

COGNITION AND LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT

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Cognition, Social Communication and Language Management
 "Cogito, ergo sum." "I think, therefore I am." The saying leaves out several essential truths.

First, it leaves out language. Ability to use language is a human gift. It is as inevitable as cognition. Cognition and communication are interdependent.

Second, the saying leaves out other people. When we use language, we use it with others. This is as inevitable as being self. Cognition and social communication are interdependent.

To say "I think, I speak, therefore I am" promises greater insight into the human condition. I think and speak. When I speak I think what to say, and how to say it. I manage my language as I speak. In this article, I will talk about how people manage language and how language management provides an approach to understand what is good language.

I distinguish between [managing language and discourse] and [generating discourse] (Neustupný, 1973 [1978, ch. XII]). I will leave the question open to what extent and how the generation of discourse involves cognition. However, the inevitable complement of generation of discourse is its management. And management of discourse is a cognitive activity.

Particular Languages are the Results of Language Management

The very notion of a particular language, of a Bahasa Malaysia, a Swedish, a Swahili, is a construct. The construct is an outcome of cognitive behavior, of behavior towards language. In other words, it is the result of language management. It is abstract in the sense that the notion projects onto and comprises all speech acts by an entire

population, classifies these speech acts and makes possible claims as to their shared properties and consequently the shared identity of the speakers.

A case study will make my point clear. Lipski's review (1999) of a book by Bakker (1997) drew my attention to the fascinating language that the multilingual Cree-French (-Ojibwa-English)-speaking Michif in Canada created for themselves. Lipski (1999:586) feels that Bakker's description (1997:27, 213) strongly implicates deliberate, voluntary language mixing, a managed development of a new language:

People of bilingual communities who consider themselves separate groups or who need a form of communication unintelligible to outsiders may develop such a mixed language...

This is an example of the language, "unintelligible because almost all the content words are not English":

- (18) *There was a rich mush with kushti-dicking purple togs.
Every divvus his hobben was good.*

For the reader who wants to know what it means, I refer to Bakker (1997:205). Anglo-romani is also an example of a kind of mixed language that has been created by its speakers. Bakker (205) presents the U-turn hypothesis which suggests that inflected Romani was lost and English was learned as a first language. However, Romani words were still in continuous use in the family network or learned from other groups. Bakker proposes that a most logical and discreet way to create secret language is for the group to use as many of the words (recovered from their former language) as possible.

I quote Bakker (1997:206):

These are secret languages spoken ... in the presence of others who do not understand them, in order to remain unintelligible to outsiders [who] may not even notice that a secret language is being used. They may think that those Gypsies speak "bad English" or that they do not articulate well. This language is obviously not used to solve a communication gap in contacts between people who speak different languages. It is an in-group language, the utmost language of solidarity for the group members...

We learn from Bakker (203) that Michif started within a bilingual group and not as a contact language between different groups.

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The originally bilingual group of people, "for some reason, wanted to distinguish themselves collectively from both groups whose languages they speak." The group developed a way of speaking that made use of both of the languages in which they were then bilingual:

The mixed language is spoken as an in-group language. It stresses the distinctness of the group... it is a distinct language, for which a special name exists...

Bakker names Michif an intertwined language. Anglo-Romani is mixed in yet another manner. The intertwining and the mixing are accomplished by on-line language management. Whether the Michif discussed in a systematic manner how their intertwining of Cree and French should best be accomplished is lost in history, as are all the intertwined speech and management acts that came to make it up. But we are, of course, acutely aware how post-colonial languages continue being developed in a highly systematic manner.

Among the Anglo-Romani, the social situation provides the external criterion for successful management of discourse. They want their speech to go unnoted by the people among whom they live and yet to be unintelligible. This was the motivation in their case for creating a secret variety (*supra*). That these languages are in-group languages (Bakker, 1997:202) and not contact languages should result in a cumulative effect on their development by circular causation through continued use (Myrdal, 1968:1871). It really only makes sense to make these strong claims that new languages have been knowingly developed if another important condition is met:

If communication with one or both of the other language groups is no longer needed, the group will lose knowledge of one or both of these languages of the groups from which it originated. Then the in-group code of the intertwined language becomes the only code available and thus a new language" (Bakker, 1997:212).

Bakker falls back on the sociolinguistic fiction that there are Cree and French components of Michif when he describes its grammar. I will not deal with this contradiction here. It is a fact that there once were those two resources out of which Michif was constructed. It could be so constructed because the Michif were then bilingual in Cree and French.

He also brings up the problem of Michif's classification. Neither will I deal with that problem here. Intertwining gives us a nice image of the provenance of Michif but it creates problems for synchronic

grammatical description, "It could be argued that Michif is Cree with massive French intrusion..." (Bakker, 1997:116).

This raises an interesting possibility. The French and Cree components may still be structurally marked and recognized by speakers. (I was reminded of this possibility by Professor J. V. Neustupný who commented on an earlier draft.)

The implication of this possibility is that contemporary speakers of Michif may act on their recognition of the fossilized components and deliberately manage their speaking to emphasize the French or Cree component. They could resurrect, in their contemporary image of course, one of their ancestral language roots. They would do that if they felt it would be in their best socio-economic or socio-cultural interest. These interests could be to claim shared identity or to more sharply demarcate identity.

There are scholars who explore alternative models of accounting for grammatical structure in discourse. At an extreme, there are speculations from Ochs' *et al.* (1996) based on ethnomethodological enquiry according to Schegloff; at a lesser distance from mainstream grammatical linguistics is the work of Syder and Pawley on phrases, idioms and lexical routines. Neither approach conflicts with the search for the limits of human language expressive potential and its internal constraints. What each underlines is that grammatical practices are necessarily cognitive constructs and products of language management. I will take this point a step further. On the one hand, and at their most general, scientific linguists' (meta-) grammars are attempts at capturing the universal limits of human verbal expression. On the other hand, descriptive (meta-) grammars codify a polity's particular selection from within that universe of expressive potential. Cognitive processes guide the selection of grammatical practices and their codification into (meta-) grammars.

Would the apparent stability of grammars of particular languages not argue against them being constructs? I do not think so.

First, when people speak they reproduce patterns and phrases so as to cause increasing convergence of usage and understanding of usage within networks of communication. This can easily be understood as a cognitive process to stabilize meaning. The denser the networks, the greater the effect, social relations being the same (*ceteris paribus*).

Second, deviations from norms and expectations (*i.e.*, kinds of norms, *cf.* Bartsch, 1985) in speaking and writing require on-line as well as off-line evaluation and possibly adjustment, both of which are

costly. And why incur such costs? The least-effort principle of cognition applies to language use as to other human activities.

Third, grammars are constructs in someone's image and interest. Grammars are thought up to create an impression of linguistic unity to support an image of socio-political unity across one or several communities of speakers that inhabit that one polity. The very objective of the ideological construct of language community is continuity of identity. The objective tallies with a stable cognitive grammatical framework.

This is compatible with the insight that grammatical norms may be stable in their own tradition but language use may not be commensurately conservative. Yet, we should expect an interaction between managed norms and speaking practices; a corollary is that community languages with little descriptive and normative infrastructure may display more fluid practices.

② Off-line, language planners reflect meta-linguistically on how people talk and write. Language planners develop national languages such as *Bahasa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Indonesia*. Language managers of many persuasions and interests think systematically about language in order to improve it, anywhere in the world. People make languages that are compatible with the social communicative circumstances they are in.

One may struggle more or less hard to learn English but one does struggle. Michif people know that languages just do not happen by themselves. The Michif created their own linguistic system. Languages are made, one way or other, by the people who make them ① their own. Malay is now *Bahasa Malaysia* and it is no longer merely a set of indigenous village ways of speaking and it serves communication far beyond its historical use as a lingua franca. That is because people together managed their discourses in a mutually useful and reinforcing manner on-line. In this, people were aided and abetted by determined and strong management actions by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka off-line.

Discourse Management (on-line)

What do I mean by the distinction between off-line and on-line language management? Discourse management is how speakers and hearers deal with trouble and repair while they communicate. In the terms of language management theory, discourse management is how speakers and hearers deal with inadequacy and adjustment during discourse. These are on-line management acts. Therefore they are cogni-

tive acts. These management acts identify inadequacy (trouble) and adjust it (repair). On-line management is management during discourse, by self or by other (of self). (See Neustupný, 1994:50-56 for the model and its development.) The one speaker notes and evaluates positively or negatively (or not) the other's discourse (cf. Neustupný, 1996) and, if negative, implements or not a relevant adjustment in a subsequent turn.

And pay attention now to what can happen. First speaker may take exception to a communicated evaluation or adjustment and may verbalize his/her disagreement. The speakers go off-line, they talk about the inadequacy or its adjustment. A language problem has been born.

Success and Failure in Language Management

Some off-line management acts may help discourse, some may not. We have to ask whether language planners and language managers in general know what is right, good and so on? This is very much an open question in my opinion, as practice shows. Can they, or can we, tell success from failure of intervention in language use? It is human nature to tell after the fact but can we tell in advance of implementation? I believe it is possible to tell success from failure.

I have a criterion of success in the theory of discourse management. If adjustment is implemented in such a way that discourse continues, then there is success. This I call the *happy communication* criterion. If trouble is repaired in such a way that discourse continues, and this is the normal case during speaking, there is success. The success may be highly relative in some evaluators' views, because one of the interlocutors may be seen to dominate the other (say, the physician a patient in a physician-led diagnostic interview) but at least talk continues, something both parties have to agree to for it to happen. Professor Asmah expresses a similar insight in a recent paper of hers on language policy in Malaysia (forthcoming) in this way: "productivity is seen through the people".

When English-educated Malays select English instead of Malay in "social life" in order to be sociolinguistically comfortable, as Professor Asmah puts it (forthcoming), they ensure success of continued communication. They ensure success by avoiding having to express their assessment of the others' social position. If they had selected to speak in Malay, they would have had to do this through the intricacies of making the right choices of expression in Malay. Language management theory has a term for this kind of management behavior. The avoidance is termed pre-correction of potential inadequacy.

(For kinds of corrections, *see* Neustupný, 1973.) The risk of inadequate assessment and therefore the risk of generating discourse that the other would evaluate negatively is higher in Malay than in English. Of course, a reform of the sociolinguistic rules of Malay to allow socially unencumbered address of other would remove this paradoxical de-selection of Malay. It is paradoxical because it is highly doubtful that such a reform would succeed unless perceptions of actual social relationships also were to change. The fact that people allow themselves to use English – whatever it may be that they avoid or circumvent by using it – nevertheless points to the possibility of sociolinguistic reform in Malay.

There is success even if people part ways in understanding – as long as they keep talking. I am an optimist: if people keep talking, they will sooner or later discover that they are going down different paths. When they do, they can come together again. Communication will be restored. That is the primary criterion of success of management of discourse.

The happy communication concept extends at least some distance also into off-line (organized and directed) language management as a criterion of success. For off-line management I am not as much of an optimist as when I observe discourse management. The criterion certainly favors making solutions available rather than prescribing particular solutions. Just about any language we can come up with, barring utter nonsense and contorting tongue-twisters, can fit discourse as long as the communicating partners both or severally know it. I am less of an optimist concerning resolutions to off-line language problems because people project differential interests backed by differential power onto off-line management processes in ways that remove solutions from the actual discourse problems (when such on-line inadequacies actually prompted the off-line action). Perhaps the criterion therefore serves more as a hands-off warning against the dangers of factional interests. Of course, when interests constrain adjustments, based on particular theories and preferences by groups of people who claim authority, then the criterion does not apply (other than by chance). Perhaps, this is where the criterion has its greatest value. It is a minimal criterion so that when we apply it to a particular language problem, we may see "the rest of the story". And the rest of the story reflects the participants' interests.

Language Problems

Language management encompasses language planning in the common sense of large-scale language management under government

authorization, but it also comprises much other off-line activity. Language problems can be regarded as cognitive problems concerning language use between particular people. Language problems come up anywhere. People discuss words, phrases, spellings, names, formats, people translate and worry over terms, and so on.

Language management theory aims at understanding:

- how discourse inadequacies arise on-line, and
- how language problems arise off-line discourse;
whose problems they are, and
what people do to solve them.

Language management theory distinguishes between the off-line, directed, more or less systematic, and more or less cognitively rigorous management acts, on the one hand, and on-line management acts that are inherent to and constitutive of discourse. A major task for the theory is to relate discourse management to directed management, to relate cognition about discourse to cognition in discourse. The theory requires an analyst to discover whether directed language management acts have their source in deviations and evaluations of discourse or in interests concerned with regulating discourse. Interests project ideological or theoretical positions onto discourse to shape discourse practices accordingly.

I do not know of such a radical solution to an identity problem as the Michif found in Hong Kong or in Malaysia. But language problems there are. How would the language management model I have sketched deal with some hot issues in our respective communities?

'English Standards' and the National Interest

The issue of "English standards" has been a problem for many years in public debate and education in Hong Kong and I understand also in Malaysia. I share with Professor Asmah the elegant solution to this language problem that is implied in her observation: "there in the background is the whole wide world of living English to refer to" (*forthcoming*). That being so, the English of Malaysians is just as much in the background as any other ways of speaking English. Therefore the Malaysian way of speaking English is adequate. Each individual has a right to his and her English as long as there is happy communication. This is a right that no one can take away.

Whether a corporate or a social or a national identity label should be stuck on similar kinds of English spoken by similar kinds of people is a different matter. This is, however, precisely my point. Labelling

articulates interests and interests imply political relationships. I do know where I stand. My interest is to maximize sticking labels on groups of people who speak different Englishes and to declare them all equally valid because for purposes of discourse they are.

Language management theory can help clarify why there is still dissatisfaction with English standards in your country as in Hong Kong and, perhaps, in many other places. The problem is not that individuals generate different-sounding Englishes. Language problems arise from the recognition that there are systematic or too many deviations from expected generated speech, such that interactive adjustment routines cannot overcome the negative evaluations of these deviations. Mere difference may well be positively or neutrally evaluated after the first "shock" of noting it in the other's speech. Either it is an intriguing give away of how Malaysians or Cantonese or Swedes sound when they speak English or it is just another example of foreign English.

The language problem that matters is when inadequacies cannot be overcome such that the communicative purpose is not met. Regrettably, there is a lack of understanding in our respective speech communities of at least two closely related points.

One point is that an individual uses language in a management context. This point has a number of implications. It means that s/he learns from his/her use, that there is interactive feedback in discourse and that there is normally a support system that provides pre-correction of potential inadequacies.

The other point concerns precision in expression, or, to use another expression, effective communication. I have definite positions on both points.

Individual Competence (of 'English Standards') in a Management Context

I have discussed the development of individual competence and the importance of language support in the work place elsewhere (Jernudd, 1999, 2000). Individuals vary in proficiency. Some are able to generate grammatically adequate utterances according to the expectations of particular others, others are not. In interaction, others may cooperate or not to overcome proficiency-determined inadequacies. Whatever varieties interlocutors share they may use. In contact communication, this is in fact what we should expect. In the office, this is how support can be extended to individuals who are learning on the job.

This is how Jenny Chow concludes her project report on communication in a textile Quality Management Services company in Hong Kong (1996:96):

...it seems that despite deviant language, communication takes place effectively in QAS [the company] and between QAS and its partners. Staff draw upon a wide range of strategies to bring about effective communication and to manage their interactions. The Chinese staff of QAS may not have a very high standard of English, but they learn from their work and master necessary communication routines through engaging in tasks which are simplified for them and frequently repeated. Through their work experience they continue to develop their linguistic and communicative knowledge to add to their cultural competence.

And (*Ibid*: 97)

... it may be possible [...] to maintain economic growth, despite the perception that current standards of English proficiency among school leavers is low, provided that those who work in these companies create a climate in which patience and mutual support among staff flourish, together with a willingness to draw on a wide range of the sort of strategies used in QAS.

The social constitution of the speech situation determines whether interaction can continue and thus whether happy communication can be maintained despite the proficiency barrier. A prime example of this kind of happy situation is the teaching situation. Organization at work is another example.

Cheung Ching Yi studied writing in a work place in Hong Kong. The main findings were (1995:82) that

Writers have to consider not only the intended readers, but also the possible readers, for example supervisors, carbon copy receivers ... auditors. [They] are conscious of establishing a positive image for themselves or their departments so as not to cause offence... [and] seem to take grammaticality as a prime consideration.

Writers manage because "format is usually controlled" (*Ibid*.: 88) by work place templates, models and previous correspondence. We know from Gunnarsson (1992, 1997) that writing in the work place is a collaborative process and that texts are recycled with new content.

This is, of course, very helpful to the individual. It considerably lessens the cognitive load.

Individual Competence (of 'English Standards') and Effective Communication

First and fundamentally, *rem tene, verba sequuntur*. This is Cato's advice to orators. Master the thought, and language follows. What is clearly thought can be clearly expressed. And *vice versa*. What is not clearly thought can be spoken out but will not make sense. And to take Cato's advice a step further, folk know that talk may mask thought, in order to deceive. The folk knowledge brings us back full circle. Cognition controls expression.

Second, if generated discourse is not adequate, interaction allows for other-initiated adjustment. In the absence of other, when there is monologue, discourse has to be controlled by self by close self-monitoring and silent pre-speech adjustment. This is cognitively tiring but necessary when complicated thoughts are being expressed. Muddled thought obviously leads to muddled sense however grammatically standard the syntax or seemingly transparent the lexicon.

Still, I hear outstanding members of the Hong Kong political community speak in radio- or TV- relayed extracts in English and they do not make sense. Why? I am forced to claim that either their proficiency in English is minimal and they are trying hard to express themselves but fail, or their proficiency in English is good and they either are not trying very hard to express themselves or they express muddled thoughts.

This is obviously the place to offer examples of writing. Texts should exemplify, for example, the ability to express relationships of time and agency. Such relationships could be simply captured with adverbs or sequential arrangement of phrases and so on but many people do not do that. Texts could exemplify deviations according to another speech community's norms that are not even noted by speakers themselves because they speak according to their own expectations. I shall, however, leave it to your imagination to imagine different kinds of texts. For example, I could offer:

- a muddled thought text
- a text in Hong Kong English which makes sense but deviates from, say, the British English norm

- a grammatically incorrect text which nevertheless makes sense.

I feel that dissatisfaction with the "English standards" of young people can at least in part be attributed to the failure to implement an educational system that values precise thought and that at the same time requires its sensible (sense-making) expression. Failure can also be attributed to counterproductive management practices. An article in the *South China Morning Post* Monday July 10, 2000 front page offers an example of mismanagement: "Exam papers get low grammar marks". Named teachers are quoted as complaining about Hong Kong students' "grammatical errors" in English when these teachers actually and unknowingly apply a foreign grammatical norm to incorrectly generate these deviations in the students' writings. Such lack of knowledge which results in mismanagement must be reformed. This is not a simple matter.

One may sketch what would be individually effective cognitive behavior. When cognition makes severe demands on discourse, a speaker must make severe demands on self in whatever variety or mix thereof s/he is grammatically encoding the message. The expression of complex relationships requires self-disciplined discourse management, and open-minded acceptance of opportunities for adjustment that others initiate when self did not. Monologue is apparently especially cognitively demanding.

Concern with language standards is concern with cognitive processes. Discourse management is a cognitive process. Discourse management, on-line, inevitably supplements generation of discourse and from it derives directed language management, off-line. The theory of language management is available to help practitioners solve language problems, and it offers happy communication as a criterion of success on-line and as an analytical tool in off-line language management.

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