

Linguistic Competence:
What is it Really?

BY
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*The Presidential Address of the
Modern Humanities Research Association
read at University College, London, on 11 January 1985*

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'Conoscere è distinguere' (B. Croce): To attain scientific knowledge is, first of all, to make distinctions. Hence, if I were asked what I consider to be my main contribution to the understanding of language and consequently to the foundation of linguistics or, to put it in other words, what constitutes my permanent frame of reference, the very often implicit fundamental principle underlying my treatment of the different, general, or particular linguistic problems, I would answer that it is a relatively simple distinction, one also made intuitively by the speakers of any language, which became entirely clear to me only around 1955; in any case, it was only in 1955 that I formulated it explicitly and undertook to justify it.¹ This distinction, which originated as a result of the discomfort with the distinction *langue/parole, language/speech* in the context of the post-Saussurean discussion of these notions, concerns in reality the levels of language, but applies first of all to what in the last decades has been called 'linguistic competence' and what I called at that time and still continue to call 'linguistic knowledge' (*saber lingüístico*). And I consider this distinction to be important, as it enables us to assign a precise position to the different problem areas of linguistics and to its various questions with respect to the complex object language. It has been, for me at least, a helpful epistemological frame of reference for the interpretation not only of the various linguistic problems ranging from that of linguistic change to that of translation and of linguistic correctness, but also of the structure of the linguistic disciplines themselves and of recent developments in linguistics.² I shall say more about this in the second half of this lecture. Let us first consider the distinction as such and its justification.

Alan Gardiner, one of the most penetrating commentators of the distinction made by Saussure between *langue* and *parole*, interprets this distinction as a distinction between language as the activity of speaking and the underlying knowledge or technique of this activity (science, knowledge): '*Speech* is . . . a universally exerted activity. . . . In describing this activity, we shall discover that it consists in the application of a universally possessed science, namely the science which we call *language*. . . . Language is a collective term, and embraces in its compass all those items of knowledge which enable a speaker to make effective use of word-signs.'³ For Gardiner, speech and language in this sense are not coextensive: inasmuch as it is realized, language is entirely contained in speech; speech on the other hand is not only the realization of language, since it exhibits, along with 'the facts of language', features by which it differs from language or rather by which it goes beyond language ('facts of speech'). Gardiner thinks that the distinction thus formulated

¹ In 'Determinación y entorno. Dos problemas de una lingüística del hablar', *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 7 (1955-56), 29-54.

² See especially *Die Lage in der Linguistik* (Innsbruck, 1972).

³ *The Theory of Speech and Language*, second edition (Oxford, 1951), p. 62, resp. 88.

corresponds to the Saussurean distinction *parole/langue*, although he would not ascribe to Saussure all of the 'corollaries' he himself draws from it.⁴ One will notice, however, that he does not speak of 'a language', 'a particular language', but simply of 'language'. His distinction is perfectly symmetrical: he distinguishes the universal level of *language as activity* from the equally universal level of *language as knowledge*. But for neither of these two levels does he make further partitions into determined forms or, at least, such partitions are not considered to be essential. 'To speak English', for instance, belongs simply to the level of speech, which is not further differentiated, and the English language is simply a part of the universal knowledge constituted by 'language'. It is in this sense that language is for him a 'collective term': it comprises all languages, 'all the varying collections of linguistic material' (p. 346), both the languages of individual speakers, and the languages of language communities. Saussure's distinction, on the other hand, is asymmetrical: indeed, for him, as for Gardiner, *parole* is the universal activity of speaking, but *langue* is the language of a community. The division which is made at the level of *langue* is not made at the level of *parole*; a *parole française*, for instance, is not delimited as such in opposition to the *langue française*. Gardiner distinguishes no particular forms of language: all the knowledge underlying speech is language. Saussure does not recognize any form of linguistic knowledge other than *langue*: the knowledge that underlies speech seems to be in each case only a specific *langue*. Other forms of linguistic knowledge, especially knowledge regarding text production, would probably be *parole* for Saussure; that is why for him the sentence together with its structuring belongs to *parole*, while for Gardiner even though the sentence is the unity of speech, its grammatical structure belongs to language.

The later — and for a certain orientation in linguistics still decisive — distinction between competence and performance may be considered to be a combination of the distinctions made by Saussure and Gardiner, although it was made independently of both authors and was only subsequently connected to Saussure's (on the other hand, as is well known, Gardiner has largely fallen into oblivion, at least as far as the theory of language is concerned). In the spirit of Gardiner, any kind of linguistic knowledge — not only the knowledge that may be referred to as 'English', 'French', 'German' — is subsumed under language (= competence), whereas competence is taken to coincide in each instance with a *langue*. As to the universal features of language, they are regarded as the features common to all languages which may first be observed within the grammar and the semantics of a particular language as belonging to its unitary system. In other words: the possible distinction between universal features which are independent of the structure of the various languages, and those features which can be observed in the structure of all known languages is neglected from the start. On the other hand, the various languages are also ascribed norms and rules which can be detected in the texts produced in these languages, that is, in the usual texts of the respective communities. Any divergence from these norms is regarded as 'incorrect', 'ungrammatical' in these languages. Here are some examples: in many papers we find the claim that semantic rules should be formulated in order to exclude as 'incorrect' sentences like *The left horn of the unicorn is black; I ate five phonemes for breakfast; This tree sings beautiful Christmas carols; I boiled my old*

piano. Similarly many linguists assume in the context of the grammar of a particular language a syntax of the names referring to body parts. These names are said to occur in certain contexts — especially in the context 'X has . . .' or 'an X with . . .' — only together with a supplementary adjectival determination, and never alone. Thus: *this woman has beautiful legs, a child with blue eyes*, but not *this woman has legs, a child with eyes*. These last expressions are considered 'incorrect' from the point of view of a particular language. By the same argumentation one would reject as linguistically 'incorrect' expressions like *The five continents are four: Europe, Asia, and Africa*; or *Pierre is a Frenchman; the Frenchmen are numerous; therefore Pierre is numerous*; or *The apostles were twelve; Peter was an apostle; therefore Peter was twelve*. On the other hand a sentence like *These five persons went to Chicago* is regarded as linguistically ambiguous as it is unclear whether these persons went at the same time and together or whether they went separately and at different times. With regard to texts, expressions like Spanish *Buenas noches* (as compared to German *Gute Nacht*, English *Good night*), Russian *Зил-бл* (as compared to French *Il était un fois*, German *Es war einmal*) would follow the rules of text production in Spanish and Russian respectively, and *Buena noche* would be 'incorrect' in Spanish; so would *Bon matin*, as this does not occur in the French linguistic community.

There is certainly no doubt that such norms and rules really exist and that the expressions considered to be 'incorrect' are indeed classified as 'deviant' by the speakers. But is the status of these norms and rules the same as that of the norms and rules of the plural formation or of the use of the article in English? And is a phrase like *The left horn of the unicorn is black* deviant in the same way as, for instance, *Der Löwe ist* as opposed to *Der Löwe frißt* or *Ich gehe mit dem Zug* as compared to *Ich fahre mit dem Zug* in German? This question is by no means trivial, as the formulation of problems in linguistics and consequently the organization of the linguistic disciplines and their respective methods depend upon the answer to it.

Such problems, and many others, can be solved or can at least be correctly formulated with the help of our distinction. We may start from the fact that we must actually make a distinction between language as activity and language as the knowledge underlying this activity, as the knowledge which is in a 'concrete' and 'actual' way realized in this activity. We must do so, because here, as for culture as a whole, activity and knowledge (knowing how) are not simply coextensive. Language as activity, which, by the way, must be understood as 'speaking and understanding', does not exhaust itself in the mechanical realization or application of an already existing knowledge. It is in the proper sense ἐνέργεια, *actus*, that is, a creative activity, which makes use of a δύναμις, an already acquired knowledge, in order, however, always to say something new, something in one way or another unique; and to the extent to which it is creative, inasmuch as it manifests 'facts of speech' in the narrower sense, it goes beyond its own δύναμις and produces new, virtual knowledge, facts which can be taken over in the δύναμις for further speech acts. Moreover, as it is a question of a productive activity, we can also regard it in terms of its products, that is as ἔργον. This can be observed most clearly and directly in the case of 'texts'; a text is nothing but the product of a speech act or of a sequence of speech acts, or, rather: these speech acts themselves as a product, which can be either retained in memory or recorded and preserved in a material, in taped, written, or printed form. It is therefore fitting to begin by distinguishing between language κατ'ἐνέργειαν (speaking and understanding), language κατὰ δύναμιν, and

⁴ See his paper 'The Distinction of "Speech" and "Language"', in *Atti del III Congresso Internazionale dei Linguisti* (Florence, 1935), p. 346.

language κατ'ἔργον. Needless to say, these constitute only different points of view concerning the same real phenomenon.

But the delimitation of *langue*, of a particular language, does not belong to this distinction; it is rather orthogonal to it, since a particular language may be observed both as activity (speaking English, speaking French, speaking German, etc.) and as knowing English, French, German, etc. It is true that we do not come across a particular language as a product in the real world; what is produced within a particular language as such either remains a unique 'text fragment' (*hapax*) or is taken over as part of the linguistic knowledge of a community to be continued as a new tradition. But we can deduce ('abstract') a language from activity or from knowledge and we can record it as a product in a grammar and in a dictionary; Saussure is right in this respect when he says that one could convey the idea of what a *langue* is by means of a grammar and a dictionary.

Speaking (understanding included) is, however, not to be identified, even in the case of one and the same monolingual individual, with speaking a particular language, or with the realization of a particular language; it is at the same time speaking *per se*, universal or general human speaking, and on the other hand it is speaking about something with somebody in a particular situation. Consequently we must distinguish (1) language in general; (2) particular languages; and (3) language as individual discourse. This is not a question of a quantitative division but of a distinction between levels of language (the universal level, the historical level, that is, the level of languages of historically constituted communities, and the individual level: this or that fragment of language), all the more so, as these aspects may be distinguished for one and the same individual, in one and the same speech act. Only the scope of validity of these aspects is different: the 'universal' aspects apply to language in general, to everything linguistic, the 'historical' aspects to the language of a particular community, the 'individual' aspects to certain bits of discourse or to kinds of discourses.

It should be observed that speakers are able to distinguish these levels intuitively or at least to perceive them. When we say of a child that it cannot yet speak, we obviously refer to speaking as such, not to speaking a particular language. Likewise, when listening to a dialogue between persons whom we are unable to observe and whom we do not understand, we might, for instance, conclude that these persons are engaged in an argument. If we realize that English, French, or German is being spoken, we perceive the historical level of language, and if we understand that X utters, for instance, a request, gives an order, or asks a certain question, we perceive the individual level of language as discourse.

How does this relate to linguistic knowledge? Exactly in so far as to every level of activity there corresponds a separate, autonomous kind of linguistic knowledge and in so far as every speech act presupposes a complex threefold knowledge. We must combine the two distinctions and this combination will yield nine different cells in a matrix. For language as activity the cells are those already mentioned: speaking in general, the particular language *in actu*, that is, speaking a language, and the discourse. In the case of language as product the cells correspond to the empirically endless totality of utterances, to the abstracted particular language and to the text. In the case of language as knowledge, which is of particular interest here, the universal level of speaking in general corresponds to an equally universal knowing-how which I call 'elocutional knowledge'; the historical level of particular

languages to an 'idiomatic knowledge' and the individual level of the discourse to a discourse-oriented knowledge, a knowledge about how certain discourses should be constructed in certain situations, a kind of knowledge which we choose to call 'expressive knowledge'. That is:

Levels	Points of view		
	ἐνέργεια Activity	δύναμις Knowledge	ἔργον Product
Universal	Speaking in general	Elocutional knowledge	Totality of utterances
Historical	Concrete particular language	Idiomatic knowledge	(Abstracted particular language)
Individual	Discourse	Expressive knowledge	Text

One could object that an ultimately so complicated set of distinctions is hardly useful as a permanent frame of reference for all of linguistics. I would readily admit it: not all the cells are supposed to be taken into consideration for every application. It is also more a matter of problems and positions in linguistics than of the whole of linguistics. Of general importance is the distinction between ἐνέργεια, δύναμις, and ἔργον, as it is indispensable for the understanding of the nature of language. We cannot understand language if we consider it only as activity, only as knowledge, or only as product, or if we consider these viewpoints as equivalent. For in this case, we can no longer perceive the real relationship between activity and knowledge, nor can we bring out the essential aspects of linguistic creativity: activity is then simply taken to be a possibly deficient and to some extent arbitrarily deviant realization of knowledge ('performance'), or creativity is mistaken for productivity, for the production of infinitely many 'correct' sentences by means of the application of a fixed and finite system of rules. Equally indispensable is the distinction 'activity/ knowledge' at the level of the particular language for the understanding of so-called linguistic change (see p. xxxiii below). The conceptions of language as well as its many definitions are also related to these points of view. Anyone who defines language as 'an activity which makes use of (produces or creates) signs', considers language primarily as an activity. Anyone who defines language as the capacity of speaking, or the capacity of expressing oneself, regards language primarily as knowledge. Anyone who defines it as the 'totality of all sentences' views it as a product.

For the foundation of descriptive linguistics and its various applications (translation, language learning, etc.), however, it is the distinction of the three levels, particularly with respect to language as knowledge, which is of primary importance, because descriptive linguistics is above all concerned with the three levels of linguistic competence and these should not be mistaken for each other.

Elocutional knowledge comprises everything that applies in principle to all languages independently of their respective linguistic structuring, that is, a number of principles of thought and the general knowledge of the world. Thus, expressions like *The five continents are four: Europe, Asia, and Africa* and *Pierre is numerous* are not 'deviant' on account of any syntactic or semantic rules of a given language but because they violate certain principles of thought, for in no language can five be equal to four or four be equal to three, nor can a single thing be a plurality, at least

not in the same respect (a *people* can well be 'numerous', for example, but not from the same viewpoint from which it is considered to be a unity). What is deviant in the case of expressions like *This tree sings, I boiled the piano* has nothing to do with the particular languages, but is conditioned exclusively by our knowledge of things: in our empirical world, trees do not sing nor do we boil pianos. In any case the particular languages do not object to my saying it exactly thus, when I mean it thus. Expressions like *a woman with legs, a child with eyes* (and also *a river with water, a house with windows, a bicycle with wheels, etc.*) are in no way unacceptable from the point of view of a particular language; they are simply not normally uttered with an informative intention, as they are void of information. We can however say *This woman has legs!, This child has eyes!* (German *Diese Frau hat aber Beine!, Dieses Kind hat Augen!*) where the intonation introduces supplementary information: for instance, expressing the point of view of the speaker. We should also say *a woman with legs but without a beard* in a world where women normally had no legs but beards, as this would be something new, something not generally presupposed. Science fiction stories, in which differently-organized worlds are presented, abound with such expressions and nobody takes offence at them.

The situation at the level of idiomatic knowledge concerning the rules of given languages is altogether different. *To go by train*, or its equivalent, is in many languages the standard and correct construction, but not in German, where the verb 'fahren' is required. On the other hand, *Questi libri sono bello* would be ungrammatical in Italian, but not so in German or in English: *Diese Bücher sind schön, These books are beautiful*. The same applies, of course, to rules valid for all known languages, unless they are 'prelinguistic': unless, in other words, they can be traced back to universal principles of thought or to a common, general knowledge of the world.

'Expressive' knowledge as well must be regarded as autonomous. Thus French *Bon matin* for 'good morning' is not 'deviant' in French as such but only with respect to certain norms of text production, in that this expression does not exist as a greeting formula in the tradition of the French linguistic community; but it occurs in all sorts of other contexts in exactly this form. Equally, 'I dislike it' for Italian *Mi dispiace* would be 'deviant' or even incomprehensible in situations in which Italians use this expression, whereas the English would say 'I am sorry', which would be in its turn incomprehensible in the form *Sono triste*. This is all the more so in the case of those norms of discourse which do not directly concern the construction of the linguistic expression in a particular language as such, but rather the so-called 'text macrostructures' or the use of certain expressions in certain types of texts or with respect to certain persons.

A more important point, however, is that these three levels of language and linguistic knowledge are paralleled by three levels of linguistic content which we can observe in every speech act, namely, *designation* (or reference), *meaning*, and *sense*. A speech act relates to a 'reality', to an extralinguistic state of affairs, but it does so through certain categories of a particular language and it has in each case a certain discourse function. *Designation* is the relation to extra-linguistic objects or to the extra-linguistic reality itself, be it a state of affairs or the corresponding content of thought. *Meaning* is the linguistically-given content in a particular language, the particular form of the possibilities of designation in a given language. *Sense* is the particular linguistic content which is expressed by means of designation and meaning and which goes beyond designation and meaning in a particular discourse, such as a speaker's attitude, intention, or assumption.

Thus, for instance, *Caesar Pompeium vicit* and *Pompeius a Caesare victus est, A is bigger than B* and *B is smaller than A* designate the same extralinguistic state of affairs by means of different meanings. The distinction between designation and meaning applies indeed to all lexical and grammatical functions. Thus agent, object, instrument, plurality are categories of speech and designation which in a particular language can be expressed or not, can be differently structured or subordinated to other linguistic meanings. The corresponding categories of meaning in a particular language would be then *agentive, objective, instrumental, plural*, which a language may or may not possess. Plurality as such, for instance, is known everywhere, but there are languages like Japanese, for example, that do not distinguish number or do so only occasionally. The same is true for other categories of designation. Thus the Japanese sentence *kodomo-wa kuru* can in a given situation designate exactly the same state of affairs as the English sentence *The children will come*, but its meaning is entirely different, for: *kodomo* is not 'children' but 'the class *child*', without distinction of singular and plural, *kodomo-wa* is not the 'subject' of the sentence in our sense and is not viewed as 'agent', but as point of reference of what is said, and the verb *kuru* is impersonal, as are all verbs in Japanese. So, what the Japanese language as such says is not 'The children will come', but only 'With respect to an indefinite number of members of the class *child* there is (or will be) a coming'. Likewise, *Caesar* has in the constructions *Caesar Pompeium vicit, Pompeius a Caesare victus est, Victoria Caesaris* the same designation function 'agent', but not the same meaning function 'agentive'. In contrast, the construction 'with X' may designate various things (instrument, material, co-agent, accompanying circumstances) through the same meaning (roughly: 'co-presence', or 'concomitance'), since in this case the differences in designation are not linguistically expressed, but rather left to the context or to 'the knowledge of the world'. The same applies to English *by a real artist, by a new technique*, as English makes no distinction here between the agent and the modality of the action. Note that the corresponding distinctions in designation are real and understood as such by the speakers, but they are not made by the particular language; thus, they belong to a kind of linguistic knowledge, but not to the knowledge of a particular language.

Similar remarks apply to the distinction between meaning and sense. A sentence like *Socrates is mortal* has only one meaning in English and can be analysed only in one way according to the grammar of this particular language. Its sense can vary, however, according to whether this sentence occurs in a syllogism, in a poem, or in a practical everyday situation. On the other hand Italian *Mi dispiace* and English *I am sorry, Italian Che peccato! and English What a pity!* have different meanings but they can express the same sense when they occur as autonomous utterance. French *Bon matin* means roughly the same as English *Good morning*, but it is not used to express the same sense function which this phrase expresses in *Good morning, Sir*. Similarly, categories like imperative, interrogative, optative do not coincide with categories like command, question, wish. Imperative, interrogative, optative are categories of meaning which a language may or may not exhibit and which can express different sense functions, whereas command, question, wish (as well as refutation, answer, retort, request, objection) are categories of discourse and of sense, which in their turn may be expressed in many different ways in a given language.

Now, to what extent is this distinction important for the organization of linguistics, especially of descriptive linguistics? This depends on the objectives of the discipline. Sometimes it is said that every science 'creates' its object, which, in the

case of non-mathematical sciences, can only mean that every science delimits its object within a real object and according to its own aims.

If we admit that the aim of descriptive linguistics is 'to describe particular languages', then our distinction implies essentially a postulate of coherence: we should not present as belonging to a particular language what is not particular to it; we should describe what is said by the language as such. Every description of a particular language should confine itself strictly to the corresponding idiomatic knowledge, to the categories and functions of the respective language, to the distinctions made by this language as such and exclude everything in the utterances in that language that does not belong to idiomatic knowledge, that is, to the layer of meaning, but rather to elocutional or expressive knowledge and therefore to designation and sense. It is only in this way that we can give a fully coherent presentation of the actual diversity of languages. But, in this case we should, from the outset, not aim for an explanation of all of speech, since elocutional and expressive knowledge and consequently designation and sense should be dealt within a descriptive linguistics of speech in general and in a descriptive discourse linguistics. By the way, this division of the descriptive linguistic disciplines is roughly parallel to the old division into dialectic, grammar, and rhetoric. In contemporary linguistics, generative grammar, structural-functional linguistics, and discourse linguistics would correspond quite exactly to the three linguistic levels, were these indeed carried out in full coherence with their own principles.

There is as yet no such coherent separation of goals and of their corresponding objects, and more particularly, no language has so far been strictly described as a particular language. All analyses to date, structural-functionalist ones included, have to a certain extent taken into consideration, along with meaning categories and functions, also categories and functions which concern designation and the use of that particular language in discourse and therefore also sense — and this because in reality the tacit aim of any description is a different one: it is to explain speech by describing the underlying knowledge. The description of linguistic knowledge is in fact supposed to justify and account for speech precisely to the extent to which speech corresponds to a body of linguistic knowledge. This is perfectly legitimate, since the description of the capacity to speak English may yield an explanation of speaking English, of that which belongs to the English language as such, but not of the whole speech of English speakers, which depends also on elocutional and expressive knowledge. In this case, however, in describing a particular language we must always distinguish between what is proper to this language as such and what belongs to elocutional and to expressive knowledge. For the interpretation of utterances and the various restrictions on the use of idiomatic knowledge depend to a large extent on elocutional and expressive knowledge. A few examples should suffice. What is the reason that a sentence like *Half of what you say is not nonsense* does not cancel the statement contained in the sentence *Half of what you say is nonsense*, although there is no doubt that grammatically speaking the first sentence is the negation of the second? This is so on account of a general linguistic elocutional condition: every assertion regarding a particular subset of a given set includes at the same time the corresponding negation with respect to the complementary subset and vice versa. (Compare: *Of the five friends only one has come* / *Of the five friends only one has not come.*) Thus the assertion *Half of what you say is nonsense* can refer to the one half and the negation to the other half and say in fact 'the same'. An example of another kind:

it has been maintained that the verb *to get* is synonymous with *to buy* in *I'll go to the shop and get some bread*. This may be correct only with respect to designation and only under certain circumstances, but certainly not with respect to meaning, and, if it were so, then surely it is not because of the English language but because of our knowledge of reality. That is, 'to get' is often understood as designating the action of buying, since we normally get bread in a shop by buying it. The verb as such however presents this action not as 'buying' but simply as 'getting'. The fact that it designates a buying in this case constitutes on the other hand only a 'reasonable' assumption: perhaps in that shop bread is given away free or the speaker intends to steal it; but in both cases the speaker says neither of these by means of his 'get'. For this reason 'get' is also not a synonym of 'to receive free' or of 'to steal'. As far as the use in discourse is concerned, we can observe a similar incongruence in the description of the definite article. In many descriptions we find that the definite article designates something already known, something which has already been introduced in the discourse or something which is presupposed; and this is taken to be its 'grammatical' function. In reality, the function of the article in our languages is always that of 'actualization': it opposes a *Daseiendes* (an 'object'), something 'actual', to a *Sein* (a 'concept', a notion), to something 'virtual' (a distinction which in English, however, is operative only after the distinction between 'singular terms' and 'class terms' is made, and which applies only to the latter, thus also presenting a singular thing as a member of a class). It is true that a noun accompanied by the definite article in discourse designates something 'known', the fact that the object is known is, however, never given by means of the article as such, but always in another way. What we have here is therefore a discourse function and not a linguistic function in a particular language.

The three levels must also be distinguished in the linguistic disciplines which deal with the various dimensions of language. There is thus a phonetics of speech in general ('to speak quickly or slowly', 'to speak in a loud or in a low tone', etc.), a phonetics of the particular languages, and a discourse phonetics. It is because it did not distinguish between the three levels of linguistic knowledge that English pedagogical sociolinguistics encountered difficulties and took at times a wrong turn, confusing in most cases elocutional or expressive knowledge with idiomatic knowledge. The same applies to most theories of language learning, which confuse (or do not distinguish between) learning a particular idiomatic knowledge (English, German, French, Italian) and learning elocutional and/or expressive knowledge.

I shall be brief as far as further applications of my double distinction are concerned. I am convinced that it is only within this framework that linguistic change and translation can be correctly understood.⁵ Linguistic change appears as a 'change' and often as a mysterious phenomenon when we start from the particular language as *δύναμις* or as *ἔργον*. In reality linguistic change is nothing but the historical objectivization within a linguistic community of what is created in language as *ἐνέργεια* and thus is not so much 'change' as the coming into being of the particular language or simply the particular language in the process of coming to be.⁶ Change may concern not only new material procedures but also new content

⁵ This was not seen by G. Newton in his hasty review of my *Synchronic, Diachronic and Geschichte*, *MLR*, 71 (1976), 363.

⁶ See especially *Sineronia, diacronia e historia* (Montevideo, 1958) (German translation *Synchronie, Diachronie und Geschichte* (Munich, 1974)), and 'Linguistic Change Does not Exist' (forthcoming).

functions just because what belongs to a particular language is interpreted or reinterpreted not only in terms of idiomatic knowledge, but also in terms of elocutional and expressive knowledge. In its turn, translation is directly concerned with the level of discourse, and not with the level of the particular language (only texts are translated) and it is therefore related to the distinction designation/meaning/sense. The particular language and its meanings are not the object of translation, but rather its instrument. The purpose of translating is not to achieve identity between the meanings in the texts of the source language and those in the texts of the target language (this is in principle impossible as meanings belong by definition to a particular language), but rather to express the same designation and the same sense by means of other meanings. Precisely because the specific content of a text is its sense, we must often give up the designation in order to express the sense. That is why the correct translation of Italian *Mi dispiace* as an autonomous discourse (approximately with the sense 'apology') is not *I dislike it*, *Ça me déplaît*, *Es mißfällt mir*, but *I am sorry*, *Je suis désolé*, *Es tut mir leid*. Likewise the French equivalent to *Good morning* must in some cases be *Bon matin*, in other cases, however, *Bonjour* (in Japanese we would simply have *Ohayō* in this case, meaning only [it is] morning and designating the corresponding reality).

I end with some remarks concerning the problem of linguistic correctness. It is true that a grammar of a particular language must identify and describe the procedures which account for the production of all 'correct' sentences of that language. But correctness does not stand in opposition to acceptability: it is rather one of its forms; and, moreover, judgements about correctness, as other judgements about acceptability, apply to language as activity not to language as knowledge, to the so-called 'performance' not to 'competence': competence is the criterion, not the object of the judgements. Thus not everything that is correct is acceptable in speech, nor is everything that is incorrect unacceptable. On the other hand, what is in many cases considered to be 'incorrect' has nothing to do with correctness in a particular language and with the corresponding procedures. Correctness in the basic sense of the word is a matter of the acceptability of speech at the level and from the point of view of a particular language: 'correct' utterances are those that agree with ('conform to') the corresponding idiomatic knowledge. As to the suitable realization of elocutional and expressive knowledge in speech, we must submit it to other judgements, namely, to judgements about 'congruence' and 'appropriateness'; this is also what speakers themselves do. Thus, *The five continents are four: Europe, Asia, and Africa* is first of all neither correct nor incorrect, but 'incongruent', because it infringes upon elocutional knowledge. And speaking to a child as we would to an adult may be entirely correct from the idiomatic point of view, but in certain circumstances quite inappropriate. For the three levels of language and the three types of expressed and communicated content we must accordingly distinguish three types of conformity judgements:

LEVELS	CONTENT	JUDGEMENTS
Speaking in general	Designation	congruent/incongruent
Concrete particular language	Meaning	correct/incorrect
Discourse	Sense	appropriate/inappropriate

However, both incongruent and incorrect utterances may be entirely acceptable in speech because of the 'one-way' direction of the neutralization of these judgements: linguistic correctness neutralizes the incongruence and the appropriateness may neutralize both incongruence and incorrectness. Thus, a sentence like *I saw it with my own eyes* may be regarded as incongruent from the elocutional point of view, since we can see only with our own eyes, but the incongruence is neutralized by the corresponding traditions of the particular languages. Equally, sentences like *The five continents are four* or *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously* are incongruent from the elocutional point of view but may nevertheless be appropriate (the first as a joke, the second in a poem) and thus incongruence may again be neutralized. As for the neutralization of incorrect utterances by appropriate ones, the most common case is that of a native speaker speaking his own language incorrectly when communicating with foreigners; this is in the conviction that the latter can only understand simplified and incorrect utterances. But since what is incorrect in this case is considered necessary and appropriate and inasmuch as the speaker's intention is recognizable as such, judgements of incorrectness are neutralized here too. Nobody will qualify the utterance of a German speaker, for example, as incorrect when he says to a Turkish 'Gastarbeiter', *Du kommen morgen mein Haus, dort zusammen trinken*. Nor will anyone object to a Frenchman, who, with the intention of imitating English, substitutes *une romaine patrouille* for *une patrouille romaine* (as is in fact done in 'Astérix').