Performativity and the claims of scientificity of modern linguistics

(Performatividade e argumentos científicos da linguística moderna)

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Resumo: *Este trabalho discute a tese da 'situacionalidade' da pesquisa em linguística, quer teórica, quer aplicada, e algumas das suas implicações. E sustenta que ela está ligada à performatividade de todas as asserções, inclusive as asserções científicas. De forma mais importante, argumento que é a regressão infinita da performatividade que torna inevitável a passagem da pesquisa presumivelmente 'não influenciada por emoções' à militância.*
Palavras-chave: *situacionalidade – performatividade – linguística – pesquisa.*

Abstract: *This paper discusses the claim of the situatedness of research in both theoretical and applied linguistics and some of its implications and argues that it is linked to the performativity of all assertions, including scientific ones. More importantly, I argue that it is the regressive infinity of performativity that makes inevitable the passage from presumably 'dispassionate' research to militancy.*
Key-words: *situatedness – performativity – linguistics – research.*

The broad outline of this paper and its principal aims

Science has long prided itself on its oft-repeated claims of being atemporal and not spatially confined. It is widely and persistently held that scientific truths, once established, are there for ever—valid, that is, until the moment they are dislodged and replaced by other (more scientific?) truths. Philosophers of science usually frame these occasional 'cataclysms' within the trajectory of particular sciences, not in terms of science itself learning to be more 'scientific' with fresh discoveries. Rather, they see it as progressive approximations to an as-yet-undiscovered 'final truth', whose existence itself is never called into question, despite lack of certainty of ever having attained it or being able to do so. Both Popperians and Kuhnians, who are otherwise at loggerheads with one another on almost every other

issue, seem to uphold such a view of science unanimously. Both are, in this sense, die-hard positivists. And, it is not difficult to verify that, by and large, linguistics fits the bill. At the very least, that was very much the case until very recently. But some changes are there already on the horizon.

In this paper, my central aim is to discuss the importance of the growing realization among researchers, especially those in the social sciences, that theirs is an activity that is inescapably situated in time and space. This means that both scientific thinking and those who are engaged in the activity have their specific spatiotemporal coordinates and can only be judged relative to them. Among the several implications of this perception, I want to single out the inevitability of our personal involvement in our research projects and trace it ultimately to the performative character of our scientific assertions and, more importantly, the regressive infinity of such a claim. I further argue that this, in its turn, has the further consequence that our research always has an immediate impact on our lives as well as the lives of those around us, a point that may not be all that self-evident to many. I conclude by arguing that it is time we took these conclusions in their stride and accepted the fact that some form of militancy in the cause of those about whose lives we conduct our research is not something we might embark on after we have done our jobs as researchers, but something that must be regarded as part and parcel of our very jobs. In what follows, I shall initially take up the themes of situatedness and performativity of our scientific claims separately before weaving them together to form a single thread by linking these concepts to that of reflexivity.

SITUATEDNESS OF RESEARCH AND ITS OPPOSITION TO CATEGORICAL THINKING AND OBJECTIVISM

The word 'situated' and its cognate 'situatedness' have gained some currency in the linguistic literature in recent years, especially in those areas considered the privileged site for applied research. It is opposed, on the one hand, to categorical thinking that has been the hallmark of rationalist tradition for centuries—the one that swept across linguistics with the Chomskyan revolution in the late 1950s—and on the other, to objectivism that informed a good deal of thinking on metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and so on, especially in the first half of 20th century.

Categorical thinking manifests itself in the widely attested penchant for positing radical, all-or-nothing dichotomous oppositions against mounting evidence of a reality composed of fuzzy categories or zones of grey, overlapping categories between the extremities of a cline. In linguistics, traces of categorical thinking can be discerned every time a linguist confidently affirms the existence of a language x as different from a language y, spoken in geographically contiguous areas (borderlands between countries, for example) or refers to a speaker as a native speaker of x rather than of y, whereas in reality the language community where that speaker lives is best described as societally multilingual. (Khubchandani, 2003). It is just this form of thinking that Pennycook (2002: 12) calls into question when he emphasizes the "need to ask hard questions about what we mean by 'language' and what different concepts, ideologies, or discourses we mobilize by particular constructions of the term." Pennycook's questioning of accepted orthodoxy in thinking about language was more recently taken up by Blackledge and Creese (2008: 552) who concluded their paper with the following remark:

> The young people's attitudes to their languages, and their multilingual practices, constituted a sophisticated response to their place in the world, as they negotiated subject positions which took them on a path through language ideological worlds constructed by others. The young people were flexible and adaptable in response to their environment, as they negotiated identities which were more complex and sophisticated than the 'heritage' positions ascribed to them institutionally.

On their part, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008: 643) chime in:

> […] the increasingly multilingual and multicultural nature of global exchanges is raising questions about the traditionally monolingual and monocultural nature of language education, and its modernist orientation.

As for objectivism, many linguists implicitly uphold this doctrine in their belief that the object of their inquiry, namely language, can be observed in complete disregard for the society at large or the cultural context. It is implicit, for instance, in the attitude of linguists like Frederick Newmeyer who defends tooth and nail what he calls 'autonomism' as an approach to the study of language. Here's how he defines it:

> (The advocates of autonomism) approach language as a natural scientist would study a physical phenomenon, that is, by focusing on those of its properties that exist apart from either the beliefs and values of the individual speakers of language or the nature of the society in which the language is spoken (Newmeyer, 1986: 5–6).

Heller (2008:505) addresses this very issue but responds to it in a starkly different way when she says:

> Indeed, if we are asking questions about what it means these days to try to understand what language and social process have to do with each other, it is not because the goal now seems meaningless, but rather because the tools we have inherited are encountering some of their built-in limitations in current confrontations with the way things are unfolding in the world around us, confounding our attempts to understand them.

In one swift stroke of the pen, thus, she addresses the pressing need of the moment to contemplate language in conjunction with the society which is where it is embedded while also drawing attention to the topicality of the very need to raise the issue.

Autonomism is antipodal to the thesis of situatedness. It arises from the misguided belief that it is possible for a researcher to free themselves of the particularities of the historical moment at which they happen to be located in order to get hold of overarching, perennial truths about the nature of things. The foolhardiness of this belief is especially striking as we contemplate objects like 'language' that are themselves products of our discursive practices about them. For the truth of the matter is that there are no such things as languages *in natura*, ready for the linguists to pounce upon and dissect. As Herman (2008: 93) says: "When we talk metaphorically of language as a 'thing' or a 'structure', we are using a 'systematically misleading expression' (Ryle, 1931)". In other words, as Makoni and Pennycook (2007: 1) argue, languages, as we know them today, were actually "invented" through the process of classification and naming. Now, many dyed-in-the-wool linguists might object that such an act of reification or, in plain English, 'thingification,' is a necessary first step without which no science would ever be possible. But the following remark by Love (2009: 30) should give them some pause to think:

> Since the mid-19th century Western linguistics has prided itself on being the 'science of language'. One important consequence of this self-designation is that linguistics projects an image of itself as culture-neutral, in the sense that physics, chemistry and biology are culture-neutral. That is to say, while no would deny that Western science is the product of a particular culture, its findings, if true, are held to be universally true. The laws of physics do not cease to hold in those parts of the world where the inhabitants' intellectual history is such that they could not have formulated

them for themselves. The facts vouchsafed by the science of human physiology are what they are, even for those who have no inkling for them. Is linguistics culturally neutral in this sense?

The very fact that we do speak of, say, a distinctively French as opposed to British or Polish linguistics, not to mention an Indian or a Chinese linguistics, should be seen as definitively forcing upon us a flat "no" as the answer to this question. The reason why it is perfectly reasonable to speak of British linguistics as different from, say, French linguistics is that the kind of research carried out under the respective banners reflect the general features that have been long characteristic of their national thinking. Thus we readily recognize Firth, Halliday and so forth as British for, among other things, their empirical bent of mind, their preference for the concrete and down-to-earth facts of language and so forth. As historians who have looked at the evolution of linguistics over the centuries have shown, the questions that linguists have raised, and the ways in which they have gone about answering them at specific moments in history, bear the indelible marks of their cultural milieu as well as historically relevant issues.

As for categorical thinking and objectivism, they have been the bedrock on which the modern science of language or linguistics was erected and are still touted by those who would rather have their science looked upon as one of the 'hard sciences' (alongside, say, physics and chemistry) than the so-called human sciences (like sociology and anthropology). Rampton (1997) summed up the spirit of situatedness very nicely when he wrote:

> Researchers can't help being socially located, with biographies and subjectivities that are brought to bear at every stage of the research process, influencing in some form or another the questions they ask and the way they try to find the answers. (Rampton 1997: 11).

Rampton made that observation with the field of research called 'Applied Linguistics' (AL) specifically in mind. The term 'situatedness' has, it seems, caught on. In Brazil, it was put to efficient use when Signorini (2008) used it in the very title of the first of her diptych *Investigações sobre Lingu{gem} situada* (Studies on situated language). As she made it clear in her editorial preface to the volume, to talk of language as situated is to see it as part of a wider, social reality on the one hand and to prepare the grounds for a critical, interventionist role for the researcher on the other. It

takes no great flight of imagination to realize that to contemplate language as part of a wider, social reality is to problematize the terms in which its contours have been delineated traditionally, while to espouse a critical and openly interventionist role of the researcher is to abdicate any claims to disinterestedness and objectivity.

The idea of situatedness is, no doubt, particularly evident and appealing in so-called applied fields as Rampton rightly observed. The kinds of problems that researchers in AL address are typically located in space and time, usually coinciding with the spatiotemporal coordinates of their own existence. It is temporally located in the sense that what presents itself as a problem today may cease to be a problem tomorrow; or, even more dramatically, may turn out to be just the solution to some other, hitherto undetected problem. It is spatially located inasmuch as a problem identified as such in a given set of circumstances may not be all that problematic elsewhere, or, even turn to be a blessing in disguise in some other situation. Also, as Rampton rightly pointed out, researchers themselves can only contemplate those problems that are not only there in the real world, but are, more significantly, the ones that the theoretical baggage they bring to the task *enables* them to see. This observation became all-too-evident and undeniably true especially in light of what scholars like Hanson (1958) and later Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) and Paul Feyerabend (1981a, b) have convincingly argued: namely, that all observations are, in the ultimate analysis, theory-laden.

Now, contrary to what some commentators have hastily gone on to conclude, the thesis of theory-ladenness of empirical observations is not an apology for a theory-first research strategy, nor for that matter for a return to stock-in-trade rationalism as the only viable means to arrive at scientific truths. In a paper entitled 'The philosophy of applied linguistics' which I wrote a decade ago (Rajagopalan, 2003), I claimed that what one witnesses as one surveys the current academic scenario is a return to empiricism in the form of what is best referred to as neo-empiricism (that is a new form of empiricism, shorn of its original naïveté and behaviorist overlays). In a review of the edited volume in which that paper was published (Davies and Elder 2003), James Lantoff (2006: 151) observed:

> Perhaps the most controversial claim in the entire volume occurs in the previously mentioned chapter by Rajagopalan, who perceives an "unmistakable" and "irreversible" trend toward neo-empiricism in applied linguistics. According to the author, with the possible exception of SLA scholars, such as the "unrepentant" Gregg

[Rajagopalan's term], researchers are 'becoming convinced that the theory-first approach has only stood in the way of real progress in the field (p. 412)'.

I confess I fail to see why my claim is described as so very controversial. As far I can see, the growing prestige of corpus linguistics which I cited as proof for my claim undeniably underscores a summary rejection of theorizing from the top, the hallmark of rationalism (see Chapman, 2008 for a reiteration of this view). But a possible clue to why Lantoff thinks otherwise may be found in a passage from the same review where he dismisses the claim of corpus linguistics as "a theory of anything" and adds that it is only a "research methodology".

Once again, I confess I see things very differently. While it is no doubt true that corpus linguistics attracts a number of new computer-savvy enthusiasts thanks to its extensive use of computer technology, it is important to remember that it is neither predicated on nor confined to it. The best proof for this can be adduced from the fact that the idea of corpus-based studies itself predates the use of computers. In fact, the massive and laborious spadework that went into the production of the monumental volume *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et. al, 1985)—often cited as an early demonstration of what can be achieved through the study of corpus—did not avail itself of any such technology for the simple reason that there was none available at that time. (Rajagopalan, 2007). Besides, as Thompson and Hunston (2006: 1-2) argue, the farthest one may go in distinguishing between a decidedly theoretical approach to language such as Systemic Functional Linguistics and Corpus linguistics is that the former is "theory-heavy" whereas the latter is "theory-light". That is to say, it is theoretically oriented all right, but maybe not in any full-blooded sense. And in a particularly poignant way, it strikes at the very heart of the generativist conception of language (Rajagopalan, 2007). Were it not so, it would not be the lightning rod for so much blistering criticism from generative linguists, especially Chomsky. (see for example, Andor, 2004).

Situatedness and its implactions

Backtracking a little, it is important to point out that, in the past decade or so, a flurry of books and papers have highlighted the situatedness

of research even in areas primarily concerned with hard-core theorizing. Particularly worth mentioning here is the book *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-tongue fascism, race and the science of language* by Christopher Hutton (Hutton, 1999). Hutton pointed out that

> Notions such as 'mother-tongue' and 'native speaker' are fundamental in contemporary formal as well as sociological linguistics, yet their status within organicist ideology and radical-nationalist identity politics is forgotten or ignored. At the very least it should be recognized that the rise of mother-tongues reflects a particular set of historical circumstances, not a transhistorical law of human identity formation. (Hutton, 1999: 287)

The importance of this observation can hardly be overestimated. Hutton is challenging nothing other than what has over the years become axiomatic in linguistics: namely, the idea that individual languages exist as such *in natura* and that they have their respective native speakers. Hutton's timely reminder that they have their origins in organicist ideology and radical-nationalist identity politics—needless to say, a part and parcel of the *Zeitgeist* of what is mostly a bygone era today—must give us pause to consider the possibility that some of the building blocks of contemporary linguistic thought may themselves owe their existence to hidden interests of an ideological nature moulding linguistic thought in times past.

When all is said and done, what the idea of the situatedness of all thinking on matters linguistic underscores is that, no matter how hard one might wish things were otherwise, there can be no escaping from the fact that we as researchers are unavoidably caught up in the particulars of the moment in history that we happen to be in as well as the circumstances–social, political and what have you—that attend on it.

Furthermore, our very presence as researchers is invariably intrusive and invasive, no matter how hard one pretends it isn't. Rather than propose ingenious—and, in the end, self-deluding—measures to sidestep so-called 'observer's paradox' or devise supplementary tricks to ameliorate its damaging effects (Labov, 1972), we as researchers should face up to the fact that the observer is inevitably part of the observed. It is not for nothing that the observer's paradox has been likened to Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle'. But it is doubtful whether in social sciences most researchers would take Einstein's famous reaction 'God doesn't play dice' for a conclusive answer to the dilemma and not simply a desperate plea to return

to a familiar rationalist dogma. Also, it is not obvious if Einstein has, in this case, done any better than Descartes and his so-called ontological proof for the existence of God and way out of his own path of skepticism.

The thesis of the performativity of our scientific claims

The concept of performative utterances was famously put forward by the English philosopher J.L. Austin (1962), though the idea itself had probably been around for a much longer time (Nerlich and Clarke, 1994). What interests us here is the idea that the utterances we make primarily attest to certain actions we perform in or by speaking language. That is to say, behind every utterance, behind every language chunk which we think is concrete and self-sufficient unto itself, there is a speaking subject who intends that utterance to mean certain things or, at the very least, is credited with having such and such intentions (even dyed-in-the-wool Freudians would have to concede that that is how ordinary men and women go about conducting their routine business of life!).

Although the thesis of performativity has been widely accepted by the scholarly community at large and percolated down to several disciplinary matrices (Rajagopalan, 2004a, 2009a), many have either failed or been reluctant to take its implications to their logical conclusions. A notable exception is Beaugrande (1998). His opening words signal a significant change in the way many scholars have started looking at their own scientific practices.

> For analysing the discourses of philosophy and science, 'speech act theory' might offer a bridge metaphor. In 'classical' agendas, these discourses are officially dominated by the '*constative*' mode for conveying information and declaring the truth about reality, but unofficially by the '*performative*' mode for constructing reality and claiming authority. (Beugrande, 1998: 1)

And he went on to contrast traditional and contemporary approaches to the looking at scientific controversies;

> Officially, disagreements occur only because the sole and complete truth is still unattained, or because individual philosophers or scientists are misled by personal interests or relativism. 'Non-classical' or 'post-classical' agendas are now seeking to reinterpret philosophy and science as performative enterprises, wherein a 'theory',

'description', or 'explanation' emerges from performative speech acts deriving
authority from a superior rationality than your competitors or predecessors.
(Beugrande, 1998: 1)

Beugrande's approach is in stark contrast with that of Dascal (1989,
1990) and Dascal and Cremaschi (1999) where a last-ditch, desperate
attempt is made to safeguard the scientific objectivity of science by creating
a straw-man distinction between a 'soft rationality' and a 'hard one'. In
Rajagopalan (2002), I argued why such attempts are doomed to fail because
they only skirt the problem rather than confronting it head-on. Moreover,
they belong to a series of attempts to 'contain' Austin, to literally 'reinvent'
him and control the potential damages that may accrue from Ordinary
Language Philosophy, the best-known example of which is Searle's efforts
to put Austin's thoughts on the beaten track of analytic philosophy (Cf.
Rajagopalan, 2000, 2004b, 2009a, 2010).

Epistemological dead-end and the idea of performativity as a way out

The theory of performativity poses a serious problem to the pretensions
of classical science: if there are no constative utterances as such but only
performatives ingeniously camouflaged so as to look like them, where does
it leave us insofar the question of scientific truth is concerned? Here is how
Austin prepares us for the final *coup de grace*:

> With the constative utterance, we abstract from the illocutionary (let alone the
> perlocutionary) aspects of the speech act, and we concentrate on the locutionary:
> moreover, we use an over-simplified notion of correspondence with the facts-over-
> simplified because essentially it brings in the illocutionary aspect. (Austin, 1962:
> 144-145)

Austin is saying that any attempt to infer rock-bottom truths from
constative utterances is precipitous and ill-advised because (a) we are
forgetting that the constative that we are appealing to was itself wrenched
out of the illocutionary and (b) the notion of correspondence that we are
using is "over-simplified". Does it mean it is high time we dumped the
whole notion of the constative utterance overboard and started looking for
an alternative? One thing is for sure: what investigations such as Austin's

have shown beyond the shadow of a doubt is that we can no longer continue doing science the way Descartes idealized it. There is some make-believe in all this. We have to pretend as if the constative can be entrusted with the task of being the bearer of truth-values.

What this also underscores is the need for giving up on the assumption that all scientific enquiry must follow a path that has a point zero at its beginning. The fact that there is no point zero in matters of scientific enquiry. All our starting premises are vestiges of past attempts. The path itself has not been laid out for us beforehand; rather, we make it by walking. (Rajagopalan, 2011). In other words, even when we as scientists think that we are working alone, we are in fact societally positioned and cannot help being so. This was the great epistemological trap to which Descartes, the great French savant, fell victim.

For Descartes, the 'Father of Modern Philosophy', theoretical reflection was a profoundly solitary affair. The idea that all theoretical reflection should start with a 'clean slate'— incidentally, the corner-stone of modern linguistics (cf. Rajagopalan, 2004c)—was also announced early on in his *Passions of the Soul*, when he declared pompously that his plan was to broach the topic "as if no one had written on these matters before". To appreciate just how far we have moved from that Cartesian orthodoxy, consider the following remark by Restivo (1988: 5):

> Even when I carry out scientific work—an activity which I can seldom conduct in direct association with other men—I perform a social, because *human*, act. It is not only the material of my activity—like the language itself which the thinker uses—which is given to me as a social product. My own existence itself is a social activity.

Essentially the same point is reiterated by Livnat (2012: 1) when he claims:

> The academic scholar, even if he feels that in certain respects he is a "one-man show," is part of a shared and ongoing endeavor, and his scientific work is asocial act that exists within a framework of agreed-upon social mechanisms.

The fact remains, however, that linguistics is still a long away from recognizing that there is an inalienable social dimension to language (Rajagopalan, 2006, 2009b). Stephen May (2006) attributes this inability (or sheer reluctance, whatever one may want to call it) to the navel-gazing

attitude of many contemporary linguists. He does not exempt even sociolinguists who, he believes, are at one with their mainstream colleagues on this question, notwithstanding their professed interest in and enthusiasm for the social context of language. This is what he has to say:

> […] for much of its history, linguistics as an academic discipline has been preoccupied with idealist, abstracted approaches to the study of language. In short, language has too often been examined in isolation from the social and political conditions in which it is used. . . . *This ahistorical, apolitical approach to language has also been a feature of sociolinguistics, despite its emphasis on the social,* and of many discussions of LP [language policy] as well. (emphasis added) (May 2006: 255)

PERFORMATIVITY AND ITS INFINITE REGRESS THROUGH REFLEXIVITY

While more and more scholars today have taken kindly to the idea that there is no escaping from the fact of all language being performative through and through, many still have great difficulty in accepting the consequences of such a conclusion in their entirety. In particular, many are still struggling to face up to the inevitable consequence that the thesis of peformativity leads us into an infinite regress (Rajagopalan, 2010: 15). To see why this is so, consider the following. To say that a given utterance is a performative one, despite all appearance to the contrary (which, after all, was the gist of Austin's groundbreaking thesis) is itself to produce another performative utterance; but to point out verbally that this is so is to produce yet another performative utterance in turn. And so on, *ad infinitum*. This is but another way of admitting that there is no stepping out of language to make a statement about it, as it were, from a perspective located outside of language. Yet another way of putting the same thing would be to say that there is no escape from the all-encompassing grip of language; no matter how hard one might try, one is always already caught up in it.

Note that the unending process of stepping back only to discover that each time we are back in the grip of performativity (only at a further remove each time from the one immediately preceding it) is something that passes through what has been called reflexivity. Now the idea of reflexivity is nothing but the recognition that what one says at any time must apply to one's very saying of it, over and above the 'content' of that saying. But, once again, it is one thing to nod in agreement to this but another to face up to its ultimate implications. Werry draws attention to this when he observes:

> Modern linguistics consists of many disparate, competing, and sometimes deeply conflicting approaches to the study of language. Yet until very recently, what has characterized almost all forms of linguistic inquiry has been the absence of attention to linguistic discourse itself, to reflexive, rhetorical selfconsciousness about the language of linguistics. Unlike fields such as economics, social psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and history, that have undergone a "rhetorical turn," linguistics has shown little inclination to look "at" as well as "through" its disciplinary discourses (Werry, 2007: 67)

As a matter of fact, linguistics was founded on the gesture of suppressing all traces of rhetoric, a gesture whose roots date back to at least as early as Plato. Referring to the eternal 'tussle' between logic and rhetoric, Schalkwyk (2004: 99) says:

> A dichotomy established since Plato's attack on the Sophists, this separation has been under pressure recently from literary theorists and some continental philosophers, who insist upon the inescapably situational nature of all enquiry and argument.

It should not take a very great stretch of the imagination to realize that this total lack of "rhetorical selfconsciousness", of preparedness or willingness on the part of linguists to 'look "at" as well as "through"' its disciplinary discourses", that Werry speaks of results in the disciplinary discourse of linguistics becoming more and more hermetic and proof against possible 'prying eyes' from the outside.

Here we are up against the eternal lure of theorizing for the sake of theorizing. Now, clearly many researchers have expressed their despair over this issue of theory for theory's sake, no matter what the consequences. It was this pent-up frustration that led van Lier to exclaim, apropos of language teaching and the spate of theory after ingenious theory being churned out, that "the linguistics in AL has veered off in the direction of theory (in a sense, therefore, has left AL), leaving pedagogy to cope with the practical side of things" (van Lier 1994). It reminds one of a standing joke that used to be told about dried-in-the-wool Marxists, a fanatic among whom exclaims "It may well work in practice; but in theory, well …"

An equally personal account of the revulsion one justifiably feels when a scholar openly disparages actual life experiences in order to focus on high-falutin' theory was recently given by Li Wei (2007) in a 'Viewpoint' piece in *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* where he wrote:

[The other day] I attended a research seminar by a linguist who presented a model of the bilingual mind. The speaker actually said, repeatedly, that the model was a "theoretical" one and did not (intend to) have anything to do with how bilinguals actually think or what they do. Indeed, she argued that having facts about the actual behaviour of the language user from observation would be a distraction from important theorization. In her own words, "the idiosyncratic behaviour of the speaker is a real nuisance for the scientist". I realised that we are still a long way from a user-centred linguistics.

I would go farther than that. There is an urgent need, I think, to *humanize* a good part of linguistics, to make it socially meaningful and relevant. And one important first step in embarking on such an agenda is to recognize that all our thinking is invariably situated. We are, after all, all human, all too human. There is indeed nothing wrong with that nor anything to be ashamed about. Or, even if there is, there is nothing we can do about that—all we can do is just grin and bear it!

RESEARCHERS AS MILITANTS

The situatedness of all linguistic thought, coupled with the inalienable performativity of all our scientific claims means that researchers in human sciences cannot help being also militants in the causes they embrace in whatever way, shape or form. Militancy is but the straightforward outcome of the fact that to speak a language is always already to intervene in the state of affairs that contributes to making our world what it is. This was the crucial fact unfortunately sidestepped by Marx (1888: 13) when he proclaimed: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Marx recommended the right pill for the malaise he had detected; but he diagnosed it incorrectly. Because he failed to recognize that all interpretation can only take place in language and speaking a language necessarily implies intervening in the world in decisive ways.

The same holds true in the case of linguists and other social scientists who have taken up the task of trying to understand the workings of human language. Whether they are willing to admit it or not, their work is already one form of intervening in the very phenomenon they are looking at. True, in the past they used to delude themselves by thinking that they could *describe* language, while withholding their impulse to *prescribe* specific usages.

But thanks to Austin and others, we know now that description is but another name for constativity and that pure constativity is but a mirage! So the earlier linguists admit the inalienable performativity of their own work, the better.

In point of fact, the politics of militancy is not option but a natural corollary of their work as researchers. Mey (1985: 16) announced this in a very pithy but powerful observation when he said:

> [...] our use of language cements the dominant interests of our society, helping to oppress a large segment of the population.

The full political significance of that statement can only be appreciated by perceiving its covert illocutionary force (Rajagopalan, 2009b). It turns out Mey was issuing a clarion call to his colleagues to join him in the crusade to fight on behalf of those left on the seamy side of linguistically inscribed social divides all over the world.

Before wrapping up this paper, I would like to mention the growing, but as yet very timid, disquiet amongst our ranks about the wide chasm that separates our 'lofty' academic discourse from the routine, 'myth-laden' speech of the 'hoi-polloi'—and the attendant belief that it is a sheer waste of time trying to 'educate' the masses at large about the breakthroughs of our scientific enquiry. Cameron (2007b: 294) asks:

> How do you make our research, with all its complexities and uncertainties, accessible and entertaining enough to keep the reader on board, without committing what academics are trained to think of as the cardinal sin of 'dumbing down'? I suspect that many of us shy away from popular writing because we fear we may commit that sin, or be accused of it by our peers.

Cameron's own book *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (Cameron 2007a) was an attempt to redeem "some of my ingrained professional prejudices", as was, in a much more modest fashion, my own attempt to address the issue in Rajagopalan 2004c.

When all is said and done, the one question we all have to answer sooner or later is: What difference does our research make to the real world and have we done anything to make it matter to the daily lives of those most urgently need it?

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