à celui que nous appelons ici « néo-locuteur ». Nous examinons les raisons de cette situation, et en quoi le traitement du « natif » dans ce sous-champ disciplinaire correspond aux débats épistémologiques plus larges autour du concept de « locuteur natif » en linguistique appliquée et dans les sciences du langage en général.

*Mots-clés*

Langues minoritaires, revitalisation des langues, changement linguistique, néo-locuteur

*Abstract*

Within the field of applied linguistics the concept of nativeness has over the recent decades come to be recognised as problematic. The problematization of the native speaker concept has, however, been more recent in other areas of language analysis including the field of minority language research and language revitalization, the sub-field on which we will focus here. Researchers interested in minority language communities such as Irish, Basque, Welsh, Corsican etc., and associated processes of language shift and revitalization, have by and large tended to focus much of their attention on native and/or heritage communities. Significantly less attention has been given to non-native or what we are referring to here as “new speaker” varieties and categories. In this paper we are interested in examining why this has been the case and how the treatment of nativeness in this sub-field fits with the broader epistemological debates around the native speaker concept in the field of applied linguistics and linguistics more generally.

*Keywords*

Minority language, language revitalization, language shift, new speaker

## INTRODUCTION

Within the field of applied linguistics the concept of nativeness has over the recent decades come to be recognised as problematic (Davies 2003). The debate around nativeness and problematization of the native speaker concept has to a large extent been concerned with the implications of the spread of English as a global language. This is a concern which emerged in a context in which there were more non-native speakers than native speakers of English world-wide (Crystal 2003; Graddol 1997, 2006), either as second language learners or as a result of colonisation, thus bringing the previously unquestioned legitimacy of the native speaker under scrutiny. The emergence of new “Englishes” (Kachru 1990; Bolton and Kachru 2006; Jenkins 2006; Holborow 1999) brought the long-standing hegemonic model of “proper English” into focus, a model which, it could be said, had reproduced a race-based, colonially-informed conceptualization of linguistic legitimacy. As such, the native speaker was seen to encapsulate political and social injustice in post-colonial Asian and African contexts where English had continued to be an official language (Davies 1991, 2003; Joseph 2013). Discussions around the legitimacy of the new types of “Englishes” which these contexts created were thus a reaction to the taken-for-granted privileged position which had been given to the white Anglo-American native speaker (Phillipson 1992).

The problematization of the native speaker concept and nativeness has, however, been more recent in other areas of language analysis including the field of minority language research and language revitalization, the sub-field on which we will focus here. Researchers interested in minority language communities such as Irish, Basque, Welsh, Corsican etc., and associated processes of language shift and revitalization, have by and large tended to focus much of their attention on native and/or heritage communities. Significantly less attention has been given to non-native or what we are referring to here as “new speaker” varieties and categories. In this paper we are interested in examining why this has been the case and how the treatment of nativeness in this sub-field fits with the broader epistemological debates around the native speaker concept in the field of applied linguistics and linguistics more generally.

## HISTORICIZING NATIVENESS IN MINORITY LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

While the current sociolinguistic contexts and status of Europe’s minority languages differ in many ways, their historical trajectories tend to follow a largely similar pattern involving the marginalization and subsequent “minorization” of their speakers within linguistically homogenous nation-states. This was the case of Catalan, Basque and Galician following the linguistic unification of Spain as a Spanish-speaking state. The plight of Irish, Gaelic, Welsh, Cornish and Manx followed a similar pattern in the context of an English-speaking Britain, in the same way that Breton, Occitan, Picard etc. were rendered invisible in a linguistically united French-speaking France. As such many of the “other” languages of Europe were pushed to the socioeconomic and socio-political margins, often as peripheral sub-standard dialects of a national language. Removed from modernization projects and the echelons of political and economic power, speakers of these “minoritized” languages were presented with few if any economic incentives to use these languages or to pass them on to their children. Therefore, in most of these contexts, social mobility and language shift went hand in hand, often accompanied by out-migration to the cities or through emigration to other countries. The exception is Catalan, which despite its minoritized status has traditionally enjoyed high social prestige because of its continued use amongst the Catalan prosperous middle-classes (see for example Woolard 1989; Strubell and Boix-Fuster 2011).

The emergence of language revitalization movements over the course of the nineteenth century was thus a reaction to these nation-state nationalisms and to the processes of language shift which they had initiated. However, such movements unwittingly reproduced many of the ideals which had led to their minoritization and demise in the first place, drawing on the same ideals of 19th century linguistic ethnonationalism linked to Herder and later Humboldt’s ideas about the origin of language. Similar to nation-state nationalisms, minority language revival movements drew on dominant European ideologies about language and identity, based on the premise that communities of speakers were conventionally constructed around distinct nationalities. Language thus came to define national collectivities and provided the means for their cultural reproduction. Such cultural reproduction was seen to be through the intergenerational

transmission of the language through an unbroken biological lineage from parents to children. In the same way that nation-state nationalisms were epitomized through their “native” speakers (Bonfiglio 2010), revitalization movements defined their right to nationhood through the construction or re-construction of a native speaker population.

However, in difference to nation-state nationalisms where the models of legitimacy tended to be that of the dominant political and economic elite, in the case of many revitalization movements, the sources of legitimacy were more diverse. Even in cases where these languages had written traditions, folklorists and dialectologists gave particular weight to the oral variety of language spoken by what had often become the most economically, politically and geographically isolated sectors of the population. It was to this group that revitalization movements tended to look in search of the most authentic and “purest” representations of the culture they sought to reproduce. As Fishman (1972, p. 69) has noted, the trend amongst ethnocultural movements in Europe at the time was to draw on “the language variety of the noble and uncontaminated peasant”, who was seen to have kept the language pure and intact. In essence, the native speaker was made into the fountainhead of a new national consciousness.

Revitalization movements thus drew on the same ideological principles and dominant language ideologies which had shaped European thought more generally. In line with these principles, languages were conceptualized as bounded entities and homogenous representations of national collectivities. In language revitalization contexts, speech communities were thus re-imagined through authentication and as part of this process native speakers were reified and idealized as speakers of the most “authentic” form of language. This is not to say that all minority nationalists or champions for the language were necessarily native speakers themselves. In fact many of them were not. Indeed, there is an unwritten history of the role of “learners” or “new speakers” in such processes including historical figures such as Sabino Arana in the Basque Country, Douglas Hyde in Ireland as one of the founding members of the Irish Gaelic League, Rosalía de Castro and other members of Galicia’s language revival movement, Robert Lafont in the revival of Occitan, amongst many others. While attempts were made to re-teach these languages to those who no longer spoke them, maintaining a traditional native-speaking community nevertheless tended to be at the core of the language planning process.



Linguistics as a discipline and its related sub-branches, including sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and the sociology of language in turn, were to draw on these same basic principles and socio-historical assumptions of European thought. The very notion of “speech community” in sociolinguistics for example, can be seen as an attempt to conceptualize bounded collective entities through linguistic criteria. Again, this idea of speech community can be traced to nineteenth century nationalism and to communities which were imagined and constructed in a historical and often geographical context. Whether explicitly stated or not, this in turn had a bearing on which speakers could then participate in and/or belong to a given speech community, that is, who became part of the “in-group” and who was considered the “out-group”. In the same way that the native speaker concept has been problematized in applied linguistics, in the field of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, the notion of “speech community” also came under scrutiny (Gumperz 1971; Hymes 1974). This was to the point that it was as we know largely abandoned in the 1990s and replaced by the more empirically-grounded notion of “community of practice” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; but see also Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Duranti 1997; McElhinny 2011).

#### “SALVAGE” LINGUISTICS AND “SAVING” THE NATIVE SPEAKER

While discussions around nativeness in the context of English as a majority language have been concerned with the linguistic, social and political implications of its spread as a global language, for researchers concerned with minority languages, the focus has been on language loss (see for example Grenoble and Whaley 2006), “language death” (see for example Dorian 1981, 1998) and “vanishing” languages (Nettle & Romaine 2000). This focus is often tied up with discourses of endangerment (see Duchêne and Heller 2007 for a critique) and an underlying concern with “saving” potentially threatened languages from extinction. In the minority language literature, indexes of endangerment are frequently identified by a break in the process of intergenerational transmission of a language in the home and the subsequent decline of a native speaker population. Joshua Fishman’s (1991) widely cited model for reversing language shift, has been most concerned with restoring intergenerational transmission of the minority

language as a mother tongue. In difference to the contested privileges associated with being a native speaker of a global language such as English, in the case of regional minorities the socially, economically and politically marginalized status of the native speaker community made it the focus of social and political injustice. In order to address this injustice, language planners, revitalization movements and researchers in the field have thus sought to reverse the processes of language shift through a reification of the native speaker community.

The priority given to the native speaker tended to be built around a preservationist rhetoric which exoticized and romanticized local people, locking them in time and space (Cameron 2007; Pennycook 2010). The “salvaging” leanings in certain strands of linguistics and in particular linguistic anthropology sought to preserve indigenous languages in the same way that salvage anthropologists had done with indigenous cultures (Bucholz 2003, p. 400). Interest in linguistic minorities by salvation linguistics has been driven by a commitment in certain strands of sociolinguistics to study those groups which were seen to be pushed to the margins, whose future existence was threatened and who were thus seen in most need of protection. Sociolinguists for language revival have thus been involved in assessing and promoting language planning efforts devoted to the protection and expansion of communities of minority language speakers, generally operating within the Fishmanian language revitalization paradigm. However, in making traditional native speakers the central focus of scholarly attention, such scholars may, unwittingly perhaps, have ignored the very ethical principles of inclusion that they set out to uphold in the first place, that is, by assigning legitimacy to only some language users and not others. In an attempt to “save” the native speaker population, who was seen as a representation of the most authentic speakers in the community, revival sociolinguistics may also have created a very specific view of who fits into the category of native speaker in the first place. Traditional dialectology of minority language communities has tended to be based on a documentation of a narrow selection of speech samples, drawing on those speakers perceived to be the most authentic, traditional and untainted by interference from the contact language. For this, they frequently drew on a small pool of rural, elderly, male individuals. The documentation of endangered languages more broadly has been concerned with collecting “authentic” speech from the last surviving native speakers of a language

(see for example, Hale 1992; Harrison 2010). As Bucholtz (2003) highlights, this re-assembling of the past is yet again a residue of Romanticism where rural peasant populations, supposedly untouched by urbanity, often came to be valorised as authentic sources of cultural and linguistic knowledge.

At the same time, however, capturing the authentic speech of these surviving native speakers is made difficult by the fact that their speech is seen to become “contaminated” by the long term effects of language contact. In the search for the “true” speaker of the language, there is often a perceived need to go further back in historical time to find the authentic speaker. However, this logic in fact again runs counter to the ethical principles of inclusion which prompted salvage linguists to take interest in such groups in the first place. The language and not the speakers thus become the focus and to preserve the language, its speakers are often expected (albeit implicitly) to remain static. Similar to other forms of heritage, the native speaker community undergoes a process of what Choay (2011) refers to as *museification*, where the speakers become museum pieces rather than lived experiences. In some contexts, in an effort to “save” these languages, revitalization agendas have sought to “protect” them from modernization and economic development. In doing so however they often ignored the political and economic needs of the speakers themselves (Muehlmann 2007; Duchêne and Heller 2007).

While such an approach can be criticized for its somewhat essentialist leanings, it needs to be understood within the historical context within which such revitalization emerged. The concern often voiced in salvage linguistics about linguistic interference and the blurring of language boundaries between the minority and dominant contact language needs to be set against a background in which such blurring has in the past justified the socio-politically motivated process of “dialectalization” (Kloss 1967). At various moments in the sociopolitical history of many minority languages this was a process which relegated these languages to the status of a sub-standard dialect of the dominant contact language. Jaffe (1993, p. 111) recognizes this tension describing it as one of the fundamental epistemological quandaries faced by those involved in revitalization programmes, that is, “how to assert the value of mixed or plural identities in “minority” societies in which the attempt to escape relations of dominance places a high premium on declarations of absolute

difference and clear-cut boundaries". Therefore, demands for linguistic purity and keeping the language intact can be seen as a defense mechanism adopted by salvage linguists and minority language activists against the possible absorption and disappearance of the language altogether. However, in adopting this position, salvage linguists are subject to the much larger epistemological quandary about the ways in languages have been constructed in the first place, that is, as autonomous wholes which can be counted and separated into discrete entities (Duchêne and Heller 2007; Makoni and Pennycook 2007). The "counting" of languages through census questions and sociolinguistic surveys became an important endeavour at regional, national and international level in an attempt to monitor the rate of language decline and/or linguistic revitalization in contexts of perceived language endangerment (Urla 1993, 2012). This approach has in turn meant that the in-between linguistic spaces (Martin-Jones, Blackledge & Creese 2012) and sometimes more hybridized forms of language inherent in language contact situations were often ignored in sociolinguistic discussion.

#### FROM NATIVE SPEAKERS TO "NEW SPEAKERS"

Despite the strong focus on maintaining or reviving its native speakers, in many minority language contexts, traditional communities of speakers continue to shrink as a consequence of urbanization and economic modernization. At the same time, however, (and not unsimilar to a global language such as English), new profiles of speakers are also emerging. In many contexts, there are now as many if not more non-native speakers. This general trend across European minority languages is to a considerable extent the result of more supportive language policies at both regional and national levels. Such policies are in many cases leading to increased provision for these languages through their inclusion in school curricula, the media and other public domains. This is leading to a deterritorialization of these languages away from their so-called "heartland" areas and into new urban spaces. So similar to English where new ways of speaking and new profiles of speakers have emerged in the context of globalization and the new social order that such processes are creating, "new speakers" of minority languages are also appearing in this new context. These "new"

speakers tend to be characterized by a middle-class, urban profile, clearly distinguishable from rural-based, traditional native speakers (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011).

Irish, for example, is a case in point where the number of second language speakers of the language significantly exceeds a native speaker population (McCloskey 2001), which continues to undergo an unrelenting pattern of decline (see Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donnacha *et al.* 2007). Manx, on the other hand, points to a case where there are in fact no native speakers left. This has led many observers to declare the Manx language dead, equating the loss of the last reputed native speaker of Manx in 1974 with the loss of the variety itself. Nevertheless, in more recent history the language has in a sense been “brought back to life” through a growing “new speaker” population of language enthusiasts and activists (Ó hÍfearnáin *in press*). We find broadly similar trends emerging in some of Spain’s minority language contexts including Basque and Galician. While in the early nineties, native speakers of Basque still accounted for the majority of Basque speakers, amongst a younger generation more than fifty per cent are “new speakers” (Ortega *et al.*, *in press*). A similar pattern can be found amongst a younger generation of Galicians where the majority now acquire the language outside of the home (O’Rourke and Ramallo, *in press*). Similarly, in case of Catalan, nearly half of Catalan users are not native-speakers of the language (Pujolar and Puigdevall, *in press*).

These and similar sociolinguistic realities in other minority language contexts prompt us to re-think the Fishmanian-oriented model for reversing language shift which has focused primarily on maintaining or reviving the native speaker community. Romaine (2006), for example, encourages scholars to consider what language survival might look like without the intergenerational mother tongue transmission that has for so long been the focus of models of language revitalization. Similarly, King (2001) and Jaffe (2010) propose a conceptualization of language revitalization as bringing the language to new speakers and new contexts of use instead of a reversal of the process of language shift and a restoration of the language to previous domains.

It is in this context that emerging research on minority language communities has begun to turn more explicitly to discussions of nativeness and the native speaker. Doerr’s (2009) recent collection of essays explicitly problematized the “native speaker” with reference to “minority”

communities such as Catalonia (Frekko 2009), Ikageng in South Africa (Baker 2009), Yukatek Maya speakers (Whiteside 2009) and Easter Island (Makihara 2009). In the Catalan context Woolard's early ethnographic work in the 1980s, examined the social and linguistic practices of "New Catalans", a term she uses to describe second-language speakers of the language. This is a category which has also become the subject of focussed study amongst others working in the field of Catalan sociolinguistics such as Pujolar (2007), Pujolar *et al.* (2012, 2013) and Woolard and Frekko (2013).

Notions such as "new speakerness" and "new speaker" have begun to be used to describe the ways of speaking and the social and linguistic practices of speakers which exist outside of the traditional native-speaker communities (see for example, O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 2013; O'Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo, in press). In the field of linguistics and its related strands, the "new speaker" concept is one which has been examined under the perhaps more familiar, but increasingly contested labels such as "non-native", "second-language", "L2" speaker or "learner". As such there is nothing intrinsically new about the concept, nor is it even a category of speaker which is specific to minority language contexts per se. The coining of the term, however, prompts a movement away from the deficiency model sometimes implied in being a "non-" native, as opposed to a "native" or a "second" as opposed to a "first" language speaker of a language. As such, the concept complements some of the existing notions which have been used to capture similar thinking including García and Kleifgen's (2010) idea of "emergent bilinguals" or Kramersch's (2012) notion of "multilingual subjects". This deliberate shift in terminology therefore seeks to draw attention to the ways in which minority language research, and indeed linguistics in general, has participated in the reproduction of linguistic ideologies, essentially through abstract notions of "nativeness".

Although the explicit labelling of this phenomenon and the use of the term "new speaker" only recently appeared in the English language literature, the term has existed for some time as both a folk and academic concept in certain minority language contexts. *Euskaldunberri* (literally "new Basque speaker") is used to refer to speakers who learn Basque through formal instruction, either as adults or through immersion schooling in *Ikastolas*. The fact that the word now exists in dictionaries confirms the

extent to which the term has become naturalized into everyday language (see Gatti 2007). The term *neofalante* (neo or new speaker) is widely used in Galicia to describe a similar type of speaker, that is, someone who was not brought up speaking the minority language but who adopted Galician language practices as adolescents or as young adults. Similarly, the *neo-bretonnant* label is used to describe Breton speakers who acquire the language outside of the home and who have incorporated the language as part of their linguistic repertoire. As well as an analytical category, the notion is also sometimes adopted as a self-defining label by new speakers themselves. At other times it can be used as a derogatory label to contest the legitimacy of new speakers as “real” speakers.

Whether or not such labels are explicitly used, issues around legitimacy, authority and authenticity have emerged as recurring themes to describe issues around nativeness and new speakerness in minority language contexts. Many minority language researchers have looked at the struggles in which non-native speakers of minority languages often engage in pursuit of recognition as “authentic” speakers (see for example Trossett 1986; Woolard 1989; MacCalium 2007; McEwan-Fujita 2010; O’Rourke 2011; Pujolar 2007; *et al.* 2012). The ideology of authenticity, as Woolard (2008, p. 304) has previously highlighted, locates the value of a minority, and indeed any language, in its relationship to a particular community. In order to be considered authentic, she suggests that a speech variety needs to be seen as if it were from somewhere and if social and territorial roots cannot be established, then the variety is not valued. Therefore, who gets to be defined as an authentic speaker in minority language contexts is often tied up with anthropologically romantic notions around the ideal of the native speaker whose origins can be traced to a bounded homogenous speech community within a particular territory and set against a clear historic past. The link between authenticity and identity can thus be used to constrain the use of a minority language by speakers who do not fit the native speaker criteria and who may see themselves as not sounding sufficiently “natural” in comparison with those who are perceived as “real” speakers. In terms of language revitalization and language planning initiatives, the apparently privileged position of the native speaker as the authentic speaker of the language has been found to deter newcomers to the language and sometimes prevent them from using it altogether (O’Rourke 2011; McEwan-Fujita 2010). Relatedly, as Pujolar (2007) suggests, the lack of “nativeness”

associated with new types of speakers can also be used to deny them access to particular linguistic markets, and can have varying impacts on an individual's social and economic prospects.

There is thus a frequent pattern across minority language contexts of contested legitimacy, authority, authenticity and ownership between and even within new speaker and native speaker groups. In the case of one of France's regional minorities, new speakers of Corsian often struggle for legitimacy in a context in which both formal and informal use of the language is restricted and the number of native speakers is low (Jaffe 1999). Nevertheless, such new speakers are also seen as important agents in the creation of new spaces in which the language is being used and the production of a new type of Corsicanness which steers away from the ideals of localism, tradition, nationalism and linguistic purity (Jaffe in press). The emergence of new speakers of Manx provides interesting insights into the ways in which a language continues to survive in the absence of a native speaker community. In contexts such as Manx, the absence of native speaker models puts the onus on members of the Manx revitalization movement to become the new linguistic role models. Their participatory role in the networks they construct in turn allows for their positioning as language experts and in turn for a construction of a sense of community around this. Thus, in cases of "extreme language shift" such as is the case of Manx, linguistic legitimacy and authenticity can no longer be linked to the seemingly inherent characteristics of its native speakers. Instead, legitimacy comes from those who can claim authority and construct such legitimacy (see Ó hÍfearnáin, in press).

While the claiming of authority can perhaps go uncontested in the absence of a distinctive "other", struggles for ownership over the minority language can and often do arise in the context of "native" and "new speaker" relations. In some cases, a native speaker ideology can prompt new speakers to feel denied of the right to claim linguistic authority in the absence of biological ties to the language through its intergeneration transmission. New speakers of Basque, for example, generally accord greater legitimacy and authenticity to native speakers (Ortega *et al.*, in press; see also Urla 1993, 2012). In the case of Galician, a similar downgrading of their own way of speaking can be detected amongst new speakers of the language. At the same time however, rural based native speakers of Galician also undermine their own linguistic abilities and pass authority



over to urban, middle-class, new speakers who acquired literacy in standard Galician. In this context, new speakers are thus positioned as political “vanguards” for language revitalization efforts, and as agents of social change (see O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, in press). In Galician and other minority language contexts, new speakers often take on such an activist role and a commitment to resolving what they perceive as a situation of social and political injustice for the language, positioning themselves as types of active minorities (Moscovici 1976), in many ways resembling stances taken by environmentalists and feminist movements. The transfer of authority away from the native speaker is also to a degree apparent in one of Spain’s other minority languages, Catalan. Frekko (2009) has shown that native speakers, particularly amongst an older generation, do not always have access to standard Catalan and can often claim less authority over the language than new speakers can. In a classroom context of adult learners of Catalan in Barcelona, she observed that students with greatest ability to produce standard Catalan and to recite the grammatical and orthographic rules were awarded most authority, independently of their real ability to speak or interact in Catalan.

In the case of some of France’s other minority languages, such as Occitan, linguistic tensions exist between traditionalist activists and modernist academics about what counts as “good” Occitan. Traditionalist activists, comprising mainly of native speakers of Occitan and therefore, users of a more dialectal form the language, oppose the newly imposed standard variety which for them is far removed from the everyday speech of their community (see Costa in press). Similarly, in the case of Breton, the source of conflict stems from demands for linguistic purity. In this context, new speakers are often accused of not adhering to these demands through an overly *Frenchicized* way of speaking Breton (see Hornsby 2008, in press; Timm 2010, etc.). In the case of Irish there can also be struggles over language ownership between new and native speakers of the language, particularly in a context in which language policy initiatives in Ireland gave it a certain market value (O’Rourke 2011). Even though new speaker profiles far outnumber those of traditional native speakers, explicit labels for this category of speaker are noticeably absent. We do nonetheless find other kinds of labelling which at times are used to question the authenticity of the non-native speaker. The seemingly neutral term *gaeilgeoir* (literally, Irish speaker) tends not be used to refer to a native Irish speaker but instead

can be used as a derogatory label to describe new speaker profiles (see Kabel 2000; O'Rourke 2011). In numerical terms alone, although "new speakers" of Irish can be seen to play an important role in the future of the language, this role is sometimes undermined by discourses which idealise the notion of the traditional native speaker. Concerns about linguistic purity are often voiced in both academic and public discourse, with the more hybridized forms of Irish developed amongst "new speakers" often criticised (O'Rourke and Walsh, in press).

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the native speaker debate has received considerable attention in the context of English and its spread as a global language, as we have shown in this paper, the case of new speakers of minority languages and their role in the process of linguistic revitalization has only recently been explicitly explored. Sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, the two strands of linguistics which have given most attention to understanding minority language contexts and their associated processes of language shift and/or revitalization, tended to draw on the same basic principles which have shaped linguistic thought more generally. As such, minority languages have tended to be conceptualized as bounded entities and as the expression of homogenous national collectivities. Speech communities were imagined and re-imagined through authentication and as part of this process native speaker communities were reified and idealized as repositories of the "true" speakers. While discussions around nativeness in the context of a majority language such as English have been concerned with the linguistic, social and political implications of its spread as a global language, in the case of minority languages, the focus has been on language loss and a concern with preventing potentially threatened languages from dying out. In difference to the contested privileges associated with being a native speaker of a global language, in minority language contexts, roles are reversed and the protection of the native speaker community became the focus of attention for language planners, revitalization movements and sociolinguists for revival.

However, as traditional communities of minority language speakers continue to be eroded as a consequence of increased urbanization and

economic modernization, the emergence of new speakers in minority language contexts has called for a rethinking of the sociolinguistics for revival model and the focus in language revitalization projects on “saving” the native speaker community. The emergence of new speakers of minority languages has begun to challenge the position that a native speaker community needs to exist in order for a language to survive. Similar to the more long-standing debate in applied linguistics and in particular in relation to English, problematizing nativeness and the native speaker concept in the context of language revitalization and minority language research helps understand the ways in which specific social groups and linguistic forms acquire legitimacy. This in turn connects with the ways in which national belonging and authenticity are defined and experienced and the multiple ways that social actors construct and negotiate their sense of ownership in relation to the language and the community of speakers to which they wish to belong.

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# NATIVE SPEAKER: FROM IDEALIZATION TO POLITICIZATION

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## Résumé

Par politicisation, j'entends un processus qui conduit à faire du *locuteur natif* une notion porteuse d'idéologies politiques du langage. Entrepris à la fin des années 1960 par la critique approfondie que fait Hymes du *locuteur-auditeur idéal* (Chomsky 1965), ce mouvement prend une dimension globalisée avec l'émergence de « voix subalternes » des situations postcoloniales – un phénomène qui se traduit en linguistique appliquée par la reconnaissance progressive des « World Englishes ». Même si elle est centrale dans bien des travaux, la politicisation de concepts linguistiques n'est pas sans poser des problèmes aussi bien pratiques que théoriques, ce dont les chercheurs sont explicitement conscients. En ce sens, l'objectif de cet article est également de montrer que la politicisation du terme *locuteur natif* mène paradoxalement, dans une certaine mesure, au rejet du politique hors du champ de la théorie scientifique. En d'autres termes, *locuteur natif* ne serait pas une catégorie valide en linguistique, précisément parce qu'elle serait plus politique que scientifique. Politiciser le terme serait dès lors une manière de diminuer sa pertinence scientifique en mettant en valeur sa dimension idéologique : le *locuteur natif* serait avant tout une idéologie de l'état-nation.

## Mots-clés

Postcolonialisme, États-nations, Idéologies linguistiques

## Abstract

By *politicization*, I refer to a process that leads to the fact that *native speaker*, as a linguistic categorization, is said to be conveying political ideologies about language. Initiated in the late 1960s by Hymes's searching critique of the *ideal speaker-listener* (Chomsky 1965), this movement was to be taken to a globalized level with the "emergence of subaltern voices" in postcolonial settings – a phenomenon that is translated as the "rise of World Englishes" in the field of applied linguistics. Even if central in many current bodies of work, the politicization of linguistic concepts does not go without practical as well as theoretical problems of which researchers are obviously aware. In that sense, the goal of this paper is also to show that the politicization of the term *native speaker* leads, paradoxically, to the rejection of politics outside the boundaries of scientific theory to a certain extent. In other words, *native speaker* would not be a proper category for linguistics precisely because it is more political than scientifically accurate. Politicizing the term would then be a way of lessening its scientific relevance by emphasizing its ideological dimension: *native speaker* would primarily be an ideology of the nation-state.

## Keywords

Postcolonialism, Nation-states, Language ideologies

An important date in the debate about the use of the term *native speaker* in contemporary linguistics would be Chomsky's assertion in the opening pages of his 1957 *Syntactic Structures*:

One way to test the adequacy of grammar proposed for L is to determine whether or not the sequences that it generates are actually grammatical *i.e.* acceptable to a native speaker [...] (Chomsky 1957).

Though the term had been used before in English-speaking linguistics <sup>1</sup>, this statement triggered a wave of hostile reactions which, under various guises, still produces a significant amount of literature today. Given the fact that the Chomskyan position is frequently taken as a starting point by the critics of the *native speaker*, this paper argues that the recent history of the term *native speaker* can accurately be described as a politicization of the term, in contrast to Chomsky's self-claimed neutral position. In this debate, Chomsky's work represents the idealization of scientific objects in a self-claimed "Galilean style" (Botha 1981), when his critiques can be described as belonging to the broad field of applied linguistics, dealing with the "real world" <sup>2</sup>. By *politicization*, I thus refer to a process that leads to the fact that *native speaker*, as a linguistic categorization, is said to be conveying political ideologies about language (Blommaert 1999; Love 2009; Love and Ansaldo 2010). Initiated in the late 1960s by Hymes's searching critique of the *ideal speaker-listener* (Chomsky 1965), this movement was to be taken to a globalized level with the "emergence of subaltern voices" (Benitez Pezzolano, Gajic and Apprato 2000, p. 94) in postcolonial settings – a phenomenon that is translated as the "rise of World Englishes" (Jindapitak and Teo 2013) in the field of applied linguistics.

- 1 Whitney (1875) uses "mother tongue" along with "native speech". See also Bloomfield (1933): "The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language." In his paper entitled "The struggle for a theory of the native speaker", Yngve (1981) does not even quote Chomsky – exploring instead Bloomfield and Schleicher's work, for example.
- 2 See BAAL – The British Association for Applied Linguistics (1994, p. 2): "Applied linguistics is both: an approach to understanding language issues in the real world, drawing on theory and empirical analysis; an interdisciplinary area of study, in which linguistics is combined with issues, methods and perspectives drawn from other disciplines."

Even if central in many current bodies of work, the politicization of linguistic concepts does not go without practical as well as theoretical problems of which researchers are obviously aware (Blommaert 2001; Joseph 2006). With this in mind, the goal of this paper is also to show that the politicization of the term native speaker leads, paradoxically, to the rejection of politics outside the boundaries of scientific theory. In other words, *native speaker* would not be a proper category for linguistics precisely because it is more political than scientifically accurate. Politicizing the term would then be a way of lessening its scientific relevance by emphasizing its ideological dimension: *native speaker* would primarily be an ideology of the nation-state (Bonfiglio 2010). However, assuming a clear-cut separation between what is political and what is not would be an untenable position:

It is a truism that any social label is inherently political; it encodes particular ideologies and carries with it specific histories and connotations (Milani 2012, p. 69).

It is therefore more exact to say that, according to the politicization movement that characterizes the history of its critiques, the term *native speaker* would not be a proper category for linguistics because the political values that it conveys contradict ethnographically grounded theories of language as a social object. The politicization of the term *native speaker* is therefore irreducible to a mere matter of terminology, and is rather to be understood as an epistemological stance.

### 1. *NATIVE AND IDEAL*: CHOMSKY'S NON-IDENTICAL TWINS

Had it only been for the opening page in Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, the controversy about *native speaker* might not have developed in the way it has. In fact, Chomsky only uses the term native speaker twice in his short book, the second passage being located in the chapter entitled "On the goals of linguistic theory":

Clearly, every grammar will have to meet certain external conditions of adequacy; *e.g.*, the sentences generated will have to be acceptable to the native speaker.

The first reviewers of the book don't focus on these two occurrences: they don't question them precisely because the term is regularly used in linguistics – especially descriptive linguistics, for which the *native speaker* is mostly a “data supplier” (Coulmas 1981, p. 7). In his review of *Syntactic structures* for *American Anthropologist*, Burling even talks about a *naïve* speaker rather than a *native* one:

The obvious example is the passive transformation in English by which *any naïve speaker* of English can readily transform an active such as “The dog bit John” to the equivalent passive: “John was bitten by the dog” (Burling 1959, p. 161) [My emphasis].

In his long review for *Language*, Lees twice mentions the term *native speaker*, in contexts where it becomes the neutral equivalent of “informant”:

It is important to keep in mind that such tests are designed not only to determine whether two segments sound alike or different to *the native speaker* for one presentation, but also to determine whether the identification or distinction is made consistently. For this reason, the tested pair is presented to *the informant* in massive, randomized replication. Furthermore, by tape resplicing techniques such comparisons as that of the [u:] of [su:t] with the [u:] of [‘u:t] may be made. It has been objected that *an informant* might easily learn to distinguish free variants, as in case 3 above, and thus invalidate the results (Lees 1957, p. 397) [My emphasis].

or the equivalent of “any speaker”, “any person”:

For example, we might demand of a useful grammatical theory that it explicate the following apparently *universal behavior of speakers* of languages: even in the presence of noise, *a native speaker* is able to identify correctly with a high degree of success single monosyllables spoken by a second native speaker. One can hardly call upon the grammatical redundancy of the language to explain this behavior; clearly there is something in the sounds themselves which the hearer can identify and classify properly, and this something must vary widely from language to language, since, in general, *a person* cannot perform very well in such an experiment if he listens to a foreign language (Lees 1957, p. 403) [My emphasis].

So the term *native speaker* is still not controversial at that time. Though very much attached to linguistic anthropology and descriptive linguistics, it is easily borrowed by generative grammar – a discipline that, in 1964,

Hymes still finds a place for in the vast and integrative enterprise formed by the *communicative ethnography*:

In complementary fashion, linguistic work concerned with the abilities and judgments of appropriateness on the part of *native speakers that generative grammar brings into focus* can contribute to the third and fourth aspects of the communicative ethnography<sup>3</sup>. Such notions, pursued fully, lead into full scale studies focused on the full range of factors conditioning the exercise of judgment and ability (Hymes 1964, p. 26) [My emphasis].

But throughout the years that follow the publication of *Aspects of a theory of syntax*, Hymes's critique becomes severe:

Chomsky's Russell lectures are a case in point. The first lecture, "On Interpreting the World," presents implications of a certain conception of the nature of language and of the goals of linguistic research, leading to a humanistic, libertarian conception of man. The second lecture, "On Changing the World," is about injustice, its roots in inequality of power, and the failure of scholars and governments to deal with the true issues in these respects. There is little or no linguistics in the second lecture, just as there is little or nothing of social reality in the first. Such principled *schizophrenia* besets linguistics today; the scientific and social goals of its practitioners are commonly compartmentalized. Such an alienation from experience and social reality of one of "the many kinds of segmental scientists of man," against which Edward Sapir warned years ago, does not mirror either the true nature of language or its relation to social life (Hymes 1973, p. 59-60) [My emphasis].

What Hymes is reacting to is not the centrality of the *native speaker* as an informant for the linguist or the grammarian, but the *idealization* of the speaker that consists of an estrangement from the "real world" and, as such, a negation of empirical findings:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly [...] (Chomsky 1965, p. 3).

- 3 "There are four aspects to be sketched, concerned, respectively, with (1) the components of communicative events, (2) the relations among components, (3) the capacity and state of components, and (4) the activity of the system so constituted. It is with respect to the third and fourth aspects that two topics prominently associated with the topic of communication, communication theory (in the sense of information theory), and cybernetics, find a place" (Hymes 1964, p. 13).

This model, as abundantly commented on so far, is cut from any social consideration regarding the speaker: disembodied, extracted from any context, it seems first that this speaker stands as a completely apolitical abstraction. But it is precisely because of its idealistic dimension that the ideal speaker is a political concept, according to Hymes:

The goal of linguistic theory was stated to be an ideal speaker-listener member of a homogeneous community. In effect, linguistic theory adopted Feuerbach and rejected Marx (Hymes 1996, 189).

Hymes's plea for materialism against idealism leads to the defense of the ethnography of *ways of speaking*, a plural object that puts forward the particularity of actual language practices rather than the quest for an artificial universality:

A dominant conception of the goal of "linguistic theory" encourages one to think of language exclusively in terms of the vast potentiality of formal grammar, and to think of that potentiality exclusively in terms of its universality. *But a perspective which treats language only as an attribute of Man leaves language as an attribute of men unintelligible.* In actuality language is in large part what users have made of it. Navaho is what it is in part because it is a human language, and in part because it is the language of the Navaho. The generic potentiality of the human faculty for language is realized differently, as to direction and as to degree, in different human communities, and is useless except insofar as it is so realized. The thrust of Chomskian linguistics has been to depreciate the actuality of language under the guise of rejecting an outmoded philosophy of science. We need not now reject a modish philosophy of science, but we must be able to see beyond its ideological use and recognize that one cannot change a world if one's theory permits no purchase on it. Thus, one of the problems to be overcome with regard to language is the linguist's usual conception of it. A broader, differently based notion of the form in which we encounter and use language in the world, a notion which I shall call "ways of speaking", is needed (Hymes 1973, p. 60).

Such a position could sound paradoxical:

Difference as a safeguard of equality, and neglect of difference as a recipe for inequality: these are the paradoxes on which Hymes builds his argument (Blommaert 2000, p. 423).



In other words, the idealization of the speaker erases social inequalities, creating a form of blindness<sup>4</sup> that in fact reinforces them. By introducing the figure of the “ideal speaker-listener”, Chomsky would have opened the way for unrealistic representations of linguistic competence, thus strengthening the already existing and quite oppressive ideal goals of language teaching and language acquisition, in particular (Leung, Harris, and Rampton 1997).

Gumperz’s description of Chomsky’s work is less severe – though he agrees with Hymes to the extent that they collaborate to develop the notion of *communicative competence* within the framework of linguistic anthropology (Gumperz and Hymes 1986). Gumperz does not seem to read Chomsky in the same way as Hymes, because the idea of universality is to him more important than the stressing of differences:

A possible reason for the relative neglect of linguistic anthropologists’ findings is the failure to see the general relevance of work done with little known societies. The early structuralists saw human society as divisible into a finite number of cultures. The discovery of previously unsuspected differences in grammatical systems led to an emphasis on elements of language peculiar to each culture and to a neglect of cross-cultural similarities. It took Chomsky’s work in grammatical theory to redress this emphasis. [...] Underneath the surface diversity of grammatical patterns he finds a universal system of grammatical relationships which characterizes all languages. Diversities in human language and cognition must therefore be seen in relation to underlying universal characteristics. Although Chomsky’s grammatical analysis has aroused much controversy, the questions he has raised provide the foundation for modern linguistic research and have led to much productive investigation into grammatical processes and their relationship to the functioning of the human mind (Gumperz 1974, p. 788).

Furthermore, commenting on Hemnes (Southern Norway), Gumperz categorizes a part of the speakers’ “verbal repertoire” as their “native tongue”:

The internal social homogeneity of Hemnes is reflected in the somewhat lessened compartmentalization of the verbal repertoire. Inhabitants speak

4 I use this term to mark the proximity with the idea of *color-blindness*. See Bonilla-Silva (2013).

both a local dialect, Ranamål (R), and a standard. The former is the native tongue and the chief medium of intra-village communication (Gumperz 1964, p. 146).

Two details should be noted here: Gumperz points out the homogeneity of the “speech community” (without this being a reference to Chomsky’s model as this is in 1964) as well as stressing the fact that the “native tongue” is the non-standard part within the repertoire – a mention that does not mean that it is less formal, but rather confirms its small-scale and local status. Hence, the term *native* is not problematic, but given as a synonym for *indigenous*, and the notion of *speech community* is in fact quite close to the notion of *language community*. So it is Hymes who triggers the first wave of the politicization of the *ideal speaker*: he defends the idea that scientists should engage with the plurality of language practices in the real world rather than with an idealization of language, the ethnographic method being the best tool in that perspective.

Though he seems himself to attach a great importance to the term *native*<sup>5</sup>, Chomsky does in fact use various terms as synonyms, between 1957 (*native*) and 1965 (*ideal*):

The central fact to which any significant linguistic theory must address itself is this: *a mature speaker* can produce a new sentence of his language on the appropriate occasion, and other speakers can understand it immediately, though it is equally new to them.

[...]

*Normal mastery of a language* involves not only the ability to understand immediately an indefinite number of entirely new sentences, but also the ability to identify deviant sentences and, on occasion, to impose an interpretation on them.

[...] *each individual* is capable of understanding the language and using it in a way that is intelligible to his *fellow speakers* (Chomsky 1964, p. 7; 17) [My emphasis].

This variation in terminology points towards one clear idea: it is not the *native* in which Chomsky is interested, but rather the *competent* speaker, as he qualifies him/her. Adult, monolingual, perfectly proficient, this

5 See Chomsky [1958] (1962, 158): “The empirical data that I want to explain are the native speaker’s intuitions.”

speaker might not constitute an empirically validated model, but he/she corresponds to a Galilean idealization – an idealization following the hard sciences modelization, suppressing all negligible quantities that are a bias in the analysis. In this sense, Chomsky’s disdain for practical questions in applied linguistics are quite understandable:

The generative grammar of a language, then, is the system of rules that establishes the relation between sound and meaning in this language. Suppose that the teacher is faced with the question : which generative grammar of English shall I teach ? The answer is straightforward in principle, however difficult the problem may be to settle in practice. The answer is, simply: teach the one that is correct (Chomsky, 1966, p. 593).

In the lack of any solid theory of linguistic variation, one wonders how the determination of the “correct” grammar would occur. In fact, it does occur, but in a conservative and non-reflexive way, along lines of legitimacy which have been thoroughly described by Bourdieu (2001). The terminology used in schools as well as in language sciences (apart from overt sociological studies) appears therefore as a mere reflection of basic ideologies about languages, which are themselves directly connected to social inequalities which remain unaddressed:

In much of the research on bilingualism, the notion of “balanced bilingualism” has [...] functioned as an implicit synonym for “good” or “complete” bilingualism and has been used as a yardstick against which other kinds of bilingualism have been measured and stigmatized as “inadequate” and/or “underdeveloped”. *Much of this terminology reflects the ideological bias of a linguistic theory which has been primarily concerned with the idealized competence of monolingual speakers in the speech communities of western Europe and the United States; communities which, on the whole, have a high degree of stability, autonomy, and historicity, and possess highly codified standard languages* (Martin-Jones and Romaine 1986, p. 33) [My emphasis].

It then seems that Chomsky’s initial assertion about the centrality of the *native speaker* is being re-evaluated later long after the first line of critique, led by Hymes and focused on the *idealization* issue. It takes the entrance of a postcolonial era to get to a point where the *native speaker* is systematically discussed on the basis of the *ideal speaker-listener*. When Hymes, as an anthropologist, saw no problem in the continued use of the

term *native*, but reacted promptly to the epistemological option constituted by the *ideal*, postcolonial, post-structuralist and postmodern critiques in particular would conflate the *native* and the *ideal*, denouncing them as tools of political oppression (Kandiah 1998; Canagarajah 1999; Love and Ansaldo 2010).

In this perspective, the term *native speaker*, which had been left aside in Hymes's critique of the *ideal speaker*, re-emerges and draws most of the attention in the debates. The conflation of the two adjectives, *native* and *ideal*, is a crucial point in this history, as well as a key factor in the ensuing complexity and duration of the controversy. Chomsky himself stays consistently out of the polemics, which he dismisses as based on false grounds and obvious misunderstanding of his scientific project. Replying to Paikeday <sup>6</sup>, he insists that any controversy surrounding the definition of *native speaker* would be meaningless:

If you want to proliferate pointless problems in this way you might go on with "society," or "culture," asking similar questions (Chomsky in Paikeday 1985, p. 97).

Similarly, when asked on an online forum <sup>7</sup> about the "discrimination" and "oppression" that is associated with "the native speaker's fallacy" (Phillipson 1992), Chomsky asserts:

I do not understand why I am mentioned at all in this connection. The "linguistic authority of the native speaker" was a truism long before I became a college student. The distinction between competence and performance – what we know versus what we do — should be a truism as well, but it has no bearing on the role of the native speaker, as far as I can see. *My notion of "native speaker" is the traditional one, adding nothing new.* I have no idea what the fallacy is supposed to be, or how these truisms might relate to oppression. I suspect there must be some serious misunderstanding <sup>8</sup> [My emphasis].

6 In this passage, Paikeday had just claimed in quite a discussable way that languages were Platonic entities that would exist independently of their speakers.

7 The forum is dedicated to "NNESTs" (Non Native English Speakers) being "TESOL" (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages).

8 Available on line: <http://nnesintsol.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/noam-chomsky.html> Quoted by Kenneth Hyltenstam at the EUROSLA roundtable, "Is there a future for the native speaker in SLA [Second Language Acquisition] research?", Stockholm, September 7, 2011.

So Chomsky's use of the term *native speaker* would be uncontroversial, as it would simply be related to a "traditional" view – a "truism", even. If his use of the term was "traditional", it would then be a continuation of the tradition of linguistic anthropology in the United States – but Chomsky clearly built generative grammar on non-empirical grounds, and he clearly differentiated himself from the Bloomfieldian tradition that preceded him (Matthews 1993; Joseph 2002b). If his use of the term added "nothing new", it would also mean that "native" never bore any political meaning – which is a point to be discussed. Moreover, what it is questioning about Chomsky's position is that he writes extensively about politics but refuses to assign any political value to a linguistic categorization such as *native speaker*. From that perspective, one must also wonder how a life-long opponent to "imperialism" and non-democratic regimes is, when it comes to the *native speaker* debate, accused of being the conveyor of "oppressive" categorizations. Chomsky sometimes mentions social hierarchies in his linguistic work, but only to prove them useless:

We exclude, for example, a speech community of uniform speakers, each of whom speaks a mixture of Russian and French (say, an idealised version of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy) (Chomsky 1986, p. 17).

Chomsky seems, for once, to integrate a social component in his analysis of language – a social component which prevails in his political work (especially about propaganda). But in fact multilingualism, restrained or not by social factors, is rapidly excluded as a cognitive anomaly from the perspective of the scientific observation: if speaking more than one language, whatever social class they are associated with, the speakers would have to switch and choose between contradictory systems of rules. Therefore, in Chomsky's view, they cannot be a proper subject for the linguist. The problem is then clearly one of empiricism: we know that multilingualism is a numerical norm throughout the world (Lüdi and Py 2003), and hence an object that linguistics should seriously take into account. What would be the validity of a linguistic theory which evacuates a prevalent phenomenon as data noise that could be suppressed without any heuristic loss? This thorny epistemological issue had been seen by Coulmas in the book he edited in 1981 – the first book that was mainly devoted to the notion of *native speaker*:

In justifying idealization as a necessary part of rational conduct in intellectual work, Chomsky (1979, p. 57) states that,

[...] when you work within some kind of idealization, perhaps you overlook something which is terribly important. That is a contingency of rational inquiry that has always been understood. One must not be too worried about it.

Is variation in language one such terribly important thing which was overlooked by idiolect grammars based on introspective evidence? Has the attempt to eliminate from the analysis non-pertinent factors led to the exclusion of a very pertinent, even essential factor? Is the homogeneity postulate a caricature rather than an idealization? Clearly, these questions epitomize a major methodological clash in contemporary linguistics (Coulmas 1981b, p. 16).

## 2. NATIVE AS A POLITICAL CATEGORIZATION

Except for a few remarkable exceptions, the native speaker in French-speaking linguistics (*locuteur natif*) does not generate as much literature as it has in English-speaking linguistics. Discussing the modalities of fieldwork in descriptive linguistics, especially in urban contexts in Africa, Renaud (1998, p. 258) wonders why such an empty category can meet so much success, being widely used in scholarship as well as in ordinary speech:

Il faut essayer de comprendre pourquoi une catégorie dont chacun s'accorde à reconnaître qu'elle ne correspond à rien « dans la réalité » continue sa carrière envers et contre tout dans les discours savants et ordinaires.

The French translation by Michel Braudeau of *Syntactic Structures* (Chomsky 1957) was published in 1969: the term *native speaker*, that appears twice in the original text, is translated as “locuteur indigène” (*indigenous speaker*), a choice that emphasizes the ethnical connotation of “native”. Further in the text (p. 17), “any speaker of English” is translated as « n'importe quel locuteur anglais », which means in fact “any English speaker” and therefore confuses nationality with language; the same expression is translated further (p. 103) as « tout anglophone », which means “any anglophone” and hence constitutes a more accurate choice. In 1970, Delaveau & Kerleroux publish a paper called “Terminologie linguistique” which appears as a methodic attempt to define terms such as

*distribution, grammaire, morphème, phonème, rapports syntagmatiques et paradigmatiques*. *Grammaire* receives this comment: « La grammaire d'une langue est cet objet abstrait à quoi obéissent tous les locuteurs natifs adultes de cette langue, qu'ils soient ou non analphabètes. » The definition here is clearly based on Chomsky's work, which the authors had apparently read in English – and their use of the exact copy “locuteur natif” reflects the main practice in French until now. A review of *Syntactic Structures* constitutes an isolated case of repetition of the term “locuteur indigène”:

L'objectif fondamental de son analyse linguistique est de « séparer les suites “grammaticales” qui sont des phrases de cette langue des suites “agrammaticales” qui ne sont pas des phrases de cette langue et d'étudier la structure des suites “grammaticales”, c'est-à-dire des suites acceptables par un locuteur indigène » (Ters 1970, p. 39).

What this variation in terminology and translation shows is that clearly no question was raised in the French context about the semantics of *native*.

In English on the contrary, the homonymy between *Native* and *native* has given the opportunity to certain critics, such as Butcher (2005) to claim that *nativeness* was a colonialist categorization, and *native speaker* a symbol of oppression:

[...] from the seventeenth century on, *natives* designated those peoples conquered, ruled, and looked down on by the British empire. The natives were the vanquished. [...] “*native*” [...] has been used over the centuries to describe the enslavement, denigration, and segregation of “other” people and countries. The adjectival entries [in the Oxford English Dictionary] for *native* also reflect this unenlightened semantic bias. When a word with this sort of divisive, demeaning history turns up in the phrase *native speaker*, all kinds of negative associations attach themselves to its use and threaten to further divide person from person and country from country. The repression of minorities to create and sustain a national identity must surely be considered a part of the old world order, worth remembering only to ensure that we take a new course in the third millennium, a course where everyone belongs (Butcher 2005, p. 20).

From her perspective, *native* is opposed to *national*, the “natives” being denied the right to constitute a nation of their own, or to belong to the majority national group. It is an analysis that diverges from the idea that *nativeness* is the core of the notion of nation: in fact, it treats *native* as a synonym of *indigenous*.

As Hackert (2012, p. 30) convincingly points out though, focusing on the negative connotation of the term *native* leaves one unable to explain how it would at the same time stand as the synonym for perfection in linguistic competence:

[...] a linguistic pecking order is established among members of a speech community, which will typically correspond to a large extent to a more general social ranking ordained by other criteria. At the top come the native speakers. Next come those who are almost native speakers but not quite. Then those who did not learn the language until adulthood. And so on. On the fringes of the community will be the hangers-on, those whose command of the language is poor or suspect (recent immigrants, foreign workers, semi-speakers, etc.) (Love 2009, p. 28).

It is actually this latter conception for which Chomsky's critics assign blame: the native speaker would refer to a social ideal which would nurture oppressive social hierarchies. In other words, a theoretical model would have met a mainstream stereotype, reinforcing its power and creating more inequality. This, then, is the meeting point between critics of the notion of *ideal speaker* and of *native speaker*. The externalist theory of *competence* (ethnography of communication, ethnomethodology, membership categorization analysis, interaction) and the deconstruction of *ethnicity* as an essentialist category (studies of multilingualism, critiques of ethnocentric approach, imperialism, postcolonialism) both plead in favour of an empiricism that would put away the rationalist idealization created by Chomsky. In France, a critique of Chomsky's epistemology has been carried out by Auroux (1998), who explicitly points to the limitations of an internalist approach:

[Les sciences cognitives contemporaines développent l'idée que] [l]e phénomène cognitif (son fonctionnement, comme son explication) relève de l'individu, ou encore, la connaissance est localisée dans l'individu. [...] Il ne faut pas sous-estimer l'avantage heuristique de cette hypothèse : elle permet de réduire la théorie de la connaissance à celle des activités d'un sujet (la subjectivité transcendantale kantienne, ou, plus trivialement, quelques performances psychologiques d'individus empiriquement choisis pour être testés). [...] On peut dire que les théories de la connaissance ont tendance à trop mettre dans la « tête » des gens et à imaginer que ce qu'il y aurait dans cette « tête » est toujours un préalable tout fait qui est la racine même des capacités



cognitives. L'homme est avant tout une structure biologique (un corps) qui interagit avec un environnement et d'autres corps. [...] On a tort de trop concéder à l'intériorité. Il est vraisemblable que la capacité de calculer n'a pas commencé simplement dans la tête des gens et qu'elle ne serait pas née sans la manipulation d'objets externes (cailloux, abaqués, etc.) (Auroux 1998, p. 5).

Auroux's thorough examination of rationalism in language sciences (Auroux 1974, 1989, 1998) thus leads him to this conclusion: a rationalist approach in language sciences cannot be sufficient and empiricism should be rehabilitated and sustained by an externalist theory of cognition. Ethno-methodologists would not deny the validity of such an epistemological proposal<sup>9</sup>. We are then taken back to the necessity of analyzing the *native speaker* debate in a framework that is empirically supported, a way of reintroducing "realism" against the excess of rationalism:

[...] earlier accounts of the notion *native speaker* [are] less than adequate because their authors overestimate the implications of their suspicion of introspection as a method for collecting linguistic data and ignore the fact that most of the world, including the West, is actually multilingual. They also seem unaware of the debates regarding the status of indigenized varieties of English and some other European languages that almost force a redefinition of the concept. [One must reconsider this issue and offer] a more realistic and adequate definition and characterization of *native speaker* (Singh 2006, p. 489).

As mentioned above, another complication comes from the fact that Chomsky is himself very active politically, and not at all on the conservative side: quite on the contrary, throughout the last decades he has been one of the most famous opponents of imperialism and non-democratic regimes. So, how can we explain this paradox, one in which Chomsky suddenly appears as the theoretician of inequality? Blommaert underscores the fact that both Hymes and Chomsky agree politically, though choosing opposite options in linguistics:

9 "There's nothing in heads but brains... What you want to do is find yourself in the midst of [people's] lived activities," to make observable "just what they are doing that is inspectably so" (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 211, in Nevile 2009).

Hymes saw Hiroshima shortly after the bomb; the madness and scale of human rage witnessed there turned him into someone whose main concerns were peace, equality, and solidarity, a man of the left. [...] Political affinities between Hymes and Chomsky did not interfere with robust disagreements over the intellectual programs that both advocated (Blommaert 2009, p. 257-258).

Precisely, Chomsky is not concerned with communication, nor with interaction. The gap between his linguistic theory and his political views have been noted and explained on this basis: Joseph (2002a) shows that even if Chomsky talks about a speaker-hearer, presenting as equivalent the two entities that would be the speaker and the recipient of the speech, it appears that creativity is for the speaker only, the hearer being passive and mostly unable to decipher the propaganda content that is imposed on him.

### 3. THE COMPLEX SEMANTICS OF *NATIVENESS*

If avoiding the debate on the *native speaker* might be an option for the advocates of a self-claimed neutral modelization of the speakers, it remains unclear how far we should attempt to manipulate concepts which are in reality far from neutral:

Native-speaker identity is crucially linked to nation, race, and class; the native-speaker ideology is also connected to a number of other linguistic ideologies, such as the standard ideology (Hackert 2012, p. 30).

“Nativeness” and “standard language” (Milroy and Milroy 1999) are indeed often discussed and presented as “ideologies” proceeding from one another:

[f]or all its supposed artificiality, the standard language has come to define in ideological terms many of the realities of language and speakership with respect to imagined communities (Anderson 1991), particularly those constructed around nation-states with their attendant identities attached to “nativeness” and “foreignness” (Train 2010, p. 47).

Evidently, the history of the term *native speaker* is not exactly synchronized with the history of the notion(s) it conveys. In his searching history of the notion, Bonfiglio (2010) argues that the idea of *native speaker* fully emerges with the construction of modern *nation-states*<sup>10</sup>. It is then understandable that Alan Davies' most recent book on *native speaker* opens with an implicit reference to Benedict Anderson:

We lead our lives in *imagined communities*. We take for granted that the world is divided neatly into homogeneous groups which exhibit internal cohesion (“we are all the same”) and external differentiation (“they are all different”), those axioms of nationalist movements. But internal cohesion is a fiction: we are not all the same, individuals differ. Yet the need for the imagined community is so powerful, the urge to belong so insistent, that we accept the normative constraints which require us to accommodate to common ways of behaving, common beliefs which the long process of childhood acquisition inculcates in us (Davies 2013, p. vii) [My emphasis].

Ten years after the publication of *Native speaker: myth and reality* (2003), Davies thus sums up with no ambiguity what has been claimed throughout decades of intense debates in linguistics: the idea of *native speaker* appears to be a *nationalist* ideology. From that perspective, the notion of *native speaker* is political in the sense that it underlies an ethnicized conception of the nation: a monolingual, homogeneous group of people equally sharing a stable culture<sup>11</sup>. As far as the linguistic level is concerned, this mainstream representation has been regularly challenged by the empirical observation of the heterogeneity and diversity of actual language practices within groups that would be considered as national. Even so, it proves itself to be still a powerful doxa, and as such is regularly criticized outside the boundaries of the linguistic field:

10 The intellectual *horizon de rétrospection* (Auroux and Colombat 1999) that he takes into account nevertheless goes back to Latin Antiquity, as he explores the notions of *sermo patrius* and *lingua materna* (the latter being introduced by Dante).

11 See also Butcher (2005) quoting an American academic and politician of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, George Marsh, for whom the teaching of English in the United States is a crucial to the construction of the American nation (Marsh, George P., 1858, “An apology for the study of English”, in *Inaugural addresses of Theodore W. Dwight, professor of law, and of George P. Marsh, professor of English literature, in Columbia college*, New York, 1 Nov., New York, Columbia University, 1859, p. 59-93).

In what sense is Islam in Europe like Spanish in the United States? In that public debates surrounding the emergence of large immigrant groups identified by religion in the one case and language in the other are emblematic of larger issues of inclusion and exclusion, which in the last instance are about identity of the hosts, of the newcomers, and, most important, of the social entities that will result from their prolonged interactions (Zolberg and Woon 1999, p. 28).

As participating actively in the deconstruction of the categories of “nation” and “native”, the political positioning of contemporary social sciences would be more accurately situated on the left side of politics rather than on its right<sup>12</sup> – which is precisely the point that a few dissonant voices harshly censure, such as Khan (2013), a self-claimed “conservative” scientist and opponent to “cultural anthropology” in particular:

Privilege. Oppression. Colonialism. Patriarchy. Heteronormativity. These are terms common in modern Left thought, but they are also widely used by cultural anthropologists. In sum, *the field has become more political movement and social advocacy collective, than a scholarly enterprise*. This is not true in all cases, but it is true in enough cases that there is an unfortunate dead rot at the heart of cultural anthropology as an academic domain of inquiry. The nastiness of academic anthropology is a function of its hyper-politicized nature [My emphasis].

Is the critique of the *native speaker* a “hyper-politicized” enterprise? It is obviously possible to provide evidence that points toward a positive answer to that question – though I would preferably drop the rhetorical “hyper-” prefix, which does not sound useful nor meaningful from my perspective. Acknowledging the highly political dimension of the debates cannot, nevertheless, be seen as a sign of scientific failure. One has to take into account that politicization results from a deliberate epistemological choice – which, as such, also entails a fruitful part of reflexivity – and that it is grounded empirically. From this perspective, Blommaert (2001, p. 131) quotes Hymes when drawing attention to the issue of scholarship about language rights – a politicized movement that would often not meet scientific expectations:

12 To avoid any incorrect generalization about the social scientists’ political opinions, I should add that it would also be incorrect to assume a perfect consensus among the “left-wing” positions that could be taken, especially in sociological and anthropological linguistics.

In my view, there is a problem of quality in much work committed to language rights. Dell Hymes, a man not afraid of putting things bluntly, at one point said about American research in and on minority groups (Hymes 1996, p. 80): “[i]t is no service to an ethnic group to right the wrong of past exclusion by associating it with shoddy work”. Advocating the rights of oppressed people can only be effective if it is supported by the best possible science. Stock needs to be taken from recent scholarly developments (while old accomplishments should not be forgotten); my feeling often is that the field has moved far beyond “linguistic rights” claims now.

The work of Robert Phillipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas is one which is particularly discussed here (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1986; Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995). Clearly militant, this scholarship stands on the side of minorities who are perceived as straying away from the ideal culture *i.e.* Western White culture. Though pragmatically efficient to some extent, this culturalist view ends up essentializing minorities as representing the native: this idealized figure of the victim, the oppressed speaker, is the one to which scholars want to give linguistics rights – even if this enterprise is not always the best political option, as some cases have shown<sup>13</sup>. As righteous as this sounds, it does not lack very deep theoretical, practical and political problems – so deep that, for some scholars, the notion of linguistic rights should be abandoned, to the profit of other forms of more complex reflections on social equality and language (Stroud 2001; Wee 2010). This critique is entirely epistemological: language sciences cannot over simplify linguistic issues just for the sake of solving political problems. We are facing a paradox: while criticizing idealized linguistic models and reintroducing issues from the “real world”, some scholars actually operate another kind of idealization, placing the native and his/her authenticity in front row – the last speaker, the speaker of an endangered language, the minority speaker, the colonized speaker being just a few of

13 See Blommaert (2001) on Tanzania: switching from English (the language of colonization) to Swahili (the “native” language) has by no means helped in reducing educational inequalities, due to much more powerful social factors. “Rights are fine, only, in practice, they tend to be overruled by other factors of inequality. Declaring languages equal does not make their speakers equal in real societies, because far more than language is at play” (*ibid.*, p. 138).

the possible variations within this framework. This situation could be analysed in terms of failed politicization, one that does not avoid the traps of essentialization:

Despite the apolitical nature of his analysis, the shadow of Saussure would loom large in subsequent attempts at a political account of language. If not reacting against Saussure's idealisation of a homogeneous speech community, such accounts are likely to be based on a methodology deriving from the structuralism he is credited with founding, or to be reacting against that very structuralism (Joseph 2006, p. 64).

#### DE-ESSENTIALIZING THE *NATIVE SPEAKER*

If *diversity* is the obvious mode of existence of human languages (Auroux 1998, p. 168), *superdiversity* (Vertovec 2007; Blommaert and Rampton 2011) is emerging as a new term to characterize efficiently the effects of mobilities, migrations and language contacts in both a postcolonial era and a globalized world:

So although notions like “native speaker”, “mother tongue” and “ethnolinguistic group” have considerable ideological force (and as such should certainly feature as *objects* of analysis), they should have no place in the sociolinguistic toolkit itself. When the reassurance afforded by *a priori* classifications like these is abandoned, research instead has to address the ways in which people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages (Blommaert and Rampton 2011, p. 6).

In a present mindset in which anthropologists actively discuss the “danger of disembodied postcolonial theorizing” (Fabian 2000, p. xiv), the core issue seems to get rid of mainstream language ideologies that still impose their view on the study of language, a view that is unfortunately incompatible with the complexity of the material collected through the ethnography of speaking:

Boas after all spent almost his entire professional career saying “language, race and culture are three different things that don't coincide”. We keep forgetting it. Why do we keep forgetting it? We keep forgetting it, I really

think, because we live in a cultural system which constantly tries to bring them back together again, racializing language difference, languaging racial difference, culturalizing linguistic difference (Silverstein, van der Aa and Blommaert 2014, p. 7-8).

In this sense, the politicization of the *ideal* and the *native* speaker is a striking example of attempts to deal with the conflation of mainstream language ideologies and language sciences.

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