

# ON PROFESSOR ROY HARRIS'S 'INTEGRATIONAL TURN' IN LINGUISTICS\*

by  
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From very early times, it has been the chief intellectual characteristic of the English to wish to effect everything by the plainest and most direct means, without unnecessary contrivance. In war, for example, they rely more than any other people in Europe upon sheer hardihood, and rather despise military science. The main peculiarities of their system of law arise from the fact that every evil has been rectified as it became intolerable, without any thoroughgoing measure. The bill for legalizing marriage with a deceased wife's sister is yearly pressed because it supplies a remedy for an inconvenience actually felt; but nobody has proposed a bill to legalize marriage with a deceased husband's brother. In philosophy, this national tendency appears as a strong preference for the simplest theories, and a resistance to any complication of the theory as long as there is the least possibility that the facts can be explained in the simpler way. And, accordingly, British philosophers have always desired to weed out of philosophy all conceptions which could not be made perfectly definite and easily intelligible, and have shown strong nominalist tendencies since the time of Edward I, or even earlier.

– Charles S. Peirce (*Collected Papers* 8.10, 1871)

Once an orthodoxy is set up, those who are dissatisfied have only two choices. They can seek to set up a privileged version of that orthodoxy; or they can become heretics.

– Roy Harris (*On Redefining Linguistics*, p. 23, 1990)

In this paper, I refute three theses predominant in the theory of sign, language and communication proposed by the British school of integrationism. The first thesis refuted has been elevated to an

axiom; it claims that the sign's meaning is a function of a so-called 'integrational proficiency'. I argue that such an axiom leads to an inadequate conception of signhood. The second thesis concerns integrational indeterminacy: the notion that a sign is both indetermined in regard to its form and meaning. I argue that this thesis and its implied contextualism become vulnerable to the reflexive argument, and that it refutes itself. The third and last integrationist thesis refuted is the proposition that a linguistic fact is a matter of construction. Specifically, integrationism claims that a linguistic fact is constructed by lay people's negotiations. I argue that such a thesis leads to no linguistic facts at all, but dissolves into a regress. The present author suggests that integrationism, far from being a coherent and homogeneous movement, is marked by inconsistency.

### *1. The Integrationist School: Roots and Representatives*

The central figure in integrationism, a radical approach to sign, language and communication, is without doubt the British linguist Roy Harris (b. 1931). From 1978, when the chair was established, he held the first Chair of General Linguistics in Oxford for ten years. Starting in 1981 with the book *The Language Myth*, he has in several publications, culminating in *Signs, Communication and Language* (1996) and *Introduction to Integrational Linguistics* (1998), formulated and refined the basic principles of integrationism.

Ever since his 1978 inaugural lecture, entitled 'On the Possibility of Linguistic Change', Harris has maintained the *creativity* thesis in linguistics. This thesis implies that the exercise of the language faculty, even in the most seemingly trivial of cases, is invariably a creative process. In this inaugural lecture, he claimed (1990 [1978]:149): 'this creative process must remain mysterious until we have a lin-

guistics that recognizes that communication situations are not the same, and that, typically, language supplies only one ingredient of communicative behaviour in any such situation'.

Harris also held posts at the University of Hong Kong, Boston University and the École des Hautes Études in Paris. In 1981 he established the journal *Language and Communication*, which he edited with Talbot J. Taylor until 2010. Harris is a regular reviewer on matters linguistic for the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. He is a founding member of 'the International Association for the Integrational Study of Language and Communication' (IAISLC), which has been in existence since 1998. The Association holds regular conferences; the latest, 'Integrationism 2.0', took place at the University of Birmingham in July 2011.

An essential armchair linguist,<sup>1</sup> Harris's thinking has inspired a whole generation of British linguists, some of them his former students including: Deborah Cameron, Tony Crowley, Daniel Davis, Hayley G. Davis, Christopher Hutton, Nigel Love, Talbot J. Taylor, Michael Toolan and George Wolf. Paul Hopper has (to some extent independently of the integrational school) defended a related viewpoint. This also applies to Peter Mühlhäusler and Jesper Hermann. Also among younger linguists worldwide do integrational ideas 'exist' which implicitly can be assumed to originate from Harris. However, there are also examples of linguists that today have dissociated themselves from integrationism, but originally were influenced by it.<sup>2</sup>

The roots of integrationism go way back. Initially, the program of integrational linguistics involved two aspects: (i) a thorough-going knowledge of Saussure's writings and (ii) a critical analysis of the pronouncements of theoretical linguists since Saussure (Wolf *et al.* 1992:313). Those pronouncements, coming from the orthodox or mainstream linguistic theorists of the *ancien régime*, include: Ferdinand de Saussure, Leonard Bloomfield, Noam Chomsky, John

Searle, John Lyons, Michael Dummett, Jerrold Katz and Willard Van Orman Quine (Taylor 1997:2).

According to Harris, the integrational school's fundamental ideas were already present to a certain extent in the thinking of John Rupert Firth, Bronislaw Malinowski, Kenneth Pike and Edward Sapir (Harris 1998:10). Besides, Harris often refers to Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein; but John Austin, Charles Bazell, Harold Garfinkel and George Moore have also have had an impact on Harris's thinking (Taylor 1997:2).

In Saussure, Harris finds support for his conception of linguistics in two areas. For one, linguistics should be reconceived as an essentially lay-oriented discipline 'that is, deriving its basic concepts from the first-order<sup>3</sup> communicational experience of lay members of the community' (Harris 2006:714). Second, the integrationist rejects a positivistic epistemology in linguistics, in which language phenomena occur as observable 'data'. Regarding the first area, Saussure (1959:189) championed the view that the linguists' units should correspond to what is real for the language user, i.e. they should have 'psychological reality' (an expression coined by Sapir, not Saussure, however).<sup>4</sup>

Integrationism appears to be particularly sensitive to this Saussurean point. It entails that the speakers' views about the forms in which they communicate is reinstated. By taking this position, integrationism opposes the view of knowledge adopted by Noam Chomsky within which knowledge of language is buried so deep that it 'in the interesting cases is inaccessible to consciousness' (Chomsky 1980:70). In terms of accessibility, this theoretical standpoint appears to be a mere reformulation of the proposition that 'the language is never complete in any single individual' (Saussure 1959:30). (Presumably, pursuing this Chomskyan goal empirically, generativists seem obliged to reconceptualize linguistics as the study of the biomechanical underpinnings of language; whereas integrationism, right from the start, has insisted on the study of communication.)

Regarding the second area, Saussure's epistemological position is epitomized in the statement that 'it is the viewpoint adopted which creates the object' (Saussure 1959:23). Here, if anywhere, Saussure's classic anti-positivistic epistemology appears. Unlike, for example, the geologist and his rocks, linguists do not study something that is provided independently of a theory.<sup>5</sup> Saussure argues that language nowhere consists of some determinate set of facts or events that lie open to observation. Despite the fact that this point was made by Saussure a long time ago, the lesson has proven to be far too difficult for most linguists to grasp.

This anti-positivistic epistemological position poses enormous problems for orthodox linguists. The reason for this is that orthodox linguistics is committed to a concept of science which requires access to objects of inquiry which are presumed to exist independently of the mode of access adopted. Adopting this (Saussurean) anti-positivistic epistemological stance appears to undermine precisely that assumption, as it affords the linguist no neutral position from which to undertake the investigation of language (Harris 1992:323).

Thus, the linguistic theorist must develop a perspective from which a certain view of the linguistic phenomena becomes possible. By adopting a certain perspective, an order arises from what seemed at first sight a hopelessly irreconcilable sum of observations. In short: according to Saussure (and integrationism), 'data' (in the Latin sense of 'things given') is simply a fudge-term by means of which linguists mask what they are going to take for granted. As Harris has pointed out, taking Saussure's (and the integrational) epistemological position seriously implies 'recognizing that the discourse of linguistics is about as neutral as the discourse of politics' (*ibid.*).

From Wittgenstein, Harris has adopted the view that (integrational) linguistic theory should be a kind of lay therapy in which one constantly considers what one can do with language, and what one cannot do with language (Harris 1997:310). Wittgenstein once observed that language 'sets everyone the same traps'. The troubles

arise in particular when one adopts the theoretical attitude towards simple lay questions, as e.g. 'what is that called?', by conceiving the question as an intellectual challenge to provide a higher-order meta-linguistic question extrapolated as 'what is it for  $x$  to be called  $X$ '?

This theoretical and generalizing attitude and the need to construct more subtle accounts run the risk of ending in an illusion of its own making: 'we feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers' (Wittgenstein 1963:106). Instead, argues Wittgenstein, the efforts towards a construction of a model or theory should be replaced by a concern with the details of particular cases of our ordinary practice of using language. This slow process of seeing one's use of language in a new light is what Wittgenstein referred to as 'therapy'. This means that one is prepared to engage in an active process of working with oneself, in order to liberate oneself from the style of thought that lies at the root of the confusion.

So, what are the characteristics of integrationism? In a nutshell, the school's central theses can be summarized in this way:

1. Linguistics has been based on a myth which goes all the way back to antiquity and persists unto this day. The myth has shaped our view of languages with the consequence that an adequate view of languages has been impossible to reach. The language myth contains two components:
2. One component of this language myth is the doctrine of 'telementation'. Its basic assumption is that communication is only a matter of transferring thoughts from one individual's mind to another's. Words, according to this view, are vehicles for thoughts. The whole process works more or less like a fax machine.
3. The other component, the 'fixed code doctrine', supports this rigid idea of transference. It is the assumption of an official (mostly national) language as a fixed code, in the sense that a sign's form and meaning is invariant across different situ-

ations. In order to communicate, we have to attach in our minds the same meanings to the same linguistic forms. This fixed code view of communication is stated as a presupposition for successful communication between two or more persons communicating by transferral of thoughts.

The critique of the 'thought-transference view of communication' and the 'fixed code telementationism' applies to some extent to all representatives of integrationism. Why are these theses a myth, and why do integrationists reject them? In the first place, because fixed codes of correspondences between forms and meanings do not figure among first-order *realia* of linguistic phenomena. Second, there are problems with the identification of both forms and meanings in a stretch of speech in any linear sequence of linguistic signs. This problem Saussure already identified when exemplifying his preferred procedure of 'contrastive segmentation' by quoting the French sequence *sižlaprā* [si je l'apprends, or si je la prends] (Saussure 1949:146, 1959:149).

In general, according to integrationism, orthodox linguistics, as currently theorized, is marked by 'theory fossilization' (as it is called within economics): a process in which the analysis of what is observable is replaced by internal debate by experts about various abstract models. The question of *what* these models in question can actually explain is not addressed and recedes into the background (Harris 1992:322).

## *2. The Inadequate Character of the Integrational Sign*

The integrational theory of the sign is based on two axioms, which are intended to replace Saussure's twin principles of arbitrariness and linearity (Harris 1993:322). The definition of the two axioms reads like this:

*Axiom 1.* What constitutes a sign is not given independently of the situation in which it occurs or of its material manifestation in that situation.

*Axiom 2.* The value of a sign is a function of the integrational proficiency which its identification and interpretation presupposes.

These two axioms apply to all signs in interpersonal communication, and more generally in the human environment; for they also apply to natural phenomena to which human beings assign a semiological value (as, for example, in medicine and meteorology). (Harris 1993:321)

With regard to the second axiom, if this notion of an 'integrational proficiency', construed as 'a situated ability to deploy the biomechanical, macrosocial and circumstantial skills in a particular communication situation'<sup>6</sup> (Harris 2006:716), does not lead straight into defective signhood, then what does? I will argue that this so-called 'integrational proficiency' ability turns *homo loquens* into an egocentric sign maker since the 'knowledge' which this proficiency integrates is not influenced by anything beyond 'itself'.

The second axiom – which surely ought to be worded with extraordinary exactitude – seems fairly controversial. It purports that the value of a sign is a property of the act of the 'proficient integrator' rather than of the sign itself, unless, of course, one opts to regard signs as mere fictions: signs are what we make them to be, nothing more.

It appears that this is actually what Harris is saying. Elsewhere (Harris 2000), the author elaborates on the notion of the 'integrational proficiency' of the sign maker. Harris explains, and I quote *in extenso* to avoid any decontextualization (italics in original):

In order to understand signs and significations, we have to begin at a much more elementary level of human behaviour.



We certainly do not have to start with the notion of a social convention already *in situ*. For our own experience tells us that we *attribute* significations to things and events, irrespective of whether there is any social convention about the matter or not. Signs do not necessarily have a social dimension at all. Here, straight away, there is a fundamental difference between integrational semiology and Saussurean semiology; i.e. the integrationist does not accept that one must recognize as semiological 'only that part of the phenomenon which characteristically appears as a social product'. On the contrary, the integrationist would argue that unless semiology starts below the social level it will never be able to explain publicly recognized signs at all.

Take, for example, the case of the familiar landmark. There are doubtless landmarks that almost everybody in a community recognizes. But there may also be landmarks recognized by certain individuals only. I may look out for a particular tree, knowing that I have to take the first turning on the left after that tree on my usual way home. (On reaching the tree, I change down into a lower gear, move into the left-hand lane, etc.) Thus for me the tree signifies something, has a certain semiological value. Perhaps it does for others too; but that is strictly irrelevant. It is a landmark *as far as I am concerned*, and that is already sufficient. Its value as a sign arises simply – and solely – from the fact that I rely on it to integrate certain programmes of activity in my daily comings and goings. In terms of integrational semiology, the tree thereby acquires an integrational function, i.e. becomes a sign, in virtue of the role it plays in those activities. Outside that framework, it has no semiological status (unless it plays a comparable role in some other programmes of activities). But as far as I am concerned it requires no co-operation from anyone else; that is, the 'tree' sign does not depend on my interaction or

agreement with another person, any more than tying a knot in my handkerchief does.

It is important to note that none of this means (a) that somehow the physical tree has now become a 'form' with its own 'meaning' (e.g. 'Take the next left'), or (b) that one object, the tree, now 'stands for' another object, the first turning on the left, or (c) that a mental image of the tree, tagged with the conceptual 'take-the-next-left' label, has now been added to my brain's stock of equipment. To refer to the tree as a *sign* – at least in the sense that integrational semiology construes that term – implies simply that I recognize and contextualize it in a certain way in relation to certain activities. (How I manage to do that is another question, but is a question for neurophysiologists, not for semiologists.) The tree is a sign only insofar as I *make* it a sign.

Signs, for the integrationists, provide an interface between different human activities, sometimes between a variety of activities simultaneously. They play a constant and essential role in integrating human behaviour of all kinds, both publicly and privately, and are products of that integration. Signs are not given in advance, but are made. The capacity for *making* signs, as and when required, is a natural human ability. Some signs (e.g. the landmark) are recurrently useful and are constantly being remade as often as required; but others may serve the purpose just for one particular occasion (as when the reader turns down the corner of the page before putting the book aside, in order to mark the point at which to resume reading next time). Signs do not have any superhuman capacity for outliving their makers. When a language dies, it is because no one is any longer engaged in remaking them. But this is the case for all signs.

Signs, therefore, in an integrationist perspective are not invariants: their semiological value depends on the circumstances

and activities in which, in any particular instance, they fulfil an integrational function. Thus even for me the semiological value does not somehow remain permanently attached to my landmark tree. If I change my usual route home in order to avoid the traffic, looking out for the tree may cease to play any orientational role at all in my daily journeys. Its semiological value will then lapse as far as I am concerned: it will no longer be a sign.

If the basic process by which signs are created and function is as the integrationist construes it, then the notion of a sign which integrates the activities of two or more individuals is not difficult to establish. And from there the notion of a sign with a common (i.e. public) value is not too difficult either. What it requires minimally is that A assigns a semiological value to  $x$ , and B assigns a semiological value to  $x$ , and that A and B both carry out mutually integrated programmes of activity on that basis. The tree, for example, can become a landmark for you too. Suppose I give you directions to my house: 'Take the first left after the tree ... etc'. The fact that I told you about the tree does not affect the point at issue. What matters is how you integrate spotting the tree into your journey. What makes the tree a landmark *for you* is the use you make of it in finding your way to where I live. The difference between us is simply that I worked it out for myself but you did not. But that does not somehow rob the tree of its landmark function in your case. That function is put to the test, i.e. established, for both of us by exactly comparable procedures. There is no philosophical puzzle about 'sameness' here: we *demonstrate* the integration of our activities by both ending up in the right place on the basis of planning our route by reference to the tree in question. [...] As this example illustrates, from an integrational point of view the difference between a private sign and a public sign is not particularly puzzling. Public signs are public because more

people are involved: i.e. more people assign a semiological value to certain things or to certain practices and integrate their activities accordingly. And the more people do this the more they take it for granted that others are familiar with these signs too. But what the signs signify is established in exactly the same way, irrespective of how many or how few people are involved. Thus the appeal to social conventions which underlies both nomenclaturist and structuralist theories of the sign is in the end a red herring. We do not have to start by presupposing that the relevant social conventions are already in place. (Harris 2000:67 ff)

In the quote above, Harris assumes that a sign without sign value is no sign at all; it is as if, by 'giving it its value', we are simply creating a subjective fiction. Interestingly, Harris comes very close to saying just that even though he seems reluctant to admit the egocentric character of what he is saying, which is obscured by his phrase '*we* attribute' – although, as he subsequently points out, it is really a matter of '*I* make'.

Harris's notion of an 'integrational proficiency' would for example in C.S. Peirce's semiotic be regarded as a skill, exercised in the process of hypothesis formation about the actual value of the sign. Hopper (1999:1) has epitomized the integrational signhood as follows: 'integration[ism] sees an act of communication as a nexus in which the sign serves not to signal pre-established meanings but to link together all the different aspects of the act'. However, according to integrationism, it *is* within our power to *make* signs in the sense Harris has in mind. Harris seems to assume that we have a power of creation *ex nihilo*, which is the theological prototype of the integrational view. I shall argue below that we only can make meaning from things already meaningful.

There is, indeed, a certain ambiguity in the way Harris presents the case. It can be argued that the sign's value *qua* a sign depends

on the fact (if fact it is) that the tree stands in a certain spatial relationship to the house, to the road leading to it, etc. If the tree in question does not exhibit that factual relationship, then Harris is just mistaken in making it into a sign having that indexical function (but of course it remains true that having that function does not in itself make it a sign).

In case Harris is willing to admit that its spatial features are what causes the tree to be of some use or value as a sign, then I think he is wrong in not recognizing the potentialities of things to be signs; but that is not a serious objection and does not constitute a real problem. In fact, though, Harris keeps insisting that the value of the tree as a sign has no basis in the fact that the tree has a certain *spatial relationship*; this value has nothing to do with the thing itself, nor with what anybody thinks it has – pure egocentrism, as far as I can see.

Harris might object that this is simply misunderstanding his position. Suppose, in the example above, that the tree in question functions as a landmark for a driver looking for Harris's house. Harris could point out that the semiological value of the tree for the driver depends on its integrational function in a contextualized 'programme of activities' – but this would amount to quite a different proposition. Harris would no doubt add that the sign can obviously have many different values – depending on what those programmes of activities are, and on the biomechanical, macrosocial and circumstantial factors that are contextually relevant. It is in *this* sense, Harris would claim, that the sign is indeterminate because the potential contexts are open-ended and infinite in number.

However, appealing to the 'integrational function' and 'different programmes of activities' cannot rescue the integrational conception of signhood from leading into egocentrism; in other words: these appeals are simply 'red herrings'. The potential impact of the sign's value is wholly a matter of the integrational proficiency of the driver, with due reference to the biomechanical and macrosocial parameters

that shape the proficiency in question. It is curious, however, that the impact of the sign's spatial relationship to the house does not constitute part of Harris's contextualized 'programme of activities'. The driver, it seems, operates independently of the fact that there is a spatial relationship from the tree to the house. Therefore, he is not constrained by any influences other than the responses to his *own* activities.

When Harris writes: "I recognize and contextualize it [the tree] in a certain way in relation to certain activities", isn't that 'recognizing its sign value'? But if that value is a matter of sheer *making*, then we are back at egocentrism: the only thing that the sign is *qua* sign, is what *I* make it to be. And what could that be, other than a pure figment of my imagination, having nothing to do with the tree itself since the tree's spatial property is impertinent to the sign of that particular tree *as a sign*? Why does Harris even mention 'recognizing', when his recognition has nothing to do with his view of the sign, but is only a matter of interest to neurophysiologists? The reader wonders.

In addition, I would take exception to Harris's idea that significance is constituted solely by attribution. It is true that we attribute significance to things, but sometimes we do so mistakenly. Given that mistaken attribution is possible, it follows that significance is not constituted by attribution. Signs are sometimes made, but sometimes – as in the case of medical symptoms and other natural signs, *pace* Umberto Eco – they are discovered. Harris is simply wrong when he likens all signs to language, in the sense of having to be constantly remade, on the penalty of dying. On the contrary, we need to distinguish between signs made and signs found. Falling air pressure will still be a sign of a developing storm, even if human beings lose all knowledge of meteorology and no longer possess barometers, etc. However, that is not to the same as saying that such signs are, to use Harris's phrase, simply 'given' to us.

Besides, there is a false dichotomy here between what is given and what is made. Signs not yet made still have to be discovered; they are not obvious. And, of course, we can choose to ignore them depending on our purposes, the existence of other signs of the same thing, and so on. What Harris says along these lines is true, but it does not legitimate his position that significance is constituted by attribution.

Actually, it could be argued that the integrationist sign presupposes that very sign concept, namely the Saussurean bi-planar sign, which Harris finds inadequate. In the long passage quoted earlier, he speaks of a 'tree' serving as a 'landmark'. In the immediate surroundings, phenomena are often exposed to signification when a spatial-temporal object becomes provided with content. However, the important thing is that no *integrated activities* are involved in calling the phenomenon in question a 'landmark' or 'tree'. In other words, Harris seems to presuppose a signhood which appears not to be integrational in nature because the act or process of making something (e.g. an object) into a sign is not *per se* an integrational act of contextual activities. It is the simple irony of Harris's own example (which he claims is supported by our own experience) that it demonstrates the very existence of a social convention which he wants to refute.

### *3. The Thesis of 'Radical Indeterminacy': The Fallacy of Speaking with two Voices*

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1990:80) once defined a certain type of argument called 'performative contradiction' as follows:

A performative contradiction occurs when a constative speech act  $k(p)$  rests on noncontingent presuppositions whose propositional content contradicts the asserted proposition  $p$ .

A somewhat different version of that argument is called 'the reflexive argument' (Lübcke *et al.* 1983:364, my translation), which, formally stated, reads:

A reflexive argument stated formally seeks to show that a proposition 'p' must be false because it either by being applied to itself refutes itself; or among its implied presuppositions contains some assertions that are contrary to 'p'.<sup>7</sup>

As indicated earlier, one of the key assumptions of integrationism is the indeterminacy of the linguistic sign. A classic, fairly commonsensical statement of this doctrine appears in 1981, when Harris claimed that 'insofar as what is meant is determinate, it can only be a provisional determinacy, relativized to a particular interactional situation' (Harris 1981: 167). Later, this common sense doctrine was to be substituted by a far more radical formulation. In 2007, we find Harris speaking of a 'radical indeterminacy' in which 'the sign does not "have" its own meaning; it is "made to mean" whatever the circumstances require' (Harris *et al.* 2007: 202). By expressing the doctrine in this way, Harris does not seem to realize that he is arguing himself into a *performative* contradiction.

Yet another example of such a contradiction is found in the following quote, where Harris (1989:74 f) maintains that:

The indeterminacy of the linguistic sign is the central doctrine of integrationism. The integrationist answer to the question why linguistic signs are not determinate is that the exigencies of human communication demand that they should not be. In other words, indeterminacy serves human purposes better than determinacy. [...] The truth that linguistic signs as used in everyday discourse are indeterminate was recognized centuries ago by the greatest of all empiricist thinkers, John Locke: but it has taken linguists until now to rediscover that truth and think through its implications.



First, the integrationist doctrine assumes that *all* linguistic signs are indeterminate. What is the epistemological value of this assumption? In order to make sense, the tenet needs to be expressed in linguistic signs; otherwise it would not be understandable. Furthermore, in accordance with the integrationist claim, these linguistic signs are indeterminate.

Take now the proposition 'p': 'All linguistic signs are indeterminate', and apply it to itself. The integrationists must apply signs in order to make sense; but at the same time the signs which they apply, are, according to their own claim, characterized by indeterminacy. Consequently, *ex hypothesi*, the propositions of integrationism are themselves indeterminate and thereby incomprehensible. In short: integrationists presuppose what they, in fact, deny. Thus, Habermas's logical *fallacy*, the performative contradiction, is reenacted.

Secondly, the indeterminacy doctrine as stated above begs the question. The fact that Locke, an empiricist thinker *par excellence*, held that linguistic signs are indeterminate, does not make this tenet any more true than the opposite opinion, expressed by Descartes, the rationalist. Harris begs the question because he presupposes the infallibility of Locke's empiricism.

Third, the claim that indeterminacy 'serves human purpose better than determinacy' does not transcend the level of assertion, and no evidence is provided. In fact, it could be argued that it is the other way around.

What Harris and the integrationists are up against is what could be called 'the fact of communication' (Favrholdt 1999:177; my translation). I shall make my point (to a certain degree echoing Favrholdt) by formulating the following three theses:

1. The fact of communication: in daily life people communicate with each other. This communication is often unambiguous. A person asks me: 'Where is the telephone book?' I respond: 'There, on the desk'. He replies: 'Yes, of course!' He takes the

book and leaves the room. To my mind, this is unambiguous communication, where the utterances from both parties are completely understood. Obviously, the objections against this 'experience' (which is more than a contingent experience, since it is more difficult to invalidate than e.g. 'All swans are white') usually base themselves on the proposition that we can never assume that we have understood a 'sentence' completely. However, the proposition would not apply because of the following reasons:

- a. The proposition relativizes itself: If we can never know, or be sure whether we can understand a sentence completely, then this must also apply to the proposition itself: 'we can never know, or be sure whether we can understand a "sentence" completely'. It follows that we cannot know what the objections in question deal with: According to the proposition, there must be some unclearness in either 'we' or 'know' or 'understand' or 'sentence' or 'completely'. But in principle, it is not possible to reply to an objection which, according to the objection itself, we are unsure as to what it deals with.
  - b. The proposition implies that even unambiguous expressions (like e2-e4, e7-e5 in a game of chess) could be ambiguous. Here the burden of proof must lie on Harris – but so far no proof has been provided.
  - c. If we can never be sure that we have understood a sentence completely, then it is not clear how language and society can function at all. On a daily basis, we use schedules for buses and trains, we use telephone books, post addresses, bank accounts, credit accounts, contracts etc., and we assume that the messages concerning all such things are unambiguous.
2. Integrationists also communicate unambiguously with each other. That does not necessarily mean that they can reach an agreement on anything regarding their viewpoints. But they can reach consensus on what they disagree about – and

this happens by communicating unambiguously with each other.

3. No integrationist or any other person can deny the truth of theses 1 and 2, above. For if a person does, he will at the same time communicate unambiguously. But if he does not communicate unambiguously, then he does not deny the truth of theses 1 and 2 (After Favrholt 1999:124 ff, my translation).

In any case, Harris's own statements in the quote reflexively *presuppose* signs which are determinate – otherwise we would not be able to understand the integrationist indeterminacy thesis, as Harris articulates it. Strangely enough, Harris *does* seem to be well aware of the self-contradiction in asserting the indeterminacy thesis. For example, in a conference paper from 2002 (2002:3, italics added), we find Harris realizing that:

*Sceptics might even feel inclined to argue that if the language myth is a myth, then a conference such as this is self-stultifying, since it both presupposes and practices successfully that very form of communication declared to be mythical.* But it seems to me that even if integrationists are misguided in their characterization of the myth, the mere possibility that they might be right, or even partly right, is already enough to pose questions about Western culture that cannot just be dismissed out of hand.

In a curious U-turn, Harris here seems to show some capacity of self-referential awareness – or at least he dares to address the issue. Coming from a school of linguistics which has done nothing but ceaselessly, day in day out, bang the drum about the language myth for decades, this statement is truly astonishing. In the days when the language myth was integrationism's latest 'discovery', any dissidents who pointed out – quite rightly – that especially the myth of the fixed code was a mere artefact of integrational theorization,

were dismissed as sceptics, structuralists or regaled with any other opprobrium current in the vocabulary of integrationism. Even more curious was the circumstance that when the language myth finally fell out of favor at court, its fall was presented as yet another 'discovery' about language.

One integrationist, however, who is not blinded by theory deserves to be mentioned here, namely Michael Toolan. In an e-mail from 2000,<sup>8</sup> I asked him whether he did not find that the indeterminacy thesis seems to entail a self-contradiction as formulated by integrationists. He replied laconically:

Integrationism's claim that any word can mean anything, that anything can mean anything etc. has to be distinguished from a claim (which we do not subscribe to) that any word or thing 'does' mean anything. The latter would fly in the face of everyday reality, and our acute awareness that part and parcel of the very idea of integrationism is that words/signs are embedded in contexts of human activity, and that these are in many ways recurrent, genre-creating, subject to social and educational and cultural etc. pressures that bring standardization, normativity, and – a key – integrationist term I think – codification.

Given Toolan's modification or relativization of the indeterminacy thesis, it now seems impossible to understand *why* integrationists need such a thesis at all. At the least, Toolan says that sign indeterminacy is empirically disconfirmed ('[flies] in the face of everyday reality ...'). Appealing to contexts as that which makes signs determined, as he does, does not convince because contexts, according to integrationists, are not construed as a given or neutral, detachable backdrop, or as a permanent setting which is there all the time, regardless of whether it is noticed or not (but *constructed* regardless).<sup>9</sup> According to Toolan, integrationism 'declines to accept that texts and contexts

are distinct and stable categories, prior to consideration of particular cases' (Toolan 1996:49). And Toolan continues: 'there really is no such thing as *the* context, even to the extent that we can continue to think of certain things as texts: there is only a recurrent activity of contextualizing' (italics in the original).

It may be appropriate here to point out that I am by no means the only theorist that managed to identify this particular weakness in the integrational conceptual machinery. In his review of Harris (1998), Joseph (2003) rather powerfully called attention to the way Harris seems to speak with two voices; or more accurately, commits the *fallacy* of speaking with two voices. This particular feature becomes all too apparent in an analysis of Saussure's model of communication, in which Harris takes Saussure to embrace a fixed code model of communication. Joseph objects to Harris's analysis on the ground that the term 'implications' is invoked illegitimately, according to the integrational indeterminacy premise, according to which a sign's meaning and form are indeterminate:

('The model has certain implications' – this statement, a classic example of the segregationist approach to meaning, must have slipped in by accident. The integrationist, I should have thought, would reply that texts do not 'have implications' any more than 'words have meanings'. Implications, like meanings, are constructed in the communicative context of the readers' interpretation.) (2003:106; Joseph's parentheses)

It is worth noting, however, that neither Harris nor any other integrationists have taken the trouble to reply to this objection. It is simply dismissed as a minor internal anomaly in the theory and resolved by brushing it under the carpet. Similarly, those who had questioned the sacrosanct notion of sign indeterminacy (long before Harris realized the futility of this tenet) had for years been treated as little better than linguistic anarchists. So what, one might ask,

does the integrational indeterminacy thesis really come down to? Is it only a piece of extravagant thinking that integrationists happen to embrace but which, when the chips are down, they cannot get themselves to believe in?

#### 4. *The Epistemological Relativism of Integrationism*

In the 'Preface' to one of his more recent works (2004:ix-x), Harris attempts to construct an argument that somehow will enable him to get around certain (apparent) performative self-contradictions appearing later on in the book. Harris writes (*italics added*):

*The Catch-22 in writing a book of this kind is that even discussion of the issues requires reference back to what others have written, and thus appears to engage the writer in the very same historical conspiracy that is being investigated, ab initio is to employ a form of counterargument which charges the writer with 'performative self-contradiction'; that is, committing the very same errors of which your opponent accuses you.* A simple example, in the case of history, would be Bernard Williams's contention that 'the attack on [...] historical truth itself depends on some claims or other which themselves have to be taken to be true' (Williams 2002:2). Thus, anyone who attacks the notion of historical truth emerges as a pot calling the kettle black.

I anticipate that critics will be tempted to use some kind of 'performative self-contradiction' argument against the main thesis of this book. So it may be as well to say in advance why I do not think such criticism carry much weight. In the first place, 'performative self-contradiction' arguments in general, even when they are convincing, do not establish the validity of the position they are deployed to defend, but merely point out the weakness of attacking that position in a certain way.

Thus, for example, even if Williams is right, it would not follow that we can now carry on as before, reassured that the notion of historical truth that came under attack is sound after all. In the second place, if critics debarred under pain of 'performative self-contradiction' from conducting the debate in the historian's terms, then the world is safe for historians, for ever and a day. But there is something deeply suspect about drawing up the rules of the debate in this way. It is rather like insisting that no illegal organization can reliably be exposed by an infiltrator, because infiltrators are automatically party to and guilty of the same illegality as the organization which, under false pretences, they have managed to infiltrate. If that rationale were sound where academic studies are concerned, all criticism of historians would be stifled at birth and the mere existence of the discipline would be its own justification.

First, Harris seems to confuse issues in the argument. The reflexive (or performative contradiction) argument is not a *defensive* argument, whereby one can buttress a given position or theory. On the contrary, it is an *offensive* argument, which can be used to refute theories that are not aware of what they presuppose. Second, Harris's reasoning has another flaw: he confuses two different types of arguments, namely a *tu quoque (same-to-you) argument* and a *performative contradiction argument* (compare the italicized passage in the quote above). These two types of arguments, it should be noted, are definitely not identical.<sup>10</sup>

To make things worse, Harris commits an even more serious fallacy, namely the analogical fallacy.<sup>11</sup> In the passage quoted earlier, he provides the interesting example of an 'infiltrator'. The rationale for this example is allegedly that he wants to get around the logic of the performative self-contradiction argument (more accurately, the *same-to-you-argument*). This move does not work, however, as the infiltrator example cannot carry the load which Harris places

on it.<sup>12</sup> Harris seems to be saying that his position is not unlike what an FBI agent (let us call him Smith) finds himself exposed to when he (Smith) infiltrates the mafia organization by uncovering its illegal activities. Harris's point is that, just like Smith's undercover relation to the members of the mafia organization does not in itself make Smith a criminal, Harris's position is likewise not made invalid because of his having infiltrated the enemy lines.

However, the essential question here is: are these two situations analogous? Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the mafia boss orders Smith to liquidate two troublesome (read: law-abiding) leaders of a trade union. In addition, let us assume that Smith knows very well that these two persons are blameless, but that his cover gets blown if he refuses to carry out the liquidations. Is it not the case that Smith should *morally* refuse to do the deed, even though he thereby destroys his chance to stay in the mafia organization and unearth evidence for its illegal activities?

To a certain degree, Harris is right that one does not automatically become a part of an organization just because one infiltrates it or works within its scopes. But it seems fair to say that the particular character of Smith's infiltration can only be upheld if some rather basic conditions are met. In the case of Smith, the basic conditions seem to be of a moral character (like: 'do not kill innocent people'). Smith can only be superior to the members of the mafia organization because he follows the basic moral rules which do not apply for the mafia bosses.

However, the point that Harris seems to ignore (deliberately or not), is that the basic conditions may also be of *epistemic* character. In the quoted passage, Harris maintains that 'there is something deeply suspect about drawing up the rules of the debate in this way', and I think he is right if that implies that some viewpoints are excluded just because they go against the orthodoxy. However, this does not apply to the case of logic or to the reflexive (performative contradiction) argument. Logic is *not* built on conventions; on the



contrary, the rules of logic are given as necessary, transcendental conditions for meaningful communication. It does not make sense to say 'now I will pretend to ignore logic or gravity'. Logic and gravity do not care at all what we think about them. We are not in a position to change them and are exposed to them, whether we want it or not. Thus, the tactics Harris uses to evade the reflexive argument do not succeed at all.

The fact that Harris's strategy fails becomes fatal for his project of debunking the notion of (historical) truth, and this has repercussions on the implied integrationist epistemology. This becomes clear in the chapter 'The Truth about History' of Harris's 2004 book. Here, he argues for the thesis that the notion of truth only becomes meaningful if relativized according to specific situations. That is to say, after he has shown (apparently) that it is possible to evade the logic of performative contradiction with the help of the infiltrator-analogy, Harris now sets out to relativize the concept of truth:

The notion of 'absolute truth' to which some philosophers have appealed is the product of just such decontextualization. As regard history, there are no statements about the past which must be regarded as true come hell or high water: that brand of linguistic absolutism is incoherent. But it does not follow from this that the truth is whatever we declare it to be. Playing off rigid absolutism against please-yourself relativism is the last thing that will help us to make sense of history. (Harris 2004:222)

And:

The bottom line here is that [...] there is no universal dimension of rightness that applies to all statements alike, depending on whether what is asserted is so or not so, and irrespective of the circumstances of assertion. (ibid:222)

It is evident that this radical contextualist approach can be turned against itself. If it is the case, as Harris states in the proposition, that 'there is no universal dimension of rightness that applies to all statements alike...', this must, according to Harris's own contextualism *stricto sensu*, mean that he is stating a particular truth which is only valid in the situational context, or which only applies in the context in which it is stated. Is this really Harris's intention? Because that would boil down to only a trivial statement.

On the contrary, what he means is, of course, a generalized truth that not only applies in the situational context. But this goes against Harris's own doctrine in which all truth (even the one he just stated) are context bound. And again: 'there are no statements about the past which must be regarded as true ...' What kind of status does this proposition have? Is it only true relative to the situation? If so, it is uninteresting and idiosyncratic. If not, he has committed a blatant self-contradiction according to his own premises.

Here we see Harris, the logician, at his worst. It does not seem that he knows about a Cretan who said that all Cretans were liars: how about the permissive relativist who said that all forms of life are valid – including those which absolutise themselves and condemn relativism? If *they* are right, then his own views are wrong; but his view is that they (among others) are indeed right. (I do not wish, however, to make too much of these self-referential paradoxes, which undoubtedly haunt Harris's arguments – indeed his whole thinking.)

What this foray into the philosophy of history has made sufficiently clear is that one cannot evade the conclusion that due to this radical contextualism, the implied epistemological position of integrationism becomes imbued by relativism through and through, even though Harris explicitly takes great pains to evade it – not a very promising epistemology as a basis for erecting a 'new' approach to sign, language and communication.

It may be pointed out that integrationist indeterminacy should not be interpreted as radically as I have done here. However, there

are good reasons for doing exactly this because otherwise the tenet of indeterminacy seems to reduce to a trivially true claim (long promoted in pragmatics): that a sign's meaning only becomes determined in the specific context in which it appears. The following dilemma then arises: either my radical reading of Harris's theories is correct, but then he appears to be a poor logician not being able to see that he refutes himself; or integrationism should be interpreted in a more charitable way, but then everybody *is* an integrationist!

5. *The two Constructivist Premises of Integrationist Semiology*

The third major argument that I want to advance against integrationism concerns the doctrine that a linguistic fact is a matter of *construction*. In a number of works, starting in 1981, Harris has maintained, rather forcefully, that linguistics should become 'essentially lay-oriented'.<sup>13</sup> This means, in effect, as he writes (1998:145; italics in original), that:

The signs that occur in first-order communication are those that the participants construe as occurring, and what is signified is what the participants construe as having been signified. *There is no higher court of appeal.* The linguistic facts are facts which the participants have to establish to their own satisfaction. And they may not always be in agreement with one another about such matters. [...] whenever there are linguistic facts available, it is the participants who are in possession of them. If a linguist wishes to have access to these facts, there is no option but to try to recover them from the participants.

But what if there is no agreement between lay people? Then, Harris says, the disagreement is to be solved by 'negotiation' (2000:71ff., italics in original):

The mark [*sc.* the 'letter *t*'] itself has no semiological value other than that attributed to it by the writer or reader; and that value depends on how the written message integrates communication between them. In sum, integrational function, and that alone, is the criterion for establishing what a sign is. [...] According to the integrationist analysis, the conflicting interpretations of the mark remain unresolved, unless settled by negotiation between reader and writer. [...] For the integrationist, there is no question of whether it 'really' is a *t* or not. In other words, the form of the sign is itself indeterminate.

Thus, integrationists view linguistic facts as constructed by the processes through which lay people reach consensus about it. Integrationists have been especially attracted to the study of lay persons with an eye to the status they attribute to the traditional metalinguistic terms such as 'words' (cf. Davis 2001). It is important, however, to realize that the integrationist position rests upon two premises. The first articulates, as already dealt with in section 3, above, what in integrational parlance is called the *sign indeterminacy* in regard to meaning and form.

As a theoretical position, this premise is not only controversial in itself (as I have argued earlier), but also in other respects. The position emerges when the integrationists support their premise by pointing to the indeterminacy of *all* sorts of signs. It is claimed that all signs are inherently indeterminate or situated; but whether or not they apply to a particular situation always depends upon the concrete, local interactional features of the situation and cannot be inferred from some abstract general definition.

Thus, there is no way to dispose of this indeterminacy. Nor is there a way in which the meaning of a sign can be projected from the sum of previous meanings to the new meaning, for such projections can always be undertaken in countless different and incompatible ways. Hence, the meaning of a sign emerges as a creative, *ad hoc*

accomplishment in the concrete situation; it is fundamentally unconstrained by general principle or precedent. Integrationists stress the *individual* character of the making processes; meaning is an act of individual *creativity*. Disagreements about the meaning of a sign, due to different contextual activities involved, are to be solved by negotiation between speakers.

Evidently, this indeterminacy of sign meaning even clings to descriptive terms, not only when they are used to formulate normative principles, but also when they describe concrete events such as meteorological phenomena (cf. the two axioms stated in section 2, above). For instance, an ordinance that dictates special precautions around the disposal of toxic waste may be vague with regard to exactly which acts are prescribed – among other things because of the indeterminacy of the concepts of 'toxicity' and 'waste'. As a result, precisely which acts we must observe or avoid if we want to abide by that ordinance may be a matter of negotiation.

Obviously, the same indeterminacy is present when we try to decide if some action already committed was an act of toxic waste disposal. The decision on this factual matter, too, is subject to negotiation between the lay parties involved. There is no exterior reality to which that particular act can be compared, no higher court to which the act can be appealed and possibly rejected as (in)valid. The agreement between lay people not only determines the actual act but also establishes its *(in)correctness*.

The second premise in the integrational argument is the constructivist premise proper. It says that what is generated by these negotiations between lay people is not only the correct meaning of a sign; rather, it is a determination or construction of a linguistic *fact*. That is, agreement between the lay speakers in their social encounter not only determines what is to count as the correct meaning of a sign in their shared language, but also fixes the fact as expressed in that language.

For the sake of the argument, consider first the integrationist's view that a determinate linguistic fact can emerge through a

negotiation between lay speakers in the situation. One difficulty immediately becomes apparent: the circumstance that the parties to a negotiation are in agreement is in itself a linguistic fact. So this fact, too, only becomes determinate whenever an agreement exists between certain lay people, who not necessarily are the parties between which the original exchange occurred that constituted the agreement. Unfortunately, this second-order agreement is itself in need of an agreement bestowing a determinate existence upon it; and so on *ad infinitum*.

As a result, the linguistic fact becomes utterly and totally indeterminate under the integrationist analysis, as it calls for an infinite number of agreements for there to be any determinate linguistic facts – and there is not (nor could there ever be) such an infinite series of agreements. For most putative facts, there will not even be a ground-level consensus – after all, in everyday social life not much time is wasted on pronouncements about obvious features of the social setting. Even where such a consensus exists, it is not likely to be many-tiered. At some point – presumably quite early on – we reach an agreement that does not require certification by a higher-order agreement, and choose to disregard the fact that theoretically, any former agreement is itself a fact, thereby rendering the former fact indeterminate.

Curiously, this extreme voluntaristic nominalism generates the same paradox as does Platonism. As Aristotle already noted, if the fact that two objects belong to the same class is explained by saying that they both resemble the same idea, then the resemblance between each one of them and the idea can in turn only be explained by one further, 'meta-idea' and so on for ever. Similarly, if the decision on an object's belonging to some class is due to a choice by the classifier, then the link between these two acts of classification similarly requires a further act of classification.

Above, I have shown the untenability of the integrationist position by what is called a (self-referential) *reductio ad absurdum*. Clearly,

such an argument does not in itself pinpoint the flaw in the reasoning which led to the refuted position, nor has this been my concern in the present context.

*6. Conclusion: Tensions and Resolutions*

No paper of this length can do full justice to the diversity of positions within integrationism. For (perhaps contrary to public opinion), it is not a homogeneous field. A number of specific themes have been selected here for review and criticism. Thus, it has been argued that the integrational theory leads to an inadequate conception of signhood, as it is based on the idea of providing a sign with a meaning according to the activities involved, independently of anything else in terms of persons or the surrounding world.

The article has further argued that the thesis of indeterminacy of the sign is vulnerable to the reflexivity argument. If one admits, with the integrationists, that the signs or words are semantically indeterminate, this must also apply to the integrational thesis itself. By logical implication, it then becomes impossible to know what integrationism really stands for. And lastly, it has been argued that the integrationist conception of a linguistic fact, as determined by lay negotiation, ends in an infinite regress.

Integrationism must confront the various epistemological problems that are inherent in the theory, rather than claiming that its programme is more homogeneous and internally consistent than the one which in fact exists. In this review, I have tried to draw attention to some areas for such critical attention.

What I have done here is to accept a challenge from Harris (1998:150), in which he asks: 'Consequently, it [integrationism] provides a basis on which orthodox linguistics can be subjected to critical scrutiny. Does this apply the other way around? Does the orthodox position in turn provide a basis on which to subject the

assumptions of integrationism to critical scrutiny?' To this question, I would reply: Of course it does – whether the 'position' in question is orthodox or not.

Perhaps it is too early to speculate on what a sophisticated *empirical* inquiry from an integrational point of view might look like. In her empirical study of lay metalanguage, the integrationist Hayley G. Davis (2001) makes use of terms like 'data', 'methodology' etc. – terms which earlier were banned from integrationist discourse as reflecting a naïve, positivistic approach to science (Harris 1997:272, 304). Apparently, the ban has now been lifted; suddenly, such terms are deemed legitimate, and Davis makes strikingly good use of this new freedom.

Incidentally, observing this sea-change in integrationist thinking recalls the sociologist Harvey Sacks's efforts to break out of ethnomethodology's hermeneutical straitjacket in the late sixties and his endeavour to start a new movement, called Conversation Analysis, which sought to build a natural observational science of human behaviour on a proper scientific basis. Whereas ethnomethodologists like Harold Garfinkel had only insisted on investigating the *practices* by natural scientists and mathematicians with no further ambitions, it seems to me that a theorist like Davis ultimately takes integrationism down the wrong road by disastrously assimilating integrationism's radical position to that of most other linguistic sciences.

The way I see it, there is only one solution: to drop the fake notion of 'science' with its baggage of 'data', 'methodology' and 'cumulative knowledge'. If it is true, as Harris (1998:18) once assured the reader, that: '[i]ntegrationism is the first movement in the history of linguistics which does not attempt to extend and refine established methods and concepts of language description or to provide them with theoretical underpinnings', then this assurance, whatever else it may be trying to do, seems to entail that at the end of the day, integrationism's claims amount to no more than 'descriptive nihilism' (Harris 1989:67).



Integrational linguistic inquiry does not start with a search for invariants or constants underlying speech communication in a given community. It begins by paying particular attention to Saussure's self-imposed *meta*-project of 'showing linguists what it is they are doing' – which demands an investigation of the presuppositions and assumptions underlying the linguistic inquiry itself. Therefore, according to integrationists, linguists should begin not with the search for invariants, but 'by examining the foundations of their own metalinguistic practices' (Harris 1998:76).

Roger Lass once complained that most linguists seem to avoid 'metaworries' (Lass's term), in that there is a predominant distaste for concerning oneself with metatheory. The common opinion among linguists is that metatheory should be left to philosophers, while 'real linguists' get on with *doing* linguistics. Lass (1980:ix) points out that the separation between 'real' linguistics and 'metalinguistics' is untenable because linguistics is 'one of these argument based subjects [...] about anything interesting that linguists come up with as the result of a complex interaction between argumentative strategies and (ultimately largely theory-defined) "data"'.

The future will show whether Davis's approach to developing an analytical understanding of lay speakers' understanding of metalanguage does 'sell out' integrationism, or whether she is successful in refocusing integrationism's attention to lay people's interpretative procedures, away from a directionless recurring series of 'demonstrations' of lay metalanguage. At one point, Davis writes: 'The advantages of directly asking the speaker about the term *word* are manifold: being essentially familiar to the lay-person of Western culture, it is no different in kind from the concepts studied in sociological inquiry, and thus the methods of sociological, in particular ethnomethodological, analysis are just as applicable to this metalinguistic term ....' (2001:36).

However, such an 'ask-the-speaker methodology' (which she adopts from Graham McGregor, 1986) does seem to lead to an

*artificial* linguistics. As Harvey Sacks has expressed it, 'the trouble with [interview studies] is that they're using informants; that is, they're asking questions of their subjects. This means that they're studying the categories [e.g. 'words'] that Members use [...] they are not investigating their categories by attempting to find them in the activities in which they're employed' (quoted in Silverman 1998:50). When it comes to 'investigating categories', Sacks emphasizes the importance of looking at *activities*, rather than 'asking questions', which makes it seem as if Davis's approach would not square with sociological, 'in particular ethnomethodological [analysis]', after all.

As an example, let's take one of Davis's research questions: 'How many words are there in these sentences? 1) "Do you want to go windsurfing?" 2) "No I don't"' (2001:39). Davis's methodology appears to make this entire exchange *researcher-prompted* – this holds not only for the example sentences provided by Davis and the informants' metalinguistic judgements, elicited subsequently, but for the interview as a whole. Davis's 'questions' are not just ordinary exchanges among lay speakers in the community. We have to ask ourselves: 'How do the informants see the interview?' and: 'Is the 'interaction' from the outset happening between 'interviewer' and 'informants?'. And so on and so forth.

Even if the integrationist effort does not definitely and successfully mark the end of positivism in linguistics, as claimed by the school, still 'examining its claims provides a useful way of putting the orthodoxy in perspective' (Harris 1998:ix).

Saussure once deplored that his predecessors had failed to think seriously about what they were doing. Linguists, he claimed, 'never took very great care to define exactly what it was they were studying. And until this elementary step is taken, no science can hope to establish its own methods' (Saussure 1959:3). The integrationist critique of orthodox linguistics can be conceived as a historical attempt to bring the critical examination, begun by Saussure, full circle.

In this way, one could say that integrationism voices the exact same criticism of contemporary studies of language that Saussure a century ago levelled at the kind of linguistics his predecessors conducted: the failure to identify its true object of study. However, before such an 'identification' can be realized, integrationists need to look inside their own camp and critically expel the unfortunate excesses of the misguided doctrine of sign indeterminacy.

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## NOTE

- \* The present paper has been in the making for a long time. It was first rejected by the co-editor of the integrationist journal *Language & Communication* at that time, Roy Harris, without providing any argument (curiously, the other co-editor of *Language & Communication*, Talbot Taylor, stated that 'I find your paper most interesting'). A sister journal, *Language Sciences*, edited by the integrationist Nigel Love, likewise rejected it without any comments.

In the interest of history, it should be remarked that the phrase 'integrational turn' in the title refers to a quote from an earlier letter from Roy Harris to the present author, in which Harris states that he is pleased to have been able to lead the way in what some people are now calling 'the integrational turn', and that integrationism should be conceived as an approach to communication and language which marks the end of positivism in linguistics.

## NOTES

1. Harris reports (1990:18) from fieldwork he apparently conducted in dialectology, and he cites as evidence an informant's reply. But, curiously, the paper from which this alleged evidence comes from does not appear in the references to the 1990 paper in question.
2. I was lucky enough to attend the first ever integrationist conference as a bursary student. The conference was titled 'The Language Myth in Western Culture' and took place at Goldsmiths College, the University of London, 3-6 July 2000. It never became clear to me whether the pretentious and ambitious title was seriously intended or merely intended as marking a provocative happening.

Additionally, an interesting feature characterized the conference in London, as I remember it. Several of the conference participants (*excluding* Harris's former students) had a theoretical background that was heavily influenced by Harris's theorizing; in particular, the doctrine of sign indeterminacy appeared to be an article of faith for the convinced integrationists. To one coming from the outside and not being part of the movement, the integrationalist school exhibited attitudes reminiscent of papal orthodoxy.

This circumstance created some peculiar moments, however. On account of the sacrosanct status of the tenet stating the indeterminacy of the meaning of the sign, one was obliged to constantly specify and define even very basic terms in one's speech. Thus, formal and informal discussions during the conference were constantly marred by the interlocutors asking: 'What do you mean by this term'? When I happened to use the term 'interpretation' during a conversation, I was promptly asked to state the meaning of 'interpretation', and when I specified by saying 'by interpretation I mean ...', I was immediately asked to supply the meaning of 'meaning' – and so on. In this way, defining turned into a merry-go-around. This was a pretty dreadful aspect of the conference, as the conversations were getting nowhere but ended in a regress of the participants' own making.

3. Integrationism operates with an epistemological distinction between (linguistic) phenomena of 'second-order' vs. 'first-order' status, 'first-order meaning 'in conformity with experience', second-order 'induced by abstractions from first-order experience'. For example, Saussure's

'state' (*état de langue*) or 'synchronic language system' (*la langue*) are second-order phenomena because they are not coming from experience, but are simply posited by the theorist. One way to theoretically posit an abstract notion is to create a codification, by setting up a structure, like traffic lights, Morse code, symbolic logic, etc.

4. 'In order to determine to what extent something is a reality, it is necessary and also sufficient to find out to what extent it exists as far as the language-users are concerned' (Saussure 1959:128).
5. 'In most scientific domains, the question of units does not even arise: they are given in advance. In zoology, the animal is the obvious unit. In astronomy, likewise, there are items already separated out in space: the stars, planets, etc. In chemistry, one can study the nature and composition of bichromate of potash without worrying for a moment about whether it is a well-defined object' (Saussure 1959:149).
6. Regarding 'integrational proficiency', compare the following quote (Harris 1993:322): 'Human beings bring to their first-order communicational task, which is the creation of signs, capacities of various kinds. These capacities depend on three different types of factor, which may be called "biomechanical", "macrosocial" and "integrational" [later called 'circumstantial']'. Biomechanical factors pertain to the organic and neuro-physiological mechanisms which underlie communicative behaviour and their exercise in particular physical circumstances. Macrosocial factors pertain to culture-specific patterns of organisation within which communication situations occur. Integrational [circumstantial] factors pertain to the fitting together of all these within a particular set of circumstances in ways which make sense to the participants involved'.
7. For a more elaborate statement of the reflexive argument stated formally, see Makie (1964).
8. I thank Michael Toolan for permission to quote from his e-mail.
9. Harris states (1996:163) the constructed character of the integrational context in this way: 'For the integrationist, it is important that context should *not* be construed as the setting which is already there waiting, as it were, for people to come along and start communicating. From an integrational point of view, the participants are part of the context and make it what it is by the activities they engage in'. For the constructed character of the context see also Harris (1998:23).

10. 'The fallacy of the *tu quoque* occurs because it makes no attempt to deal with the subject under discussion. [...] The truth or falsehood of an assertion has nothing to do with the background of the person who makes it' (Pirie 2006:165).
11. Pirie (2006:11f.) defines the fallacy in this way: 'The analogical fallacy consists of supposing that things which are similar in one respect must be similar in others. It draws a comparison on the basis of what is known, and proceeds to assume that the unknown parts must also be similar.'
12. I am indebted to the philosopher Thomas Østergaard for providing the hypothetical example of the FBI agent and for pointing out the epistemic consequences of the example.
13. From its inception, integrationism has relied on a distinction between common sense (or lay) understanding and scientific (or analysts') understanding.

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