DYNAMIC LINGUISTICS

LABOV, MARTINET, JAKOBSON AND OTHER PRECURSORS OF THE DYNAMIC APPROACH TO LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION

Iwan Wmffre

Analysis of language as a combination of both a structural and a lexical component overlooks a third all-encompassing aspect: dynamics. *Dynamic Linguistics* approaches the description of the complex phenomenon that is human language by focusing on this important but often neglected aspect.

This book charts the belated recognition of the importance of *dynamic synchrony* in twentieth-century linguistics and discusses two other key concepts in some detail: *speech community* and *language structure*. Because of their vital role in the development of a dynamic approach to linguistics, the three linguists William Labov, André Martinet and Roman Jakobson are featured, in particular Martinet in whose later writings – neglected in the English-speaking world – the fullest appreciation of the dynamics of language to date are found. A sustained attempt is also made to chronicle precursors, between the nineteenth century and the 1970s, who provided inspiration for these three scholars in the development of a dynamic approach to linguistic description and analysis.

The dynamic approach to linguistics is intended to help consolidate functional structuralists, geolinguists, sociolinguists and all other empirically minded linguists within a broader theoretical framework as well as playing a part in reversing the overformalism of the sim-plistic structuralist framework which has dominated, and continues to dominate, present-day linguistic description.

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DYNAMIC LINGUISTICS

CONTEMPORARY STUDIES IN DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS

VOL. 28

Edited by

DR GRAEME DAVIS & KARL A. BERNHARDT

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This publication has been peer reviewed.

Printed in Germany

Dla Ewy z miłością

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Preface

0.1. The aims of the present work

The fundamental aim of this work is to convey to linguists as well as to lay persons the importance of understanding the dynamic nature of language in its most fundamental form: the ordinary means of mutual communication between people who share a language. For readers in a hurry, but curious to find out what is the inherent meaning of dynamic in relation to language, I suggest they rush to Chapter 11 where they may get some kind of basic answer to 'What is dynamics in language and dynamic linguistics?'.

The second aim of this work is to support the best means for accomplishing in situ language descriptions in the spirit of a scientific methodological approach. Again, with time at my disposal, this could have been developed much more thoroughly, but I have contented myself with some basic principles of a structural-dynamic approach to the description of language which readers will find in Chapter 12.

The third aim of this work – albeit one that informs the understanding of dynamics in language – is to chart the protracted development within twentieth-century linguistics of a dynamic understanding of the nature of languages, by the very specialists who should have been expected to have understood the nature of the phenomenon. Briefly stated, the reason dynamics was missed is that most professional interest in language emanates from the language and literature teaching profession and tends to be of the prescriptive type. And among 'real' linguists the reason dynamics was missed was that the development of the discipline – which since the early twentieth century we call linguistics – arose with almost purely historical interests in the nineteenth century. As this type of 'philological' linguistics was increasingly superseded, from the second quarter of the twentieth century onwards, by what became termed structuralist linguistics,

linguists tended to concentrate on structural patterns found in language at the expense of variation which was regarded as of no interest. Not until the 1950s did some structuralist linguists start to realise the importance of dynamics as not only a synchronic motivation for language change and variation but also a head-on challenge to structuralism as it had been commonly understood. The variationist sociolinguistic work of Labov since the 1960s and his many emulators has, of course, led to a growing engagement with the dynamics of language, but the quantitative effort required for most such studies has led to a narrow focus on a few variables and has generally not managed to exemplify a dynamic approach to more holistic attempts to describe languages.

The concept of dynamics does not replace a structuralist understanding of language but complements it, which is why a more complete term describing the approach advocated in this book would be the label structural-dynamics. The account is dominated by the figures of William Labov, André Martinet and Roman Jakobson, the three most important contributors who developed the understanding of the dynamics of language. Other linguists are noted in the wake of these three influential linguists, but more attention is paid to any precursors who might have had a hand in preparing the ground for the belated insight that language is dynamic as well as structured. Readers will notice that I accord the greatest importance to Labov's and Martinet's contributions and because of this I have discussed many aspects – but not all by far – of the two men's research, concepts, and terminology in ways which may at some times seem oblique as well as detracting from the main point of this book which is to discuss the dynamic aspect of language. If it appears thus, I excuse myself, but these peripatetic wanderings into the writings of these two men and others are intended to help explicate obscure linguistic concepts and terminology that might not be particularly well known. This was the fourth aim of my work.

As the title of this book suggests, I believe this term – in its English guise ′dynamics′[1] – is better suited to describe the phenomenon which more usually bears the unwieldy label ′change and variation′ or the partial

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1   Prime marks are used to designate key terms.

definition 'variationism' in the English-speaking world. To contextualise Martinet's contributions to the dynamic approach to linguistics accurately, I must also weigh and measure Labov's inestimable contributions to what amounts to the same approach. Both linguists' teachings and that of their adherents – the Martinetians and Labovians if one may consider it useful to call them that – have marched in parallel but apparently discrete 'universes' with rare acknowledgements by either of the contributions of the other. Despite almost unavoidable differences of emphasis I hope to show that their contributions are actually complementary in helping readers attain a more holistic appreciation of what dynamics or the dynamic approach to linguistics involves. The last chapter of the book concludes with a programmatic but flexible statement of eleven principles which aims to make clear the requirements of a dynamic approach to language description. This purports to enhance the explanatory powers of dynamics with contributions based on recent pioneering methodological approaches by Brian Ó Curnáin (2007) on Irish and by myself on Welsh (forthcoming).

Experience has taught us that progress in any branch of linguistics can almost never be attributed solely to one person however justifiably unavoidable some individuals succeeded in making themselves. This is exemplified in the historiography of linguistics as practised by Konrad Koerner since the early 1970s work and supported by the triennial International Conferences on the History of the Languages Sciences (ICHoLS) initiated in 1978 and its journal *Diachronica* established in 1984. After some 35 years of productive research into the subject, Koerner can point out that:

> the history of linguistics may well serve as a guard against exaggerated claims of novelty, originality, breakthrough, and revolution in our (re)discoveries and, thus, lead to a more balanced kind of scientific discourse, or, as the late Paul Garvin suggested many years ago, 'a moderation in linguistic theory'. (Garvin 1970) [Koerner 2004: 11]

In light of this I hope readers will understand that my book is not to be taken in any way as saying that only Labov, Martinet, Jakobson are worthy of consideration as 'gurus'. My attitude to scholars' writings is that one should take what is useful and ignore what is not. I certainly devote a chapter to French precursors of Martinet, helping to return to light – I hope – some

unjustly neglected contributors to a dynamic approach to language to an English-reading public. That said, I am acutely aware that limitations of time as well as my own unfamiliarity with German, Russian, Italian, Spanish linguistic traditions, and, indeed, other less well-known linguistic traditions, may easily have neglected other contributing insights concerning the dynamic nature of language. Thus, although this book cannot pretend to be final on the many subjects which it only touches, I hope and trust that it contains much material that would benefit English-reading linguists.

0.2. Caveat

I have to point out that this book is incomplete in parts, but I sincerely hope that it is only incomplete with regard to a number of linguistic concepts I have mentioned or touched upon to which I have not done justice. The unavoidable mobilising of terminology and concepts that were helpful to illustrate the main thrust of this book led me to undertake more than was feasible because dealing with them properly would have created a more diffuse book than the one readers face at present. In pursuit of restricting this book to a particular linguistic concept, that of dynamics, I am afraid that many other important linguistic concepts have been treated somewhat cavalierly as peripheral and superficial, certainly inexhaustively and probably insultingly so to the many studies which I did not read. To those scholars who have written work which – in ideal circumstances – should have been used or at the very least been referred to, I offer my sincere apologies.[2]

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2   I regret I was not able to peruse all volumes of relevant linguistics journals, especially *Language* (1925–), *Word* (1945–), *La Linguistique* (1965–), *Language in Society* (1972–), *Historiographia Linguistica* (1974–), *Folia Linguistica Historica* (1980–), *Diachronica* (1984–), *Language Variation and Change* (1989–). Likewise, those books that are marked with an asterisk in the Bibliography refer to books I was not able to see properly or read in their entirety. Rather than conceal that I have taken

Labov is not dealt with as comprehensively as I would have wished but, apart from the fact that his contributions to linguistics are relatively well known, he is otherwise fairly satisfactorily covered in many accessible books and the emphasis of my work was to give a broader account of dynamic linguistics to which the Labovian approach belongs.

I have, in the main, dealt with a restricted number of linguists among whom I had to chart their often particular path in developing a dynamic approach to linguistics. Even so, to assess each one's contribution also entailed understanding the framework within which each of their methodologies of research and models of language worked. Thus elaboration was needed on the background, the influences and general theoretical approaches, just enough to inform the central aim of charting how a dynamic understanding of the nature of language and the consequent need for a dynamic approach to language description arose.

At the risk of perhaps repeating similar arguments, the approach I have favoured is to give as many citations of the authors themselves in their own language rather than to simply summarise and perhaps mask their ideas and their development of those ideas. If readers might find that sometimes these citations seem repetitive or over-long, I apologise, but nevertheless I still think it is a price worth paying for getting linguists' own original – or not so original – insights straight from the horse's mouth.

My hope is that this work will be appreciated for its insights rather than its shortcomings and that later editions may be able to supply such defects.

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references at second hand as scholars are wont to do, whether due to sloppiness or to logistical pressures, I thought it more helpful to highlight the status of such sources.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA	African American (supposed African component of AAE)
AAE	African American English
AAVE	African American Vernacular English
AIS	*Atlante italo-svizzero* or *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* (AIS) (1928–40)
ALF	*Atlas linguistique de la France* (1902–10) by Gilliéron
ANAE	*The Atlas of North American English* (2006) by Labov & Ash & Boberg
ATP	Action Thématique Programmée
CDC project	Cross-Dialectal Comprehension project (Labov)
CLG	*Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), published under Saussure's name by Bally & Sechehaye
CNRS	Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique
Cz.	Czech
EHE	*see* EPHE
EPHE	École (Pratique) des Hautes Études
GC	Guyanese Creole
GenAm.	General American English
GenE	General English (English component of AAE)
H-variety	high or prestigious variety of a language
ICHoLS	International Conferences on the History of the Languages Sciences
ISRC	Intelligent Systems Research Centre (University of Ulster)
L-variety	low or low-prestige variety of a language
LAMSAS	*Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States*
LANCS	*Linguistic Atlas of the North-Central States*
LANE	*Linguistic Atlas of New England*

LAPC	*Linguistic Atlas of the Pacific Coast*
LCAAJ	*Linguistic and Cultural Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*
LSA	Linguistic Society of America
LYS project	Labov & Yaeger & Steiner (1972)
MG	Middle-aged Generation
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MLE	Multicultural London English
MPF	Multicultural Paris French
NCS	Northern Cities Shift
NORMS	Non-mobile Older Rural Males
NWAV	New Ways of Analyzing Variation (journal and conferences)
NWAVE	New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English (journal and conferences), shortened to NWAV in 1984
NYCE	New York City English
OAD	'Other American Dialects' (Labov) including General American English and all other non-Black American English dialects
OG	Old Generation
OT	optimality theory
PLC	*Principles of Linguistic Change* (1994–2010) by Labov
RP	Received Pronunciation
SED	*Survey of English Dialects* (1962–1971) by Orton & Dieth
SGE	Standard Guyanese English
SILF	Société internationale de linguistique fonctionnelle
SSENYC	*The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (1966) by Labov
SSRC	Social Science Research Council, The
Telsur project	ANAE Telephone Survey project
YG	Young Generation
YIVO	Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut / Yiddish Scientific Institute

Introduction

Considering the widespread uncomplimentary reputation among Anglo-Saxon scholars which stereotypes French intellectuals as theorisers rather than constructors of empirically based edifices, it is ironic that linguistics in the late twentieth century was to such an extent in thrall to an American theorist whilst all the while it succeeded in neglecting a notable French empirical linguist. The American, of course, is Noam Chomsky (1928–) and the Frenchman is André Martinet (1908–99), but this article is not about the disagreements between the two (despite the interesting things that can be said on this subject), rather it seeks to remind readers of the neglected contributions of Martinet and other – mainly European – linguists to the study of what is often known in English as language variation and change or else simply as variationism.

In this work I defend the use of the term 'dynamics' for what has come to be commonly termed 'variationism' or 'variationist sociolinguistics', a linguistic approach which has been winning increasing support in the last few decades. The growing awareness of the need to chart both contemporaneous variation and actual evidence of change in progress and to include these in detailed linguistic descriptions has spawned the set phrase 'variation and change' in the English-speaking world. This set phrase which seems to have been coined in the early 1970s by William Labov as the title of a long-term 'Project on Linguistic Change and Variation' on the social status of leaders of the linguistic changes in progress in Philadelphia [Labov 2006: 385] has established itself since the 1980s, especially after the establishment of the journal *Language Variation and Change* in 1989, but which had already appeared in the two Milroys' 1982 *Sociolinguistic Variation and Linguistic Change in Belfast* and Holes's 1987 *Language Variation and Change in a Modernising Arab State: the Case of Bahrain*. The set phrase has continued

to enjoy recognition in James Milroy's 1992 *Linguistic Variation and Change: On the Historical Sociolinguistics of English*, in Trudgill's 2001 *Sociolinguistic Variation and Change*, in Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes's 2002 *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, in John Harris's 2009 *Phonological Variation and Change: Studies in Hiberno-English* and in Kiesling's 2011 *Linguistic Variation and Change* (not forgetting the elements reversed in Fasold and Schriffin's 1989 *Language Change and Variation*). Apart from its conciseness, the reason for preferring ʹdynamicsʹ to the set phrase ʹlanguage variation and changeʹ is that both ʹvariationʹ and ʹchangeʹ are merely two aspects which precisely illustrate the underlying, inherent dynamic nature of language.[1] If ʹdynamicsʹ was understood to only mean change or evolution in language then it would hardly constitute a revealing truth. But ʹdynamicsʹ encapsulates more than the way language changes in time; it also points to the way different elements within speech react with and upon each other, phenomena such as chain-shifting, analogical levelling, interference phenomena, and so forth.

In any given language's existence the determinants for variation are myriad and include change in progress, register, style, indexing and others, all of which govern the dynamics of language in use, and all of which fall comfortably under the title of ʹdynamicsʹ. The adoption of the term ʹdynamicsʹ, a dynamic approach to synchronic linguistic description, is inspired by Martinet's insights on the dynamics of language, although with him it is nearly always found as an adjective as ʹdynamic synchronyʹ (*synchronie dynamique*), ʹlinguistique dynamiqueʹ or ʹphonologie dynamiqueʹ.

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1   The term ʹvariationismʹ has the weakness – it seems to me – of only actually covering the one aspect. Somewhat embarassingly, perhaps, though hardly conclusive in fact, Martinet talks of 'variation through time and variation through space' [1964a: 205], as well as 'variation as a process' as against 'variation as a state of affairs' [1964b: 215].

Structuralism's neglect of dynamics

2.1. The development of structuralism

Linguistics as it emerged as a learned discipline in the nineteenth century emphasised both diachronicity – more precisely, evolutionary differences between one historical state of a language and another – and a mechanical formalism of phonetic change. This linguistic emphasis could not but be firmly Eurocentric in its focus on the copious amounts of historical documentation which many Indo-European languages possessed. Historical linguistics began to be eclipsed in the twentieth century as linguistics went in the direction of synchronicity – more precisely, contemporary description – a tendency strengthened by anthropological interest in other non-European cultures, many of whom had no written tradition. The synchronic emphasis in linguistics went hand-in-hand with an emphasis on a more holistic analysis of linguistic patterns, structures and systems present in a particular language and as a result this approach was to acquire the label 'structuralism'. The structuralist approach had made itself the dominant paradigm in linguistics before the mid-twentieth century and the formerly dominant historical linguistics was cast into the shadows. This evolution of the discipline was indubitably induced by the nineteenth-century spread of a global European dominance which brought European and European-American linguists into sustained contact with a multitude of languages without written forms in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Australasia. To such languages, structuralism offered an approach that did away with the prior need of historical explanation. This non-historical approach was also tempting to dialectologists of European languages, concerned as they were with composing accurate descriptions of contemporary vernacular forms of

the European languages, but who were increasingly less satisfied in simply constituting a subservient branch of historical linguistics, merely a quarry to be mined for data.

2.2. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)

From the 1920s onwards, structuralist linguistics invoked the name of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–13), an influential Swiss linguist, as its founder and his posthumously published *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure-CLG henceforth) of 1916 as its Bible. As has been pointed out many times before, Saussure's book aimed to publish three separate courses on general linguistics which he gave successively at Geneva University over the academic years 1907–09 and 1910–11. However, since it was compiled and edited by his students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from notes after his death, the *Cours de linguistique générale* does not necessarily represent Saussure's thoughts on linguistics in every particular detail, although it seems to have been generally representative. As a result of the importance accorded to Saussure as the initiator of structuralist linguistics, I have everywhere in this work distinguished the *Cours de linguistique générale* as 'Saussure-CLG' from the other actual attested writings of Saussure which will be quoted simply as 'Saussure'. The distinction between Saussure and Saussure-CLG is somewhat irrelevant as regards Saussure's influence on structuralism which was almost wholly due to the posthumously published *Cours de linguistique générale* since his other ideas or elaborations on the subject were only published much later as exercises of exegesis on Saussure-CLG from his own notes or those of his students (some discovered as late as 1996).

We need not tarry too long on Ferdinand de Saussure's life story which is chronicled in detail by John E. Joseph (2012). Saussure was born in 1857 to a rich bourgeois family of Geneva, descendants of a sixteenth-century minor noble from Lorraine who fled to Geneva because of his conversion

to Calvinism. Saussure had a conducive home environment for developing intellectual interests. His father Henri de Saussure was a scientist, mathematician, mineralogist, entomologist and taxonomist who corresponded with Darwin, but had no interest in languages [Joseph 2012: 59–67]. Saussure showed an inclination to the study of languages in his teens and studied historical linguistics for a year in 1875–76 at Geneva University where he began maturing as a linguistic scholar (joining the Société Linguistique de Paris in whose publication he published his first linguistic writings). He left Geneva in order to further his linguistic knowledge at Leipzig University, the linguistics capital of Europe of the time where he was taught by Karl Brugmann and Hermann Osthoff (soon to launch the Neogrammarian manifesto). He was attached to Leipzig University between 1876–80. This included almost five months at Berlin University in 1878–79 getting specialist tutoring from Hermann Oldenberg and Heinrich Zimmer at the time which saw the rushed publication of his first book *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* (1879) ('Dissertation on the primitive vowel system in Indo-European languages'). His *Mémoire* of 1879 garnered immediate and widespread critical acclaim in France and many other countries, although the reception in Germany was stifled by his Leipzig professors who were irritated at what they considered examples of plagiarism of their ideas [Joseph 2012: 242–47]. After the publication of the *Mémoire*, Saussure, now unsure of where he stood in Germany, as far as his future was concerned, began to share his time between Paris and Leipzig where he submitted and was awarded a doctorate in early 1880 for a thesis published as *De l'emploi du génitif absolu en sanscrit* (1881) ('On the genitive absolute in Sanskrit'), a quarter the length of his *Mémoire*, and on a theme differing from it so as to avoid the latter being subject to ill-intentioned criticisms.

Saussure moved to Paris in late 1880 to continue his studies, not only linguistics, but also epigraphy, history, philosophy and theology. The following year *De l'emploi du génitif absolu en sanscrit* was submitted again, and awarded a doctorate by Geneva University [Joseph 2012: 277] and Michel Bréal, who had been appointed Inspector-general of Education in 1879, named him as his own successor as lecturer of comparative linguistics at the École des Hautes Études in Paris (a position which had been created

for Bréal in 1868). In Paris, Saussure would teach, among others, Paul Passy, the founder and leading light of a teachers' phonetic association in 1886 which would, in 1897, become the International Phonetic Association (*L'Association Phonétique Internationale*), and Antoine Meillet who would succeed his teaching duties after he left for Geneva. Saussure's influence can be gauged from Meillet's statement of 1903 that: 'the new generation has never heard of him and is unaware of his existence ... his teaching gave birth to a veritable school, the French school of linguistics, which has above all become known for the neatness of its views and the sureness of its method.' [Joseph 2012: 528 (French original)]. Saussure elected to return to Geneva University in 1891 and taught there until his death in 1913. For most of his academic life, in Paris as in Geneva, Saussure taught classic nineteenth-century historical linguistics but he was struggling with the difficulties of attempt to write a book concerning a more generally applicable linguistics which became known as general linguistics (*linguistique générale*). Despite having given a series of structured lectures on general linguistics between 1907–11, Saussure, by all accounts, was hesitant in finalising his thoughts by putting ink to paper. Joseph [2012: 651] points out the irony that 'He managed to persuade the world to think about language in a different way – yet never managed to persuade himself that his thought had reached a form presentable to the public.' Not having lived up to the glory of his early years, Saussure must have been reconciled to oblivion, but the relative insignificance and provincialism which seems to have been the direction of his fate towards the end of his life was within a few years of his death to be inverted by the publication of 'his' *Cours de linguistique générale*, through the efforts of appreciative students.

2.3. Linguistic concepts or terms associated with Saussure

Hoskovec [2011: §1] remarks that the stereotypical image (*image d'Épinal*) of structuralism derived from Saussure-CLG is one trimmed down to a trinity of basic binary oppositions: 'synchrony' vs 'diachrony', *langue* vs *parole*, *signifié* vs *signifiant*.[1] In this book I am preoccupied only with the first two of these 'Saussurean' oppositions.

2.4. Saussure's *parole-langue-langage*

Saussure's threefold opposition of *parole*, *langue*, *langage* [CLG 1916: 21, 25, 30–31; Mauro 1967: 419–29] – which is not a binary opposition it should be noted – needs elaboration. The first of these, Saussure's *parole* 'utterance, performance, speech act, speech event', referring to an actual concrete realisation of language is fairly unproblematic in English and is more or less identical to Chomsky's 'performance'.[2]

1   The usual English translations are 'signified'/'signifier'. Jakobson favoured 'sign' (*signum*) composed of the tangible sound form termed 'signifier' (*signans*) and the conceptual linguistic referent termed 'signified' (*signatum*) distinct from the actual extralinguistic 'referent' (*denotatum*) [Waugh & Monville-Burston 1990/2002[2] viii–ix]. The last is termed 'real-world referent' by Joseph [2012: 177].

2   Respectively (more or less); 'language' vs 'utterance' (Mathesius 1961/1975[2] [13–14]); 'competence' vs 'performance' (Chomsky 1957); 'I-language' ('internalised language') vs 'E-language' ('externalised language') (Chomsky 1985) (or my own tentative disambiguating suggestion that we derive Chomsky's 1985 labels from 'interior language' and 'exterior language', see 9.4.1.). Jakobson seems to use 'code' vs 'message' in much the same way at times [Peeters 1992: 155], and he pointed out that the Czech theologian and educationalist Jan Komenský (Comenius) had anticipated Saussure's distinction in the seventeenth century as *lingua* vs *sermo* [Jakobson & Waugh: 1979/2002[3]: 127].

In contrast, translating the terminological distinction between *langage* and *langue* is a more intractable problem and has led to difficulties whenever French linguistic thought is translated.[3] In Modern French *langage* refers to the language faculty of humans, whereas *langue* refers to particular varieties in opposition to other each other (i.e. *la langue francaise*). Thus, in French, the language faculty (or else faculty of language or faculty of speech in English) can only be translated as *faculté de langage* whereas a *faculté de langue(s)* refers to a university faculty specialising in particular languages). In his inaugural lecture at Geneva University in 1891, Saussure defined *langage* in more abstract terms: 'language (*langage*) is a generalisation of the totality of all the languages (*langues*) / le langage est une généralisation de l'ensemble des langues' [Engler 1968: 515] and this refined intangible form of language was the essential definition of *langue* given in Saussure-CLG, although there were inconsistencies in its application [Mauro 1967: 416]. Mauro [1967: 417] notes that Saussure prevaricated on this question, for – also in 1891 – he wrote: '*Langue* and *langage* are but the same thing; one is the generalisation of the other. / Langue et langage ne sont qu'une même chose; l'un est la généralisation de l'autre.'

Kyheng [2006] shows that the concept of *langage* was to remain erratic and contradictory even among linguists who proclaimed their intellectual debt to Saussure and that as a result the confusion between *langage* and *langue* meant: 'linguists ended by no longer knowing what exactly was the object of their science, which is very serious ... / Les linguistes ont fini par ne plus savoir quel est exactement l'objet de leur science, ce qui est bien plus grave ...'

Mauro [1967: 20] notes the deficiency of the distinction of these two concepts in an actual passage in Saussure-CLG where the terms are defined and in a preceding manuscript version of the book. The book reads:[4]

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3   Mauro [1967: 423–25] compares Saussure-CLG's threefold opposition of *langue* – *langage* – *parole* 'equivalents' to these three terms in languages as varied as: Arabic, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, German, English, Spanish, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Swedish.

4   Readers will note that I opted to avoid translating both terms as 'language' in the English translation since it only made the passage more difficult to understand than with the French originals preserved in italics.

> But what is *langue*? For us it is not to be mistaken with *langage*; *langue* is but a defined element of *langage*, an essential one, it is true. *Langue* is both a social product of language faculty (*faculté de langage*) and a set of necessary conventions, adopted by the social body to allow individuals the usage of this faculty. / Mais qu'est-ce que la langue? Pour nous elle ne se confond pas avec le langage; elle n'en est qu'une partie déterminée, essentielle, il est vrai. C'est à la fois un produit social de la faculté du langage et un ensemble de conventions nécessaires, adopté par le corps social pour permettre l'exercice de cette faculté chez les individus. [CLG 1916: 25]

The manuscript reads:

> Language (*langue*) is a set of necessary conventions adopted by the social body to allow individuals the use of the language faculty (*langage*). By utterance (*parole*) one means the act of the individual realising his faculty through the social convention which is language (*langue*). Language faculty (*langage*) is a phenomenon distinct from language (*langue*), but which cannot be exercised without the latter. / La langue est un ensemble de conventions nécessaires adoptées par le corps social pour permettre l'usage de la faculté du langage chez les individus. La faculté du langage est un fait distinct de la langue, mais qui ne peut s'exercer sans elle. Par la parole on désigne l'acte de l'individu réalisant sa faculté au moyen de la convention sociale qui est la langue. [Saussure-CLG manuscript cited in Mauro 1967: 419]

In conclusion, *langage* in Saussure-CLG is defined in its refined sense and translates into English as 'human language, the language faculty'. An elegant expression of the difference between the two terms from an anonymous contributor to the internet read: 'A language (*langue*) is learnt, the language faculty (*faculté de langage*) is innate. / Une langue est apprise, la faculté de langage est innée.'[5]

However, this is not all, for apart from its abstract sense of the language faculty innate to all humans, *langage* also equates with language in ordinary everyday use or 'speech' (refer to the many quotations of Rousselot in this work). In the thousand-year history of written French, *langue* appears to

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5 Jakobson's [1938/1949²: 237] distinction between *langage* and *langue* seems to bring *langage* near to the concept of 'idiolect': 'It is known that speech (*langage*) is not the same between two informants speaking the same language (*langue*) with each other. / Il est connu que le langage n'est pas le même chez deux sujets parlant entre eux une même langue.'

have progressively trespassed on the semantic range of *langage* without having supplanted it completely. In the sixteenth century, for example, the classical scholar and printer Henri Estienne defended the virtues of the French language against other languages by publishing *La précellence du langage françois* (1579). Medieval French had *langa(i)ge françoiz* or *françois langa(i)ge*, and the existence of English *language* and Breton *langach* as loans from French, dating from medieval times, suggests that *langage* was commoner for 'language' than *langue* (conversely, the late fifteenth-century examples of *don de langue* 'gift of speech' [DMF s.v. 'langue'] contradicts the semantic distinction in contemporary French between the two words in the other direction). Kyheng [2006: n.26] shows some examples of the extension in the use of *langue* in the nineteenth century, and, whilst she criticises the etymological reasoning given in the standard Littré dictionary of 1869, it is worth taking a moment to appreciate a mid-nineteenth-century definition of the semantic distinction between *langue* and *langage* which does not accord with twentieth-century French usage and is closer to the distinction between *language* and *speech* in English:

> Language (*langue*) is more exactly the assemblage of means to express thought by utterance (*parole*); speech (*langage*) is more exactly these means in use. That is the shade of meaning one notes, for example, between the French language (*langue*) and the French speech (*langage*). / La langue est plutôt la collection des moyens d'exprimer la pensée par la parole; le langage est plutôt l'emploi de ces moyens. C'est la nuance que l'on aperçoit, par exemple, entre la langue française et le langage français. [1869 Littré dictionary: 2.3.144]

Kyheng quotes a grammar book published in the 1990s to show that the delimitation of both terms fluctuated in French (note the suspicion of the influence of English and the bringing into play of Émile Benveniste – one of the French linguists who receives criticism from Kyheng – as the last word):

> Languages (*langues*) are means of interspeaker communication and what is called *langage* is in actual fact the specifically human ability – linked to biologically-deter-mined cognitive skills – to learn and to use the symbolic systems which are languages (*langues*). The current use of the two terms, particularly under the influence of English (which has only the single term *language*), is so erratic that one can only assign them definitions justified by theoretical choices. The strictly linguistic option in this matter was clearly formulated by Émile Benveniste [1966: 19]: '*Langage*, the universal and

unalterable characteristic human faculty of man, ... / Les langues sont des moyens de communication intersubjectifs et ce que l'on appelle le langage n'est autre que la faculté, proprement humaine et liée à des aptitudes cognitives biologiquement déterminées, d'apprendre et d'utiliser les systèmes symboliques que sont les langues. L'usage actuel des deux termes, notamment sous l'influence de l'anglais (qui ne dispose que du seul terme *language*), est si flottant qu'on ne peut leur assigner que des définitions justifiées par des choix théoriques. L'option proprement linguistique en la matière a été clairement formulée par E. Benveniste [1966: 19]: 'Le langage, faculté humaine, caractéristique universelle et immuable de l'homme ...'. [Riegel et al. 1994/2003³: 1]

Because of its ambiguity, the term *langage* will be translated in this work, according to context, as either (1) '(human) language, the language faculty' or (2) 'speech, vernacular'. And if the context should not be clear it will be translated simply as 'language' (for clarity's sake I have attempted to place *langage* between brackets as a gloss following each translation).

2.5. Saussure's synchrony and diachrony

In redefining the goals of linguistics it is Saussure who distinguished 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' approaches (which can be glossed respectively as 'historical' and 'descriptive' approaches). The 'diachronic' approach privileged the relationship of any linguistic feature to a prior historical form of the language whereas the 'synchronic' approach privileged and justified the relationship of any linguistic feature to other linguistic features which coexisted within that very same language at any one time, without consideration for any prior historical form of that language. As we shall shortly see, Saussure's neat distinction faced a growing and widespread dissension as was already noted in the mid-1960s by the Italian linguist Mauro: 'To transcend the Saussurean separation, to rejoice at a real paradigm shift (*dépassement*),[6] is becoming the common theme of a vast flock

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6   The English set phrase 'paradigm shift' (usually translated in French as *changement de paradigme* although *dépassement de paradigme*, or even *bouleversement de*

of [linguistic] contributions. / Dépasser la séparation saussurienne, se réjouir du dépassement effectif, deviennent les thèmes communs d'un vaste troupe de contributions' [Mauro 1967: 453]. Mauro [1967: 452] convincingly defended Saussure from actually having had such a simplistic view, reminding readers that:

> Saussure's fundamental attitude is that the opposition between synchrony and diachrony is an opposition of 'standpoints'; it has methodological character, concerns the researcher and his *object* ... and not the sum of things with which the researcher is engaged with, his *subject matter*. A researcher always finds himself facing a particular linguistic period: in which, Saussure not only knows, but also says explicitly (and it is astonishing that this has been forgotten) that 'at every instant speech (*langage*) implies both an established system and a change ... (24)' ... 'A language (*la langue*) incessantly interprets and analyses the units with which it has been bestowed ... (232)' ... 'a language (*la langue*) in its implementation (*action*) is peppered with an infinity of hesitations, of more-or-lesses, of half-bakings (*demi-analyses*). At no moment does a particular language (*idiome*) possess a completely settled system of units (234).' / L'attitude fondamentale de Saussure est que l'opposition entre synchronie et diachronie est une opposition de 'points de vue'; elle à un caractère méthodologique, concerne le chercheur et son *objet* ... et non l'ensemble des choses dont s'occupe le chercheur, sa *matière*. Un chercheur se trouve toujours face à une époque linguistique: dans celle-ci, Saussure non seulement sait mais encore dit explicitement (et il est incroyable qu'on l'ait oublié) que 'à chaque instant il [le langage] implique à la fois un système établi et une évolution ... (24)' ... 'La langue ne cesse d'interpréter et de décomposer les unités qui lui sont données ... (232)' ... 'l'action de la langue est traversée d'une infinité d'hesitations, d'à peu près, de demi-analyses. A aucun moment un idiome ne possède un système parfaitement fixe d'unités (234).' [Mauro 1967: 453–54]

But, despite the truth of Mauro's defence of Saussure's understanding of the dynamic nature of language illustrated by these quotes, Roy Harris points out that they are contradicted elsewhere in CLG:

> One might counter this, however, with other explicit statements from the *Cours* [*de linguistique générale*]. For example, that each language uses a 'fixed number of distinctive speech sounds' ([58]), that 'every language has an inventory of sounds fixed

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paradigme, might be better) was coined by Thomas Kuhn in his influential 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

in number' ([303]), that 'each language constitutes a closed system' ([139]), that in writing as in languages values 'are solely based on contrasts within a fixed system' ([165]). [Harris 1987: 221–22]

Neither could the early structuralists ignore Saussure-CLG's unambiguous injunction that synchrony excluded a temporal aspect since in his introduction of the concept in a chapter entitled 'La linguistique statique et la linguistique évolutive' ('Static linguistics and developmental linguistics') [CLG 1916: 114] he opposed the 'axis of simultaneities' to the 'axis of successions' in the following manner:

> It is clear that all sciences should concern themselves in most scrupulously delimiting the axes along which the phenomena they study are to be found; in each and every case one should distinguish ... 1) the 'axis of simultaneities', concerning the relationships between coexisting phenomena, from which all intervention of time is excluded, and 2) the 'axis of successions', on which one can only consider one phenomenon at the time, but where all the phenomena of the first axis are to be found along with their alterations. / Il est certain que toutes les sciences auraient intérêt à marquer plus scrupuleusement les axes sur lesquels sont situées les choses dont elles s'occupent; il faudrait partout distinguer ... 1° l'*axe des simultanéités* ..., concernant les rapports entre choses coexistantes, d'où toute intervention du temps est exclue, et 2° l'*axe des successivités* ..., sur lequel on ne peut jamais considérer qu'une chose à la fois, mais où sont situées toutes les choses du premier axe avec leurs changements. [CLG 1916: 115]

As for labels for these two axes of analysis of language, Saussure-CLG thought 'historical linguistics' (*linguistique historique*) was too ambiguous [CLG 1916: 116] before settling on the terms he would advocate:

> The terms 'evolution' and 'evolutionary linguistics' are more precise, and we shall employ them often; in contrast one may speak of the science of the 'states' of language or 'static linguistics'. / But to better distinguish this contrast and this overlapping (*croisement*) of two classifications (*ordres*) of phenomena in relation to the same object, we prefer to speak of 'synchronic' linguistics and of 'diachronic' linguistics. Everything which is related to the static aspects of our science is synchronic, everything which deals with developments (*évolutions*) is diachronic. Likewise, 'synchrony' and 'diachrony' will respectively designate a state of language and a phase of evolution. / Les termes d'*évolution* et de *linguistique évolutive* sont plus précis, et nous les emploierons souvent; par opposition on peut parler de la science des *états*

de langue ou *linguistique statique*. / Mais pour mieux marquer cette opposition et ce croisement de deux ordres de phénomènes relatifs au même objet, nous préférons parler de linguistique *synchronique* et de linguistique *diachronique*. Est synchronique tout ce qui se rapporte à l'aspect statique de notre science, diachronique tout ce qui a trait aux évolutions. De même *synchronie* et *diachronie* désigneront respectivement un état de langue et une phase d'évolution. [CLG 1916: 115]

In one place Saussure insists that 'all intervention of time is excluded / toute intervention du temps est exclue' [CLG 1916: 116] and in another 'the linguist ... must wholly discard all of what has produced it and ignore diachrony' / le linguiste ... doit-il faire table rase de tout ce qui l'a produit et ignorer la diachronie' [CLG 1916: 117]. But this was, as Mauro had concluded, the approach the linguist needed to take rather than the reality. Saussure-CLG was aware of continual movement in language; the following passage could not be more clear:

> As a matter of fact, absolute immobility does not exist ... all components (*parties*) of language are subject to change ... the river of language flows without interruption; that its course may be leisurely or headlong is of secondary importance. / En effet l'immobilité absolue n'existe pas ... toutes les parties de la langue sont soumises au changement ... le fleuve de la langue coule sans interruption; que son cours soit paisible ou torrentueux, c'est une considération secondaire. [CLG 1916: 193]

This supports Mauro's conclusion that Saussure-CLG recognised the *reality* of the dynamics of language whilst at the same time insisting on the *abstraction* of doing away with time (especially the historical and diachronic aspects) needed on the part of linguists who were engaged in describing the complexities of a particular synchronic state of language. From all of this we can conclude that even if Saussure-CLG's actual understanding of synchrony was more refined than subsequently came to believed among structural linguists, it was not explained satisfactorily in the book. Thus it was understandable that Saussure-CLG was generally understood as having advocated a very narrow definition of 'synchrony' which provided a convenient justification of principle for those engaged in descriptions of living spoken varieties of languages who could not or did not want to invoke historical argumentation.

The structuralist approach to language and linguistics presented in CLG devoted about two-thirds of its contents to synchronic linguistics so it is no wonder that it appealed to those who would want to study language without a constant reference to older stages of that language. This contrasted with other books of the period which gave a lion's share of the attention to diachronic linguistics, although it can be overlooked that around a third of CLG was in fact devoted to diachronic linguistics. Joseph points out:

> The way the *Course* [i.e. CLG] progresses from the general to the specific, and builds towards diachronic linguistics as its apparent endpoint, is true to Saussure's vision. But no book controls how it is read, and what is untrue to Saussure is how the *Course* was read in such a way as to make *synchronic* linguistics its climax, leaving the diachronic as a mere coda. This led later generations to credit or blame Saussure for shifting the mainstream of linguistics from historical to synchronic enquiry. [Joseph 2012: 634]

On many levels, arguably, CLG was in many ways ('signifié' vs 'signifiant', and even 'langue' vs. 'parole') a return to linguistic approaches that had preceded the nineteenth-century rise and dominance of comparative historical linguistics [Joseph 2012: 635]. The emphatic methodological separation of 'synchrony' vs 'diachrony' was novel and certainly useful – even if in much of the following work it shall be the butt of sustained criticism – but the other novelty in Saussure's book was as Jakobson concluded many years later:

> Saussure, and that is where his great merit lay, placed at the top of our priorities the study of the system of language in its entirety and in relation to all its components. / Saussure, et c'est là son grand mérite, mit au premier rang l'étude du système de la langue dans son ensemble et dans le rapport de toutes ses parties composantes. [Jakobson & Pomorska 1980: 61]

Rudolf Engler [1997: 22], the indefatigable editor of Saussure's numerous unpublished manuscripts, states that CLG actually gave a very faithful rendition of the actual Saussure's teachings with the unavoidable qualification that some of the aspects of his thinking were overlooked. As we have seen, Saussure was a historical linguist by training and he taught historical and comparative linguistics in Paris. Nevertheless, he became dissatisfied

with the restricted scope of the subject and, by the time of his return to Geneva in 1891, his interest in general linguistics had begun to crystallise [Engler 1997: 25]. This can be illustrated from a number of his letters or unpublished writings:

> It is that I believe that there is no *historical* morphology (or grammar), and that conversely there is no *momentary* phonetics. If well scrutinised, the connection between successive states of language would amount to the phonetic connection; conversely, the connection between elements of the same state of language would amount to the morphological connection, ... There would thus be a primordial opposition, and incompatibility, between the *phonetic* view of language, which supposes 'succession' and a 'total abstraction of meaning' and the *morphological* (grammatical) view which assumes a 'temporal unity', and a 'consideration of meaning, value and usage'. / C'est que je crois qu'il n'y a point de morphologie (ou grammaire) *historique*, et que réciproquement il n'y a point de phonétique *momentanée*. Le lien entre des états de langue successifs se résumerait, bien examiné, au lien phonétique; le lien entre les éléments d'un même état, inversement, au lien morphologique, ... Il y aurait opposition primordiale, et incompatibilité, entre la vue *phonétique* de la langue, qui suppose 'succession' et 'abstraction totale du sens' et la vue *morphologique* (grammaticale) qui suppose 'unité d'époque' et 'prise en considération du sens, valeur, emploi'. [Saussure 1891 letter to Gaston Paris in Engler 1997: 24]

> The exact situation of language (*langage*) amongst human phenomena is such that it is extremely doubtful and ticklish to state whether it is rather a historic object or rather something else, but in the actual state of affairs (*tendances*) [i.e. the dominance of historical-comparative linguistics], there is no danger in insisting rather on the non-historical side of things. / That language (*langage*) is, at every moment of its existence, a historical product, is evident. But at no moment of language (*langage*) does this historical product represent anything other than compromise, the latest compromise ... / La situation exacte du langage parmi les choses humaines est telle qu'il est extrêmement douteux et délicat de dire si c'est plutôt un objet historique ou plutôt autre chose, mais dans l'état actuel des tendances [i.e. historical approach], il n'y a aucun danger à insister plutôt sur le côté non-historique. / Que le langage soit, à chaque moment de son existence, un produit historique, c'est ce qui est évident. Mais qu'à aucun moment du langage ce produit historique représente autre chose que le compromis, le dernier compromis ... [Saussure 1894 in Engler 1997: 25]

Engler [1997: 23, 25–26] defends the actual Saussure from having neglected variation, although he concedes that CLG did indeed give that impression.

And if CLG failed to incorporate dynamics into synchrony, his work was nevertheless appreciated: Jakobson's verdict on Saussure's CLG was the following:

> Saussure focuses on what remains to be done and finishes the introductory chapter of his course by these rather significant words: 'today', he says 'the fundamental problems of general linguistics await a solution'. Thus it is not definitive dogmas but working hypotheses and perceptive outlines (*esquisses*) which form the content of this attractive volume. This work finds itself at the crossroads of two eras, at the bounds of two different ways of seeing things. Such a book, as broadly-aimed (*général*) as it may be, can never be exempt of contradictions, and it would be dangerous as well as misleading to see in this *Cours de linguistique général* – as is done, unfortunately, too often – a sort of compendium, an established (*solide*) doctrine! Consequent to this false understanding, people wrongly endeavour to conceal its contradictions or else conversely they persevere (*on s'y attache*) to misunderstand even the fundamental value of the work and to condemn it completely. ... / ... The *Cours de linguistique générale* de Saussure is a brilliant work whose very errors and contradictions are suggestive. / Saussure porte son attention sur ce qui reste à faire et il finit le chapitre introductif de son cours par ces mots bien significatifs: 'aujourd'hui encore', dit il 'les problèmes fondamentaux de la linguistique générale attendent une solution'. / Ce ne sont donc pas des dogmes définitifs, mais des hypothèses de travail et des esquisses lucides qui constituent le contenu du beau volume en question. Cette œuvre se trouve située au carrefour de deux époques, à la limite de deux façons différentes de voir les choses; un tel livre, aussi général qu'il soit, ne peut jamais être exempt de contradictions, et ce serait dangereux aussi bien qu'erroné de voir dans ce *Cours de linguistique* – comme on le fait malheureusement trop souvent – une sorte de compendium, une doctrine solide! Par suite de cette interprétation fausse, on s'efforce à tort de dissimuler ses contradictions ou bien au contraire on s'y attache pour méconnaître même la valeur fondamentale de l'œuvre et pour la condamner en bloc. ... / ... Le *Cours* de Saussure est une œuvre géniale dont meme les erreurs et les contradictions sont évocatrices. [Jakobson 1942/1984: 396, 397]

2.6. *Tout se tient*, the celebrated phrase associated with Saussure

The phrase *tout se tient*, often cited in italics without translation by English or German linguists, acquired an unrivalled standing in twentieth-century linguistics as a basic description of structuralism associated with Saussure's teachings.

For Saussure language was not to be studied primarily as a speech (*la parole*) to be studied as a 'system', self-sufficient and insulated from other language 'systems' and constituted 'a system in which everything is coherent' (*un système où tout se tient*) in the celebrated phrase which Saussure was widely believed to have coined.[7] This was certainly the belief of most linguists by the 1960s. However, it seems certain that the ascription of the phrase to Saussure was misleading in fact if not in spirit. Its origins as a citation are rather circuitous. The exact phrasing is first attested in 1893 by Antoine Meillet – a student of Saussure – in relation to the various phonetic elements in any given speech, and appears in his influential article 'L'état actuel des études de linguistique générale' (1906) which discussed the contemporary state of linguistics at the beginning of the twentieth century. The phrase is found again in the 1932 *Linguistique Générale et Linguistique Française* of Charles Bally – a student of Saussure – where it was ascribed to Saussure: 'In a system, everything is coherent ...: this principle, proclaimed by Saussure, preserves for us all its value. / Dans un système, tout se tient ...: ce principe, proclamé par Saussure, conserve pour nous toute sa valeur.' and the ascription of the phrase to Saussure was repeated in Nikolai Trubetzkoy's programmatic 1933 article 'La phonologie actuelle' [Koerner 2004: 178–87].[8] As intimated above, the phrase is not found anywhere

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7   'System' was Saussure's term for what I label 'language structure' (see 9.1.1–2.).
8   Jakobson and Waugh [1979/1987: 168] remind us that Wilhelm von Humboldt had stated 'nothing in language stands by itself but each of its elements acts as part of the whole' and that 'in language everything is determined by each thing and each thing by everything / in der Sprache Alles durch Jedes und Jedes durch Alles bestimmt wird'.

in Saussure-CLG or in any of his own published or manuscript writings. Joseph [2012: 472] firmly believes that the phrase 'featured in Saussure's teaching during his Paris years.' whence his various students picked it up.

The meaning of *tout se tient* can mislead those not very familiar with French. In its infinitive form, *se tenir* translates literally as 'to hold, to maintain (in respect of posture – sitting, standing – or of behaviour), to cling', but more idiomatically in the context of reasoning it conveys logical coherence and should be translated as 'to hold together, to hold water, to stand up' or, adjectivally, simply as 'coherent'. Martinet [1977: 178] – who surely knew the meaning of this phrase as well as anyone could be expected to do so – translated *tout se tient* as 'a coherent whole' (although 'everything is coherent' or 'everything coheres' would be just as correct tranlsations).

Thus, notwithstanding the phrase's rather circuitous provenance, it did represent Saussure's view correctly enough. James Milroy best expresses the problems caused by the structuralist school of linguistics in their reification of the terms ′structure′ and ′system′ which were more or less synonymous: 'According to twentieth-century structural linguistics, a language is a self-contained entity that has well-defined outer boundaries differentiating it from all other languages – it is a system *où tout se tient*,' [J. Milroy 2005: 329]. However, J. Milroy continues, this premise is a convenient methodological fiction whose purpose is to facilitate synchronic analysis for: '... when we consider the real world in which language is used, these structuralist principles seem to be repeatedly violated.' The structuralist approach prioritised the integrity of languages as systems rather than 'speakers who are faced with communicative problems in multilingual situations.' [J. Milroy 2005: 331].[9]

Joseph [2012: 471–72] paraphrases *tout se tient* as implying that 'all the levels of linguistic structure are inseparably linked', that 'every part supports every other part' or that 'every element connects to and supports

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9 It will be noted throughout the book that most native English linguists have adopted 'communicative' rather than 'communicational'. This may derive from the use of *communicative* 'communicational' by Martinet and other French linguists as the exact cognate of 'communicational' does not exist in French.

every other element'. Whatever the exact meaning the phrase was supposed to have had, and whichever exact way it was interpreted over the years, it can hardly be denied that the phrase along with the contents of the *Cours de linguistique générale* implied a bound static structure rather than a fluid dynamic polysystemic structure.

2.7. Postscript

The structuralist approach which dominated the discipline of linguistics following the publication of Saussure-CLG in 1916, and its advocacy by the Prague School in Europe and by Bloomfield in America from the 1920s onwards, emphasised linguistic systems and a synchronic approach.[10] Even Chomsky's approach, dominant since the 1960s, remained firmly synchronic-structuralist as much as it proclaimed itself to constitute a revolutionary overthrow of the previous versions of structuralism. Nevertheless, a whole current of linguistics concerned with change and variation – namely, historical linguistics, dialectology and, later, sociolinguistics – remained rather impervious to structuralism since synchronic-structuralism as defined by Saussure-CLG was not able to solve all questions relating to the dynamics of language. And although the Prague School of structuralists were aware of the difficulties of separating the structural aspects from the dynamic aspects of language, it is chiefly Roman Jakobson, André Martinet, Uriel Weinreich and William Labov, between the 1950s and 1970s, who contributed in bringing together the structural and the dynamic aspects, and thus the synchronic and diachronic aspects of linguistics. A 'revolution' which is not yet duly appreciated except in the Labovian focus of sociolinguistics.

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10   Doubtlessly, an added reason for the receptivity to Saussure's work was the wish to
       cast off the German cultural dominance in linguistics [Joseph 2012: 635].

In reading this work, it is important that readers understand the key distinction which I make between a language 'structure' and a linguistic 'system'. This is explained at 9.1.1., but the ambiguous use of 'structure' and especially 'system' by previous authors whose terminology could not be changed in their quotations means that readers will still have to keep their guard in respect of these two terms.

Labov's contribution to dynamics

3.1. Labov's background

It was the American linguist William Labov (1927–) who pioneered and developed the dynamic approach to language investigation in the English-speaking world in the 1960s. Because of the unparalleled reach of his influence it is worth paying close attention to his approach.

Of Jewish background, Labov had been initially brought up in the small town of Rutherford, New Jersey, some 20 kilometres from New York, then outside the New York City dialect area. Aged twelve, his family moved to Fort Lee, just over the river from the north end of Manhattan. In contrast to Rutherford, Fort Lee was well within the New York City dialect area and it seems that Labov's out-of-town accent got him unwanted attention from local roughs at his high school [Gordon 2013: 5].

He studied at Harvard, graduating in English and philosophy in 1948, but, after a spell as a writer, settled down in a job as an inkmaker with his family's business, Union Ink Company, formulating inks for various commercial applications in a laboratory. Many years later, he reminisced about his attraction to linguistics on his return to the scholarly world in 1961:

> From what I learned about the small, new field of linguistics, it seemed to be an exciting one, consisting mostly of young people with strong opinions who spent most of their time arguing with each other. When I found that they were also drawing most of their data out of their heads, I thought that I could do better. I would make good capital of the resources I had gained in industry. I would develop an empirical linguistics, based on what people actually say, and tested by the experimental techniques of the laboratory. I didn't realize it then, but I was also bringing to linguistics two other resources that were missing in the university: the belief that working class

people have a lot to say, and that there is such a thing as being right or being wrong. ... / ... You can defend any piece or research by saying that it is 'theoretical' ... I myself have always felt that theory can only be justified if it fits the facts. [Labov 1987/1997]

Labov elaborated on his preference of facts over theory:

> There is a point of view commonly held in linguistics that a theoretical framework is to be valued more highly than the facts that support it, based on the argument that a simple, clear theory that is contradicted by certain reported facts will ultimately prove to be right when such facts are investigated more carefully. It is also maintained that all facts are theoretical constructs and that observations can only be made within a theoretical framework. It is possible to find cases in the history of science that support this argument. But the opposite strategy seems to me more appropriate for the present state of linguistics, one that values above all the stubborn facts that resist explanation by any available theory. This study of linguistic change reports a number of such facts – repeated observations that were made in spite of all expectations to the contrary. The development of the general principles in this volume [i.e. *Principles of Linguistic Change: vol.1 Internal Factors* (1994)] is the result of a repeated series of inferences from resistant facts of this type. It seems to me that they provide the most powerful stimulus to the development of new methods and insights into the operation of the world around us. [Note: The framework in which these observations are embedded is the practice of reporting our impressions of objects and events with as little reliance on memory and intuition as possible. In the case of linguistics, the simplest observations ... when they are recorded immediately, by instruments or in writing, ... are remarkably reliable and robust. The theoretical biases that interfere with such observations take effect primarily when time elapses between observation and recording, through a naive reliance on memory and introspection. These procedures for observation are a commonplace of the experimental method, as practiced in many fields, but they have only recently been applied to the study of spontaneous speech.] [Labov 1994: 368]

A clear definition of an empirical linguist is given by William Kretzschmar, of the University of Georgia, a computer dialectologist and successor of Raven McDavid as director of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States project, in his own self-description as a linguist:

> I am an empirical linguist. This means that I do not necessarily assume that each speaker of a language shares the same linguistic system, or conversely that speakers naturally possess a single linguistic system as native speakers, as structural or generative linguists might do; instead, I want to collect great quantities of real speech from a

> great many speakers in order to describe what people actually say. Empirical linguists typically employ the grammatical categories postulated by structuralists and generativists, but they test each category empirically to assess its reality in use. [Kretzschmar 2002 at <http://www.tei-c.org/Membership/Meetings/2002/kretzschmar.pdf>]

Labov not only emphasised the empirical collection of data, but also its quantitative analysis through statistical methods used in sociology. The early 1960s was indeed the period which was saw the beginning of the rise to fame and, before long, the dominance of the ideas of Noam Chomsky, newly appointed professor of modern linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) across the river from Harvard. Chomsky's contribution to the study of language also brought to linguistics an approach from other scholarly disciplines, namely, logic, mathematics, and computing languages. Previous, to his appointment as professor of linguistics in 1961, he had been the in-house linguist of a computer translation project headed by Professor Victor Yngve at MIT's Research Laboratory of Electronics. Chomsky's approach to language, which was soon to assume dominance in linguistics, was a formalistic one,[1] but – unlike Labov – he assumed language to be a homogeneous phenomenon through his distinction of speakers' 'competence' from their 'performance' and his positing of a logical 'universal grammar' behind all the surface variation of language.

Labov was fortunate – and this was also his opinion – in having Uriel Weinreich as his teacher at Columbia. Weinreich enabled Labov to better appreciate the achievements of European linguists who had not published in English, as well as having inspired him to pursue research in linguistic variation. Weinreich's 1951 doctorate 'Research Problems in Bilingualism with Special Reference to Switzerland' clearly demonstrated that extrinsic societal determinants rather than intrinsic linguistic determinants dictated the direction of change in a dominated language like Romansh before the dominant German [Kim 2011: 103–06, 108–09], an analysis reiterated with

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1 Because of an intolerable ambiguity, I separate 'formalistic' 'referring to form' and the associated abstract noun 'formalism' from straightforward 'formal' which is often found with this very same sense as it seems impossible to separate 'formal' from its usual use in opposition to 'informal, relaxed'.

examples from further afield in chapter 4 of his influential work *Languages in Contact* (1953) 'The socio-cultural setting of language contact'.[2] In his endeavour to tackle the mismatch between structural linguistic approach and traditional dialectology, in the influential 1954 article 'Is a structural dialectology possible?', Weinreich wrote a few lines which seem to presage exactly the programme Labov was later to follow:

> In the domain of dialect sociology, where transitions are perhaps even more continuous and fluid than in dialect geography, the use of extra-linguistic correlations and statistical sampling techniques offers promising possibilities of research in an almost untrodden field. / The use of the social-science tools of 'external dialectology' can do much to supplement the procedures outlined for a structural dialectology. [Weinreich 1954: 397]

Whilst never having shown reluctance to praise Weinreich's inspiration, Labov seems to have remained rather vague about what Weinreich actually contributed to his own approach to linguistics, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> I find it very hard to say where his influence is to be found, since it has merged so deeply with my own approach to language, so I must assume that it is everywhere. [Labov 2006: xii]

> what I learned from my own professor, Uriel Weinreich, which turns out to be more than I would have imagined. [Labov 2009]

Labov claims he came to his approach independently:

2   Except in excerpts from other authors, I will attempt to consistently distinguish 'societal' from 'social' throughout this book. The reasoning being that 'societal' refers unambiguously to phenomena having to do with society writ large, whereas 'social' is more ambiguous, seeing that it is commonly understood in English as having to do with matters of 'companionship; politeness, etiquette; socialising events, gatherings' (even approaching the connotations of 'gregariousness, friendship' due to the similarly sounding related adjective 'sociable'). I will reserve 'social' for socialising phenomena, both formal and informal, e.g. 'social network'.

> I thought that I already knew what I intended to do on entering graduate school, and Uriel never directly imposed his ideas on me. [Labov 1994: xiii]

Furthermore, Labov claims that it was only after Weinreich's death, upon reading his unpublished papers, that he discovered that his director had anticipated his ideas of investigating societal variation in language [Labov 1972: xv; Labov 1994: xiii; Labov 2006: xii]. It can hardly be doubted that Weinreich's directing of his doctoral student contributed to Labov's research approach, although it remains Labov's privilege rather than anyone else's to remember the details of their dealings with one another. That stated, the vagueness and reticence of Labov's acknowledgement of his intellectual debt and his suggestions that the similarities between his and Weinreich's approach concerning societal variation were merely coincidental seem inconceivable and beggars belief in the face of clear published evidence – seven years before Labov registered as a student with him – that Weinreich had, in an important linguistic publication which could not have been unknown to Labov, actually stated an outline programme for the study of societal variation in language identical in approach to Labov's own programme (see below).

Irrespective of how exactly Weinreich's and Labov's approaches to the study of societal variation in language coincided, it cannot be doubted that Weinreich found in Labov a more than worthy researcher to carry out a programme that he had previously flagged, indeed, one who was to excel in pioneering and furthering this approach and inspire a significant cohort of emulators and this happened early in his career as can be seen in the dedication of a collection of sociolinguistic articles in 1973 – the proceedings of the first NWAVE conference in the previous year – which stated: 'TO / WILLIAM LABOV / who freed us from static analysis' [Bailey & Shuy 1973: iii].

3.2. The Martha's Vineyard Study (1962–1963)

A characteristic of his approach to research ever since his first published study 'A social motivation of a sound change' (1963), a study of phonological variables in the English of the New England island of Martha's Vineyard, is his interest in analysing by quantitative methods and in the societal determinants that drive linguistic change. His initial spell of fieldwork on the island was conducted in the autumn–winter of 1961–62, and, by embracing rather than neglecting the variation he found, by sampling the variants among a representative cross-section of 69 informants, and submitting his results to quantitative analysis he succeeded in connecting the linguistic variation he found with societal processes and tensions on the island which opposed summer visitors to local Vineyarders, who tended in the face of these visitors and incomers to affirm and strengthen their local identity. The identitarian determinant was such that Labov could correlate different realisations to different groups of high-school children based on whether they intended to stay on the island or whether they intended to leave [Gordon 2013: 46–57]. The linguistic scope of his study was narrow and focused on the varying phonetic range of the vowel found in the two diphthongs /aj, aw/ which tended to display a centralised realisation /əj, əw/ particular to the island's English. The range of realisations were to be classified according to a multipoint scale of difference nearing 'the limits of auditory discrimination', but correlated to 80 sample acoustic spectrograms from seven informants processed to give a formant chart [Labov 1963: 14–16]. Labov also gave cursory attention to the retention and even the strengthening of the traditional retroflex /ɻ/ among islanders confronted with the annual and ever-encroaching innundation of the island by non-rhotic Bostonian and New-Englander incomers [Labov 1963: 29, 32].

Labov followed the investigations on Martha's Vineyard with many other important studies, always on phonological variables, following and developing the same approach, often on a grander scale, which included:

- his doctoral thesis published as *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* [SSENYC] (1966);
- a report written under his direction Labov et al. *A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City* (1968) followed by a collection of his own articles entitled *Language in the Inner City* (1972b);
- a study with the researchers Malcah Yaeger and Richard Steiner on a quantitative analysis of sound change in progress which led to the publication by Labov et al. *A Quantitative Study of Sound Change in Progress* [LYS] (1972).
- a long-term study with his doctoral students on the 'Project on Linguistic Variation and Change' in Philadelphia initiated in the early 1970s, whose results published in various articles and theses since 1976 is summarised in Labov (2001);
- a project on Cross-Dialectal Comprehension [CDC] studying the cognitive consequences of language dynamics whose results began being published in 1989 and is summarised in Labov (2010);
- a telephone-based survey with a colleague and research students of the regional phonology of American and Canadian English which led to a multimedia publication *The Atlas of North American English* [ANAE] (2006).
- a three-volume publication entitled *Principles of Linguistic Change*, a magisterial summing up and synthesising over thirty years of his life's research on language dynamics, published according to volume titles as vol.1 *Internal Factors* (1994), vol.2 *Social Factors* (2001), vol.3 *Cognitive and Cultural Factors* (2010).

The Martha's Vineyard study constituted Labov's Master's thesis presented in 1963. In 1962, before he had even completed his Master's, and barely a year after he had re-entered university to study linguistics at Columbia University in that city, Labov embarked upon his large-scale investigations into the English of New York which would win him his doctorate in 1964.

3.3. The Social Stratification of English in New York City [SSENYC] study (1962–1966)

Published in 1966 as *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, Labov's doctoral investigations were aimed not as a comprehensive description of the English of New York City, but rather as an investigation of the variation of five phonological variables: two vocalic variables (/**æə, oə**/)[3] as well as three consonantal variables (/**ɹ, ð, Θ**/) and slighter treatment investigation of a few other phonological and morphemic variables (/**aj, aw**/, *her*, *-ing*) [Labov 1964a/2006²: 241–61]. Labov's 'take' on his descriptive task was to discern patterns in hitherto unexplained but well-known phonetic variations. Indeed, in New York, Labov was working on a linguistically well-known speech community whose language had previously been described in much detail in the works of Babbitt (1896), Thomas (1932, 1942, 1947), Frank (1948), Hubbell (1950), Wetmore (1959), Bronstein (1962). Although Labov seems to have thought highly of Babbitt and Hubbell's descriptions in particular, he nevertheless believed that all previous studies, despite their insights on such matters, had neglected a rigorous quantitative investigation into societal and stylistic variation despite their awareness of the existence of these phenomena and too often concluded that there was 'free variation', 'absence of any pattern', or that the realisations occurred 'in a thoroughly haphazard fashion' [Labov 1964a/2006²: 18–27]. Having commenced his linguistic researches in the early 1960s, almost half a century following the emphasis on the structural aspects of linguistics which dominated the discipline, he had become acutely aware of the inability of the then entrenched structural approaches to account for every aspect of language as it was spoken:

3   Labov's broad transcription gives the Trager-Smith convention /**h**/ for /**ə**/ – and so he transcribes /**æh, oh**/ rather than /**æə, oə**/ – a practice with nothing to commend it and one rightly criticised by Švejcer [1978: 49] as the 'mythical semi-vowel /**h**/ with its imperceptible auditory features'. The broad /**ə**/ was not only [ə] but sometimes a constricted [ɚ] described as 'an *r*-like constriction' [Labov 1964a/2006²: 27–30]. Berger [1968: 34] actually gives /**ɪə, ɛə, æə, ɔə, ʊə**/ for New York City English.

> to understand the structure of the entire language, and to grasp the dynamics of linguistic change, it is now necessary to turn our full attention to the variable elements in the system. These are the elements which have traditionally been relegated to a kind of linguistic scrap heap, under the name of 'free variants', 'social variants', 'expressive variants', and similar terms. [Labov 1964a/2006²: 31]

His approach in SSENYC, further developing his emphasis on rigorous quantitative investigations, combined with various angles of approach and an inventive variety of techniques of investigation into the previously neglected dimension of variations of variables in language, paid off.[4] Many years later, Labov concluded:

> Judging from the literature and general opinion, SSENYC had considerable impact on the field of sociolinguistics. It initiated a field of quantitative, linguistically-oriented sociolinguistics, or as it is commonly referred to today, the study of linguistic change and variation. The annual meeting of NWAVE (New Ways of Analyzing Variation) has reached its thirty-fourth year ... the journal devoted to quantitative analysis, *Language Change and Variation*, is in its eighteenth year. [Labov 2006: 380]

The location of the New York City study was in the inner city, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, which then included a vibrant Jewish community, the largest single ethnic group constituting over a quarter of the population, a factor which probably eased Labov's dealings with informants, he himself being of Jewish background. Labov was able to take advantage of a sociological project of the area already underway which had already interviewed a random sample of 988 individuals in 1961. But with a linguistic study restricted to native speakers of American English and deaths and removals away from the city by 1963, Labov was left with only 195 native American English speakers on his list of whom he managed to interview some 158 (122 fully) for the preliminary 'American Language Survey' (ALS), an ad hoc cover name chosen to instill trust and positive responses from informants when first approached [Labov 1964a/2006²: 109–13]. Of these 122, Labov

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4   Labov famously carried out random pro-active investigations: posing as a customer in three department stores [Gordon 2013: 70–73], and cold-calling over the phone posing as an engineer interested in television reception [Gordon 2013: 60].

dismissed four 'peculiar' speakers, and focused on a core of 81 informants who were native New Yorkers [Labov 1964a/2006²: 117–19, 169] and relegated 37 out-of-towners – a majority of whom were Black Americans – to an appendix and to chapter 7 as well as chapter 11 where their evaluation of New York City speech was solicited [Labov 1964a/2006²: 117–19, 169] (those who arrived in New York before the age of 8, were classified as New York natives, although this was finally refined to those who arrived before the age of 5) [Labov 1964a/2006²: 119].

Labov borrowed the sociologists multidimensional index of social class, simplifying the sample so that he retained 9 socioeconomic classes (SEC) although these were often bundled differently when he came to draw his distribution diagrams and the 4 social class (SC) labels which he recognised (lower, working, lower middle class, upper middle class) were not correlated consistently to the 9 socioeconomic classes [Labov 1964a/2006²: 139, 176–78; Gordon 2013: 57–70]. McDavid criticised the fact that 'certain groups are not represented – notably the old stock white Protestant class, and whose speech patterns seem – admittedly from familiar rather than scientific observation – to suggest other values than those found in Labov's informants (is this a sharper stratification than he has observed?).' [McDavid 1968: 385]. Although this was a good point in relation to New York speech as a whole, Labov had pointed out that there were no upper class informants living in his study area, the Lower East Side [Labov 1964a/2006²: 139].[5]

As far as identitarian or ethnic determinants were concerned, Labov recognised in New York's white population 'the traditional orientation of New Yorkers into a three-cornered structure of Jews, Irish, and Italians' in opposition to Black Americans and Puerto Ricans [Labov 1964a/2006²: 231]. In 1960 the ethnic percentage of the Lower East Side was: Jewish 27 per cent, Italian 11 per cent, other Whites 37 per cent, Puerto Ricans 26 per cent, Black Americans 8 per cent, other non-Whites (mainly Chinese) 3 per cent [Labov 1964a/2006²: 98]. The Puerto Ricans were the latest demographic group, but Labov noted that the Jews, Italians and Black Americans

5   Labov [2006: 139] pointed to a study of the English of the upper class of Philadelphia.

had only arrived in numbers in New York since the 1880s, but now these groups formed 'the bulk of the speech community' [Labov 1964a/2006²: 21].[6] In the Lower East Side, the Black Americans and especially the large numbers of Puerto Ricans were the most recent arrivals since 1945 [Labov 1964a/2006²: 98, 107], both groups tending to concentrate in a number of blocks [Labov 1964a/2006²: 105]. Because so few of the adult Puerto Ricans had been brought up in New York they were discounted from the SSENYC study [Labov 1964a/2006²: 107] as were the Irish whom Labov describes as a receding community: 'in a few areas there are still quite a few of the older Irish people left' [Labov 1964a/2006²: 105].

Labov [Labov 1964a/2006²: 59–63] also explored intraspeaker stylistic differences distinguishing five stylistic degrees during his sociolinguistic interview:

- casual speech (context A);
- careful speech (context B);
- reading prose (context C);
- reading words in isolation (context D);
- reading minimal pairs (context D′).

Labov did record a lot of unaffected speech on the streets of New York as an anonymous bystander [Labov 1964a/2006²: 64], but he also wanted to collect such natural speech during the conduct of the interview since he controlled the societal determinants at that point. He reified a stylistic category which he termed ′casual speech′ which was supposed to reflect the informants' unaffected speech as best as possible. This ′casual speech′ was subdivided into 5 degrees $(A_1, A_2, A_3, A_4, A_5)$ which were presumed to represent increasing degrees of unaffectedness [Labov 1964a/2006²: 64–71]:

- A_1 conversation with the interviewer;
- A_2 conversation with a third person;

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6   This was in contrast to most of Hubbell's informants who in 1950 were fourth- or fifth-generation old-stock New Yorkers.

- A_3 unprompted talk with interviewer;
- A_4, topic of childhood rhymes and customs;
- A_5, topic of an emotionally involved incident (the 'danger of death' theme).

This multistage method which Labov had refined was known as the socio-linguistic interview and it included obtaining unprompted as well as elicited material such as reading prose passages, minimal-pair wordlists, evaluation of New York speech through reaction tests to recordings, their attitudes to their own and to New York speech. Labov (1987/1997) later mentioned the aim of his investigations were 'to pin down just which sounds triggered the linguistic self-hatred of New Yorkers.' The informants proved to be far from reliable in assessing their own production of sounds [Gordon 2013: 61–62, 65–66, 68–70].

In SSENYC, Labov demonstrated that there was patterned variation showing trajectories according to class and to degree of formality in style [Gordon 2013: 64, 73]. I prefer not to use 'structure' for such patterns, or 'structured variation', as does Gordon [2013: 64, 78], following Labov and Weinreich (see below), since I do not see what these trajectory patterns of linguistic change actually 'support'. I prefer to distinguish the classically understood 'structure' of language, which one can think of as scaffolding or architecture as supporting or underpinning various linguistic functions (see 9.1.), against 'patterns' which, whilst representing a linguistic trend, do not support or underpin any linguistic function per se. Although linguistic change and variation can show clear patterns, the patterns are messy, not wholly predictable and hardly amenable to be described as structures (Weinreich's other adjective 'ordered' might be a little more acceptable than 'structured', although it cannot be made to imply homogeneity in the process of linguistic change or the global results of language variation at any synchronic stage).

3.4. The Harlem Black American English project (1968)

Labov was inspired by his experience of research into the English of New York City to study the divergent English of Black Americans (in SSENYC he had only 9 Black Americans among a core informant total of 81 [Labov 1964a/2006²: 180] although there was a majority of Black Americans among the 37 out-of-towners he had interviewed). With this in mind he proposed a research project to the Office of Education to discover if the dialect spoken by Black American children had anything to do with the failure of the schools to teach them to read.[7] His conclusion would be that the main cause of reading failure was the devaluation of Black American English (or African American Vernacular English [AAVE] as he termed it) and the predicted educational failure for those who used it as a result of the institutionalised racism of the USA. Many years later, Labov [1987/1997] concluded sadly that the results of the research did not appreciably further the teaching of reading to Black American children and the gap between minority and mainstream achievement in school had continued to expand, year by year.

Labov had also his own particular aim which was to obtain a representative Black American English sample with minimal observer effect, something which had in his estimation affected the speech of the 'good percentage' of Black Americans who had contributed to SSENYC and who had accommodated to him when being interviewed [Labov 2006: 382]. Having succeeded in obtaining a research grant from the authorities, the project set out to study the English of South Central Harlem with the help of graduate student Paul S. Cohen and two Black American fieldworkers Clarence Robins and John Lewis who were recruited.[8] The project resulted

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7   The following paragraphs on the Harlem project are derived from a synthesis of Labov [2006: 381–82: 2009] and Gordon [2013: 191–93].

8   Labov (2009) also mentions the participation of the graduate student Benjamin Wald and his collaborator Joshua Waletzky as linguists, although neither of these made it to the credits for the 1968 report.