Meanderings Around the Notion of ‘Contact’ in Reference to Languages, their Dynamics, and to ‘WE’

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[No] hay que explicar el hablar desde el punto de vista de la lengua, sino vice-versa. Ello porque el lenguaje es concretamente hablar, actividad, y porque el hablar es más amplio que la lengua: mientras que la lengua se halla toda contenida en el hablar, el hablar no se halla todo contenido en la lengua. En nuestra opinión, hay que invertir el conocido postulado de F. de Saussure: en lugar de colocarse en el terreno de la lengua, hay que colocarse desde el primer momento en el terreno del hablar y tomarlo como norma de todas las otras manifestaciones del lenguaje (inclusive de la « lengua »).

Eugenio Coseriu. Determinación y entorno. Dos problemas de una lingüística del hablar.

1 “It is not the activity of speaking that must be explained based on language, but the reverse. And this is because, concretely, language is simply the activity of speaking, and because this activity goes beyond a given language. A language entire is contained in the activity of speaking, whereas the latter activity cannot be equated in its entirety with a language. This is why Saussure’s well-known theory must be, in our view, reversed, i.e.: instead of taking language as the starting point, one should start with the activity of speaking which should be the standard by which all other phenomena are grasped (including languages themselves).”
Abstract

This paper is a linguistic, anthropological and philosophical exploration of language, with particular focus on language contact. The goal is not to address linguistic phenomena from a descriptive perspective, in the classical sense of the term, nor as if they were a “given”, and nothing further. Nor is the goal to craft a model. Instead it is an attempt to account for all relevant elements which (empirically) come into play in ordinary language use, considering them both in terms of language dynamics and in terms of language usage; this necessarily entails taking into consideration our own practices, as actors of communication and as builders of knowledge. We are ever stakeholders in this play (and its plays) because we are the ones who identify and/or attribute relevance.

In other words, this text is a reflection on the (our) frameworks established through communication practices (frameworks which naturally have an impact on the form of our tools, including languages!) It highlights that the objectivization of phenomena which underlies our practices (whether academic or not) is closely dependent on the means by which we grasp the phenomena—this is nothing new but is worth noting afresh.

Methodologically speaking, observing this point is an essential element in the elaboration of a theory to account for how phenomena are empirically grasped, and more particularly what it entails in the field of ‘language contact’.

Keywords

language dynamics – communication actors – historicity – epistemic construction – language contact

1 Meanderings

Our communication functions and is transformed through the indeterminacy of words, forms, languages and meaning; they are constantly modulated by connotative additions and the historic depth, or historicity, generated by usage. Languages are entities which are continuously being reinvested and overhauled both individually and collectively by those who use them; this is how, independently of the cognitive faculty of language which makes its instantiation possible, one knows that to correctly use a human language entails mastering the cultural and social background shared by its speakers. In consequence, linked to the indeterminacy and historicity of languages, there is a necessary we.
The general notion of ‘contact’ is a construal having for sole stability to presuppose its ‘pre-extants’, i.e. the “logically” prior existence of the posited entities which are actualized in (or through) such ‘contact’. If, leaving generalities aside to focus on how linguistic dynamics are grasped, one decides to only examine matters to do with language contact, these necessary ‘pre-extants’ belong on one hand to the category of phenomena which I call ‘evidences’—and by this term I am not referring to the specific quality of “obviousness” which is the most common meaning of the word, but rather entities, concrete or abstract phenomena which simultaneously possess the following four characteristics: (1) historically stabilized, (2) positively identifiable, (3) seemingly obvious and (4) specifically resulting from human construal or intervention. This is thus a specific category in our productions and representations: those which are stabilized and whose existence predates ours. On the other hand, these ‘pre-extants’ also belong to what I have dubbed ‘we’ and which I will further explore in what follows. Together—‘evidences’ and ‘we’—these ‘pre-extants’ constitute the enclosures of ‘language contact’. In what follows, after having broached the first pre-extant with the example of two types of ‘evidences’ (the notion of language in general and that of code alternation as an object developed through contact), I will explore the second pre-extant, the we which I posit to subsume all notions of speaker, subject, actor, etc., and which, in consequence, is essential to the processes of construing, interpreting and delimiting communication phenomena. Because of this, whenever the question of contact is raised, this we is concerned by all of the conceptual tools which specify, mask or develop a break in continuity in how one understands these phenomena which must be grasped and—if so desired—accounted for.

Therefore I will introduce, in relation to the dynamics this entails, an overview of the notion of ‘boundary’ followed by a few related considerations such as: what are the place and functions of the delimitation properties which we call upon in our ordinary processes of construing signs, and therefore of conceptualizing? Is it possible to think the construal of signs outside of a process of essentialization and categorization? Why is this dichotomy between...

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2 They can be massive and pervasive or not: they are contextually and structurally imposed (as being... “evident”) through the unfolding of our histories, both individual and collective. This is the case of construed objects such as ‘languages’, ‘structures’ within a linguistic system, ‘cultural patterns’ and other such entities which, intentionally or not, we have created and which would not exist without us; but this is also true of more subtle, induced and resultant secondary phenomena such as the ‘absence of mutual comprehension’ in the language domain.

3 In using the term ‘enclosure’, I am naturally inspired by E. Coseriu (1955/56) [‘entorno’], cf. infra. A term which cannot be assimilated to that of ‘Setting’ in the D. Hymes (1967) speaking model.
objectivizing and subjectivizing positions still ongoing, despite at times strong stances and continuous resistance from “Categorizer Humans”, whether they be “Scientists” or not? What of the reflexivity and subjectivity of the describers and speakers in their activities—always cleft⁴—of construing objects and creating knowledge?

2 The Dynamics of Fuzziness

Far from all ‘stuff’, ‘thingamajigs’, ‘whatchamacallits’ and other openly indeterminate pro-nouns susceptible of subsuming the entities of the world in our discourse, every domain, whether scientific or not, has lexical units which, although they refer to fuzzy notions, are constantly used as if their meaning were obvious. As if by their “apparent naturalness” they could be shared without comment, without it being necessary to specify their meaning or how they’re used. As if they were givens, a common good to be used as each sees fit because, in practice we are supposed to know (for more or less expoundable reasons) to what they refer, so often are they repeated and rehashed. In other words, the process of repetition fosters trivialization which, surreptitiously, makes their use a means to not think about what’s behind them. In yet other words, as if these lexical units belonged to frozen, essential, referenced terminologies; of the stuff that (ideal) engineers in (ideal) communication would create in a laboratory to “keep discourse going” in/with/between their machines, in the parallel universe (an ideal atemporal bubble?) which together they constitute; or else of the stuff which, rather than lexicographers, ordinary dictionary users, a category to which we do not all belong but to which many of us do, would think to use to produce sentences which they could unblushingly pronounce to render precisely what they wanted to say—since they’re in the dictionary! It is up to the listeners to “adjust” what is said to give it meaning, to give significance in the direction taken by the ‘profferer’, or in the opposition direction. Some examples? Actually, any of the words we use could serve as examples: the term ‘contact’, the designation ‘chickadee’, the pastry name ‘Negro’s head’, not to mention the sentence ‘I love you’. In fact all of the signs we use partake in this fuzziness—including the signs which make up the various ways of saying so!

Language probably wouldn’t work without this. Interchanges and communication would be impossible without these “naturally” approximate tools and

⁴ See Nicolaï (2012: 301, 302, 310) where, in relation to an initial presentation of this notion of ‘we’ which I am deepening here, I propose and develop the notion of ‘cleft’ (split, separation) and the distantiation this notion entails. See also infra, fn 13.
the continuous double play involving *giving false references to meanings* and *true laxity in the meanings imparted*, authorized by this fuzziness, whatever the state and level of one’s communicational practices; this is what enables the proper development of human behavior.

3 Tiered Connotations and Historicity

At times one hears naively expressed dreams of a perfect match between sign and reference, of an errorless classifying terminology, a naming system without connotations. As far as natural language is concerned, these are to be considered misleading fantasies in the realms of both *logical clarity* where, perhaps, flawless language can be desirable⁵ and the *constricting enclosure* of some possible avatar of an ever feared ‘newspeak’.⁶

Moreover, beyond the scope of dynamics and from a simple cognitive perspective, our memory capacities probably could not cope with a language having no connotations and without the constant reinscription of usage in its signs. This goes beyond polysemy, because *connotative additions* (whether structural, formal, cultural or other) are designed to be one of the mainstays of both ordinary and scientific thought in elaborating propositions, construing arguments and, at heart, of all discursive (and therefore human) interchanges, of whatever nature. Furthermore, it is well known—even though often conveniently forgotten—that the transmission of purely denotative information and the strictly referential designation of the entities in the world relevant to us are far from being the only reasons to speak, from being the only purpose of language.

I thus ascribe a certain weight to historicity which cannot be erased, and which can but be retained in the forms of language—all forms (and formatting), from the lexicon to discourse via morphosyntax—which can but leave a mark. Connotations and contextual memories from prior use, collectively or not, recognized or not, can but add depth to the banality of words, transforming

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⁵ This is an oft denounced fantasy. For those who share it there is unawareness of what the words suggest as concerns the things or people to which they refer. For example: E. Coseriu: “Language ‘builders’ cannot abolish enclosures nor prevent speaking from producing meaning in infinite contexts.” [Los constructores de lenguas no pueden abolir los entornos ni impedir que el hablar signifique en contextos infinitos] (1955/56: 53).

⁶ Another fantasy which is often mentioned, but which is clearly fantasy given that its effective implementation would presuppose absence of the dynamics and pervasiveness of memory, since these can but partake in our linguistic practices and lives as humans, and be inscribed in language through the persistence of their recurrence!
them in the manifestation of discourse and the practice of language, thereby contributing to its evolution, dynamics, future. This is what builds norms, we establish them, we follow them. In doing so, what is being inserted is we.

Examples? Here are a few, chosen arbitrarily, mostly from within the neological sphere:

- some terminologies and scientific jargons innovate with terms rife with double connotative plays in terms of concreteness and openness, at the crossroads between mathematics and physics (yesterday: ‘imaginary numbers’, ‘transfinite numbers’, groups, derivatives; today: the vocabulary of ‘topology’, of the theories of ‘catastrophe’, ‘chaos’ and ‘complexity’); 8
- some politically and culturally marked denominations which potentially invest the semantic space through formal and ideological reconceptualization9 or, on a more practical level, the opportunistic denominations and phrases which litter the research projects submitted for funding;

7 In Des mathématiques catastrophiques, J.-M. Lévy-Leblond (1977) notes the interplay between formal and natural language “Borrowed [the term ‘catastrophe’] by Thom from the vernacular to refer to a mathematical concept, it is its spontaneous natural connotation which is used here to surreptitiously enhance its theoretical function” [(438) Emprunté [le terme ‘catastrophe’] par Thom à la langue vernaculaire pour désigner un concept mathématique, c’est sa connotation naturelle spontanée qui est ici utilisée pour valoriser subreptice-ment sa fonction théorique[ then “would Thom’s theory have met with the same success if it had been dubbed “theory of transitions” or “theory of changes in form” (Thom writes: “these changes in form, which we will call catastrophes”)?

The hoped-for abolition of the “divorce” between formal and ordinary language cannot in any case be the result of a simple play on words.” [(439) [l]a théorie de Thom aurait-elle connu la même fortune eût-elle été baptisée “théorie de transitions” ou “théorie des changements de forme” (“ces changements de forme, qu’on appellera catastrophes” écrit Thom)? L’abolition espérée du “divorce” entre langue formelle et langue commune ne peut en tout cas résulter du simple jeu des mots.]

8 And again “The inner tension inherent to a physical concept, between its mathematical conception and its verbal description, reproduces the driving conflict between theorizing and experimenting. The common name for a concept (speed, force, wave, etc.) makes it possible to render it in natural speech and highlights the empirical sources and practical roots of the concept.” [(435) La tension intérieure inhérente à un concept physique, entre sa constitution mathématique et sa description verbale, reproduit le conflit moteur entre la théorisation et l’expérimentation. Le nom commun d’un concept (vitesse, force, onde, etc.) en permet le raccord au discours naturel et rappelle les sources empiriques et les enracinements pratiques du concept.]

9 For example, over the past twenty years, the terminological inflation in some branches of Francophone sociolinguistics, “researching” themselves. Among others, in texts with theoretical and epistemological scope by D. de Robillard and P. Blanchet. E.g. neologisms such as
– the well-known dynamics of changing a lexicon through tabooization and euphemization illustrated by the constant sugarcoating of images and terms under the influence of those who are “politically correct”, whatever their background, which we all adopt naturally, easily switching from “window washer” to “surface technician”;

– or yet the impact of fads\(^{10}\) – another facet of being “politically correct”. These are flaunted and assumed in forced and affected terms, specific sentence types, predefined rhetoric, because denomination is not everything. Thus on the level of language and without any play on words, one has—“a cherry on top!”—plays on discourse, style, standards of all kinds which are construed, learned, imposed, used, and which precondition speech, usage and the recognition of what is “said” (or “written”).

In contrast, in the line of logical positivism with possible reference to the Vienna Circle, the denominative rigor and asceticism, an example of which was provided during the structuralist period by the ‘glossematics’ designed to translate the theoretical undertaking of a ‘deduction’ (in the Hjelmslevian sense: Hjelmslev, [1943] 1961) presented as “la description d’un objet défini par les dépendances homogènes qui le mettent en relation avec d’autres objets et qui établissent des relations entre ces derniers” [the description of an object defined by the homogeneous ties which make it dependent on other objects and which establish links to the latter]—each of the terms used above having a specific definition in the framework of this ‘analysis’—, found very few followers. Leaving aside the specificity and discipline of such an approach, it contained perhaps too much abstraction; furthermore the disconnection from all implementation save formal definitions and referrals to other terms already defined in the ‘system’ no longer offered sufficient substance for the memory, the gain not being worth the outlay in energy, and the residue of terms remaining to be defined not being lessened (such is the case e.g. of the first term ‘description’ in the above quotation). In fact, no \textit{caractéristica universalis} has ever managed to take root in a human community for the needs of ordinary communication, nor even for scientific communication. And even were one to develop (\textit{ad absurdum}?) it would \textit{de facto} exclude \textit{we}.

\(^{10}\) On this topic, see G. Siouffi (forthcoming).

‘structurolinguistiques’, ‘alterlinguistiques’, etc.; not to mention the recurrent references to ‘complexity’ and ‘cognition’!
Examples from another level? Beyond the trivial “language faculty” and the obvious “systemic reorganization” of language forms and norms, the effects of historicity and connotative layering are present at any given instant in time throughout linguistic evolution. The most marked evolving forms are often those which have been most impacted by reconditioning in more or less ad hoc temporarily stable ecological niches such as creoles, mixed languages and other language forms which have undergone upheaval through situations which entail high population contacts; however, there is no strict correlation nor linear progression between the extent to which a language is impacted by a given change and the extent of the contact which it bears traces of.

4 Essential Indetermination and we

Lastly, it could be a good idea to not only consider the presence of historicity in language dynamics and transformation but also—and this is in contradiction with any stated pretension to denominative clarity and rigor which are often posited a priori as a/the sterling quality in language—consider the linguistic tool as such, as an object which, in its nature and function, has, not as its main defect but as its essential quality, its own characteristic of necessary indeterminacy for implementing meaning, for reconstruing meaning following any proferring in speech or writing. Under this sort of scope, languages and signs are ever transformable objects, they can be cleft or are already; they are objects marked by the internal potentiality of differential multiplication and growth. In other words, languages are a “given” to be continuously reinvested; they are matter to be worked both individually and collectively in their forms and meanings to be what they are vs. (and taking into account the relations we have with them) for we to be what we are!

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11 And naturally they are implicated both in philology and dialectology, in historical linguistics and contemporary approaches to dynamics and to language contact.

12 In any case, one must first be in a position to qualify and quantify impact!

13 With the notion of ‘cleft’ (Nicolai, 2012) I am referring to what I call contact in a language rather than contact between languages. Contrary to the idea of ‘contact’ which suggests a priori discontinuity and tends to denote discrete and independent entities linking and being linked, the idea of ‘cleft’ suggests a cleavable object; i.e. the existence of an entity characterized both by the a priori unicity of its representation and the indeterminate number of actual or potential ‘clefts’ it is susceptible of actualizing, with all being equivalent in their nature.

14 Obviously it is also important to recognize that the particular link I am highlighting here between ourselves and our languages is always susceptible of being utilitarianized,
Languages are thus considered as communication tools in the full sense. To function, they are endowed, independently of the historicity linked to their usage, with inherent (insuppressible) indeterminacy and are characterized by their essential anchoring in \textit{we}. Their full usage is conditioned by this functional indeterminacy and by the fact of their historicity which can only be integrated, leading to the development both of “scientific jargons”,\textsuperscript{15} “cant”, “ordinary communication” in all its dimensions, and towards the expression—and creation of—“symbolics” and “poetry”.\textsuperscript{16} Full usage which, in consequence, by the effect of this double characterization—insuppressible indeterminacy and historicity—locates \textit{we} actively at the center of linguistic and language processes, in the multiplication of avatars through which, very ordinarily, \textit{we} are manifested in the plurality of forms constituting this usage; forms which especially in the case of language contact and the political and social contexts where it is manifested. Conditions permitting, this is often the case. This helps clarify militant stances, recurring proactive dynamics which periodically develop through the functionalization for specific purposes of an affirmed, peremptory stance, both politically and ideologically, on languages, nations, communities, etc. Important overviews and deep reflexions (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Lacorne and Judt, 2002; Sériot, 1996, 2003; Tabouret-Keller, 2011) have particularly stressed these phenomena which pertain not only to policymaking and “development” research, but also to language teaching and learning, sociolinguistics, and even ideology studies and history. That being said, let us be clear: it is true that this concept of ‘\textit{we}’ which I recognize and am introducing here is susceptible of being surreptitiously interpreted, transformed for outside causes in a broader communicational context if the limits of its usage are not specified. However, since the risk of conceptual, utilitarian drifts with their obvious dangers is indeed real, it is better to explore and question the issues rather than to ignore, mask or deny them. Ignoring ‘\textit{we}’ will not make risks and problems vanish.

\textsuperscript{15} And through the lens of a “scientist”, once again J.-M. Lévy-Leblond (1977: 440) “… these specific forms of analogy which are abuses of language (most often metonymical) and metaphors are inevitable and even necessary to the elaboration of all scientific discourse. They have always been the foundation for creating discourse specific to each field, either based on ordinary language, or on elements already constituted in other fields.” … “external origins in no way disqualify words and ideas from conveying valid concepts which can only be judged by how they function in the theory’s inner mechanisms.” [… ces formes spécifiques de l’analogie que sont l’abus de langage (métonymique le plus souvent) et la métaphore, sont inévitables, et même nécessaires, dans l’élaboration de tout discours scientifique. Elles ont toujours sous-tendu la construction des discours spécifiques de chaque discipline, soit à partir de la langue commune, soit à partir du discours déjà constitué d’autres disciplines. […] l’origine externe du mot ou de l’idée ne disqualifie en rien la validité du concept qui ne peut se juger qu’à partir de son fonctionnement dans le dispositif interne de la théorie.]”

\textsuperscript{16} This is reminiscent of the approach of Meschonnic (1975).
then contribute to establishing a link between making sense of the orderless heterogeneity found in language practices and construing homogeneity; represented for we and by we.

In the preceding paragraphs, why have I, with capital letters, put so much emphasis on ‘we’? Certainly to highlight, within an anthropology still to be created, and beyond imposed disciplinary segmentations into sociolinguistics, stylistics, pragmatics and even cognitive linguistics, the importance of our presence, our complex state as an individual and collective subject, available in variable quantities to ourselves and to the world. To affirm our status of individual and collective actor, both ‘lay actor’ and ‘regulator actor’\footnote{See. Nicolaï (2012, 2016): ‘lay actors’ actualize and use languages, they stabilize linguistic and language forms through shared intersubjectivity, in a community fabric which they actively contribute to transforming (creating, enriching, impoverishing). ‘Regulator actors’ analyze (representations of) the linguistic phenomena they will have created [...] based on a few features identified and provided as clues, and a few rules they will have adapted, construed, posited. That being said, this distinction does not denote a stable categorization. It is rather a case of roles momentarily being invested by human subjects who, at times, take them on because: (i) ‘regulator actors’ are also ‘lay actors’ since they speak; (ii) ‘lay actors’ are also ‘regulator actors’ since they cannot prevent themselves from judging their own productions and those of others, since such judgment is an integral part of construing meaning from what is interactionally exchanged through language and discourse.} in the continuous process of transformation, construction, interpretation and selection which we manifests in our (its) activities and words. Within this same process, to give more substance to the two notions I have raised, indeterminacy and historicity, which, at this stage, are as yet “fuzzy”, but deserve to be worked on, monitored, so as to better understand the language dynamics located in the eye of the storm. I.e. the place where—in appearance—everything is still! Of course this does not prevent a potentially formalizable linguistics from creating (exfiltrating) its own objects and developing its approaches in an asymptotic manner, in the framework of “sensible” scientific reductionism, the validity of which is not being questioned and the results of which can be clearly seen within the predefined limits.

In parallel, the presence of ‘we’ which I so adamantly stress the need for, leads to unexpected overlappings which, initially, can seem far-fetched if not anachronistic to some. Indeed, with this we, the question is not so much to stress the abstraction of the ‘speakers’ and ‘social agents’ who people some sociolinguistic approaches; nor is it about some ‘psychological subject’ or ‘logical-rational demon’ in charge of organizing our cognition, or worse, about
Laplace’s intelligence!\textsuperscript{18} It is not because I often call upon the notion of ‘actor’ (lay and regulator) that we should be considered outside language. \textit{We} is in no way an object, except in that it develops and manifests itself in language: it both \textit{informs} and \textit{forms} it.

A few lines of Humboldt which I will quote at quite some length because they are important for better understanding some aspects of the links between this we I am introducing—and which, although it serves to introduce Humboldt’s \textit{événements}, cannot be said to be the same thing—and language, because of the dynamics which are set in motion when these links are articulated:

The two opposing views here stated, that language belongs to or is foreign to the soul, depends or does not depend upon it, are in actuality combined there and constitute the peculiarity of its nature. Nor must this conflict be resolved by making language in part something alien and independent, and in part neither one nor the other. Language is objectively active and independent, precisely in so far as it is subjectively passive and dependent. For nowhere, not even in writing, does it have a permanent abode; its ‘dead’ part must always be regenerated in thinking, come to life in speech and understanding, and hence must pass over entirely into the subject. But this act of regeneration consists, precisely, in likewise making an object of it; it thereby undergoes on each occasion the full impact of the individual, but this impact is already in itself governed by what language is doing and has done. The true solution of this opposition lies in the \textit{unity of human nature}. In what stems from that, in what is truly one with myself, the concepts of subject and object, of dependence and independence, are each merged into the other. Language belongs to me, because I bring it forth as I do; and since the ground of this lies at once

\footnotesize{One mustn’t forget: “Given for one instant an intelligence which could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings who compose it—an intelligence sufficiently vast to submit these data to analysis—it would embrace in the same formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atom; for it, nothing would be uncertain and the future, as the past, would be present to its eyes (Laplace,\textsuperscript{1814} 1902: 4, translation: Truscott and Emory).”

[Une intelligence qui pour un instant donné, connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée, et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si d’ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l’analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule, les mouvemens des plus grands corps de l’univers et ceux du plus léger atome : rien ne serait incertain pour elle, et l’avenir, comme le passé, serait présent à ses yeux (Laplace, 1814: 4).]
in the speaking and having-spoken of every generation of men, so far as speech-communication may have prevailed unbroken among them, it is language itself which restrains me when I speak. But that in it which limits and determines me has arrived there from a human nature intimately allied to my own, and its alien element is therefore alien only for my transitory individual nature, not for my original and true one (Humboldt, 1836 [1988: 62–63]. Translation: Heath)).

Of course one can imagine all sorts of other similarities, possible vectors for other meanderings such as those suggested above (footnote 14). For example, on the notion of ‘linguistic worldview’ (Weltansicht) and ‘inner form of language’ (Innere Sprachform), but to go into detail would be beyond the scope of this text. I will thus stop here, and return to the notion of ’contact’.

5 ‘Contact’, a Construed Notion

The preceding examples show that it can be interesting to examine fuzzy linguistic determinacy as well as the accompanying load of historicity. And, now that we are back in the field of denomination, that has to be done not only

19 “Die beiden hier angeregten, einander entgegengesetzten Ansichten, dass die Sprache der Seele fremd und ihr angehörend, von ihr unabhängig und abhängig ist, verbinden sich wirklich in ihr, und machen Eigentümlichkeit ihres Wesens aus. Es muss dieser Widerstreit auch nicht so gelöst werden, dass sie zum Theil fremd und unabhängig un zum Theil beides nicht sei. Die Sprache ist gerade insofern objektiv einwirkend und selbstständig, als sie subjektiv gewirkt und abhängig ist. Denn sie hat nirgends, auch in der Schrift nicht, eine bleibende Stätte, ihr gleichsam toter Theil muss immer im Denken aufs neue erzeugt werden, lebendig in rede oder Verständniss, und muss folglich ganz in das Subject übergehen. Es liegt aber in dem Act dieser Erzeugung, sie gerade ebenso zum Object zu machen; sie erfährt auf diesem Wege jedesmal die ganze Einwirkung des Individuums, aber diese Einwirkung ist schon in sich durch das, was sie wirkt und gewirkt hat, gebunden. Die wahre Lösung jenes Gegensatzes liegt in der Einheit der menschlichen Natur. Was aus dem stammt, welches eigentlich mit mir Eins ist, darin gehen die Begriffe des Subjects und Objects, der Abhängigkeit une Unabhängigkeit in einander über. Die Sprache gehört mir an, weil ich sie so hervorbringe, als ich tue; und da der Grund hiervon zugleich in dem Sprechen und Gesprochen-haben aller Menschengeschlechter liegt, soweit Sprachmitteilung, ohne Unterbrechung, unter ihnen gewesen sein mag, so ist es die Sprache selbst, von der ich dabei Einschränkung erfahe. Allein was mich in ihr beschränkt und bestimmt, ist in sie aus menschlicher, mit mir innerlich zusammenhängender Natur gekommen, und das Fremde in ihr ist daher dies nur für meine augenblicklich individuelle, nich meine ursprünglich wahre Natur (1836 : 62–63).”
taking into consideration the development of the lexicon we use daily, but also when one has professional stakes in languages as descriptive objects or in language as a socially and interactionally functionalized cognitive property. This leads to the observation that the most general and widely used technical terms which subsume common notions such as ‘language’, ‘system’, ‘contact’, ‘communication’, ‘meaning’, ‘sign’, etc. also partake in this fuzzy indeterminacy!

In what follows, with illustrations from linguistics, I will explore more deeply one such common notion: ‘contact’. Basic intuition tells us that what is generally meant by ‘contact’ is not perceived in phenomenal reality as a ‘primary’ fact since, in conformity with the principle of an ordinary metaphysical “rationality”, there must be ‘pre-extants’ to actualize it! These elements, given their supposed status of ‘prior’ would tend to be considered as having a certain homogeneity due, at the very least, to the fact that for there to be recognition of ‘contact’, these ‘pre-extants’, even though they do not necessarily need to be

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20 Unless one decides to go with the oxymoron of “inner contact”, “abstractly” imagined independently of any encounter between phenomenal and conceptual entities!

21 This indicates perhaps impact from a creation myth and it is not without interest to refer back to the opening paragraphs of Monadology (Leibniz, [1714], translated, 1898, by Latta): “2. There must be simple substances since there are compounds; for a compound is nothing but a collection or aggregatum of simple things. [...] 7. There is no way of explaining how a Monad can be altered in quality or internally changed by any other created thing; since it is impossible to change the place of anything in it or to conceive in it any internal motion which could be produced, directed, increased or diminished therein, although all this is possible in the case of compounds, in which there are changes among the parts. The Monads have no windows, through which anything could come in or go out. Accidents cannot separate themselves from substances nor go about outside of them.[...]. Thus neither substance nor accident can come into a Monad from outside. [...] 11. It follows [...] that the natural changes of the Monads come from an internal principle, since an external cause can have no influence upon their inner being.”

[2. Et il faut qu’il y ait des substances simples, puisqu’il y a des composés; car le composé n’est autre chose qu’un amas ou aggregatum des simples. [...] 7. Il n’y a pas moyen aussi d’expliquer comment une Monade puisse être altérée ou changée dans son intérieur par quelque autre créature, puisqu’on n’y saurait rien transposer, ni concevoir en elle aucun mouvement interne qui puisse être excité, dirigé, augmenté ou diminué là-dedans, comme cela se peut dans les composés ou il y a du changement entre les parties. Les Monades n’ont point de fenêtres par lesquelles quelque chose y puisse entrer ou sortir. Les accidents ne sauraient se détacher ni se promener hors des substances [...]. Ainsi, ni substance ni accident ne peut entrer de dehors dans une Monade. [...] 11. Il s’ensuit [...] que les changements naturels des Monades viennent d’un principe interne; puisqu’une cause externe ne saurait influer dans son intérieur.]
simple, nor do they necessarily need to be analyzed/considered in the organization of their internal structure.\textsuperscript{22}

Practically speaking, the notion can find its field of application at the phenomenal level and in this case provides an explanatory element which is empirically observed; it can also find its place at the conceptual level, in which case it is rather its role as an explanatory tool which is questioned. But in both cases, the notion is a \textit{construal}\textsuperscript{23} which, \textit{de facto} or \textit{de jure}, refers to (establishing) a relation. It is thus a notion construed by the actors in communication (authors and analysts of discourse pronounced in a given situation), depending on their identification and description of the phenomena they observe, produce and which they propose to process, but also depending on the theories developed to account for such phenomenal relations. Through these ties to empiricism and a wish for description behind the actualization of this notion of ‘contact’, it aspires both to \textit{a positive status of phenomenal manifestation} where within the framework of ‘phenomenologies’ which have become potential objects of study its meaning can be accounted for, and \textit{a theoretical and epistemological status} which tends to orient it towards the world of concepts (another fuzzy notion!); depending on the theoretical postulates and principles at play, this can either lead to its essentialization or to its relegation or rejection.

This clearly stresses the importance of the place of descriptors in constituting such phenomena, in their interpretation and delineation as well as in the development of the phenomenologies associated with them. To be clear, I use the term ‘phenomenology’—without referring to any particular philosophical theory—only to designate a set of dynamic phenomena which are usually examined independently of each other in their materiality and functions but which, due to reasons of theoretical choice, are considered as related by more or less tight links. Thus phenomenology is constituted as a specific construed universe. It is processed as a problematic object to be accounted for, and its description then partakes in establishing a single explanation and/or one which has special relevance in the universe in question. For example,

\textsuperscript{22} One could note however that in the framework of a more elaborate and theoretically "grounded" intuition, whereby the phenomena grasped structurally at a given level can only take on form, meaning and existence if there is some relational organization between them and between their ‘parts’ within a predefined space (which would then entail a certain type of ‘contact’ which would have defining status rather than secondary status since the ‘relation’ is a form of ‘contact’!), the a priori general quality of homogeneity posited for the entities thus constituted at this given level remains unchanged.

\textsuperscript{23} Of course this is also the case of all other metalinguistic notions used. Let us specify however that there is no relation of dependence or causality between “construed notion” and “fuzzy notion”.

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‘mixed languages, ‘code switching, ‘convergence area’ and other objects of this type are so many phenomenologies developed in relation to the notion of ‘language contact’.

6 ‘Language Contact’ in the Phenomenal Realm

In the area of languages, awareness of what is known as ‘contact’ and the outcomes of its existence is obvious if one looks at the sharp rise in publications on the issue.24 ‘Language contact’ is an empirical phenomenon which is always identified even if often relegated to the margins of language descriptions, linguistic typologies and considerations on language as much as in the beginnings of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. The topic has now become an epistemic object placed at the center of an academic sub-field on the rise.25

Thus of the objects which attest to ‘contact’—such as the above-mentioned ‘mixed languages’, ‘convergence areas’, ‘code switching’, etc.—are recognized as evidences26 which it is important to describe. At other levels, the dynamics of grammaticalization, processes of typological readjustments (in as much as they are manifestations of linguistic transformations) are also phenomena susceptible of involving ‘contact’ and being potentially determined by it. Beyond work in linguistic policies and language planning, work in sociolinguistics and in the study of variability (given that they partake in the dynamics of continuously updated standards) endorse processes whose connection to the question of language contact is thus affirmed. The bilingualism of individuals and the other cognitive specificities which characterize them (in so far as they actualize the modalities behind grasping the forms and meaning of what is shown or supposed) attest to properties which also illustrate the existence of contact which it is important to understand.

24 Which obviously contribute to making the term’s definition more precise! For a brief presentation on various approaches to contact, see Nicolaï (2012); moreover the literature on the subject is overabundant.

25 Constitution of a field—whether on purpose and/or by chance—which is manifest both in the transformation and in the increasing presence of questions concerning language contact, with more and more research taking it into account and, in correlation, in the growing share of human and financial resources invested in its study within the academic establishment. Works designed to be ‘handbooks’, such as that edited by R. Hickey, 2010: The Handbook of Language Contact, are illustrations of this.

26 In the sense of the term given above. These ‘evidences’ are distinct from the other types of entities and phenomena which I call ‘materialities’ and which, for their part, result solely from the various constraints in the physical and biological world (Nicolaï, 2011: 91, 2012).
The ‘language contact’ phenomenon is thus recognized as essential in the constitution of many phenomenologies. It has also become the basic notion—deemed indispensable—used to characterize a whole set of linguistic objects construed and problematized in the frameworks of such phenomenologies. At the same time, one notes this trivial and oft mentioned fact: concretely speaking, it is between the actors of communication, in the communities they “inhabit”—and which “inhabit them”—that this contact takes place, it is not between languages themselves, which do no more than to bear the traces of the transformations which have taken place within them.

To conclude: with the empirical description of the new positivities which depend and result from these phenomenologies, linked to taking language contact into consideration, with a renewal in conceptualizations and the development of theoretical frameworks to better account for such phenomena, with the development of epistemological issues which bear on the constraints within the notions conceptualized within such frameworks, one notes that the emergent status of the notion of ‘contact’ can contribute to enriching reflection not only around what constitutes it, but also what it constitutes.27 One then passes from the empirical understanding of specific phenomenologies to a reflexive approach around a notion in need of being conceptualized.

7 The Enclosures of Language Contact

I am mentioning these ‘enclosures’ as a way to better grasp the notion of language contact, because of course it is only through such distinctions that the notion emerges. The notion ‘enclosure’ is of course used in reference to Determinación y entorno, the well known article by Coseriu (1955/56) on similar themes, where the notions of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘historicity’ implicating we are not without links to the “linguistics of the activity of speaking” [lingüística del hablar], the existence of which he rhetorically affirms:

is there a linguistics which is not a linguistics of the activity of speaking. Language itself, what is it if not the activity of speaking?28

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27 For the initial stages in the development of this theme, some considerations are to be found in: Questioning Language Contact. Limits of Contact, Contact at its Limits, Nicolaï (ed.), 2014.
28 “... cabría más bien preguntarse si hay una lingüística que no sea una lingüística del hablar. La ‘lengua’ misma ¿que otra cosa es si no un aspecto del hablar?” (31).
He further notes that:

concretely, ‘language’ is a historical speaking activity. For all speaking subjects, it is the “potential of speech”, the know-how within a specific tradition. And for linguists, it is a system deduced from speech,\textsuperscript{29}

and conclude by noting: “Even the so-called ‘language system’ is simply the systematicity of all historically determined speech.”\textsuperscript{30}

What are the enclosures of language ‘contact’? They are the ‘pre-existing elements’ without which there could be no contact. First and foremost the ‘evidences’ which I illustrated above with a few examples. One must remember that what I mean by these terms are the phenomena which massively impose themselves on us, but which were born out of human activity—again highlighting potential links to Coseriu’s “linguistics of speech”. The second ‘enclosure’ is ‘we’. This we whose inescapable presence introduces and guarantees the ensuing indeterminacy and historicity dynamics which characterize languages and how we speak them.

8 ‘Evidences’ as the First Enclosures

It makes sense to first have a closer look at these ‘pre-extants’! We will start by saying more about ‘evidences’. The first are those which, in popular conscience, are referred to by the terms ‘language’, ‘dialect’, ‘variety’, etc. And naturally whenever there is the slightest doubt, there are dictionaries and textbooks to tell us more or less rigidly what’s what. And yet, in “ordinary life”, who cares! Because, although this is less true of a notion like ‘variety’, we consider it obvious that we all “know” what a ‘language’ or ‘dialect’ is! If only because we all “speak”. However, between a structural linguist, a generativist, a dialectologist, a typologist, a historian, a sociolinguist, not to mention a cognitivist... i.e. amongst professionals (describers, theoreticians, technicians) who have reason to conceptualize or to specify what meaning they give to these notions in their practices, it is highly unlikely that any will agree on the definitions. The same goes for specialists of language planning, policy makers, activists for various

\textsuperscript{29} “La ‘lengua’ es concretamente un modo histórico de hablar. Para todo hablante, ella es un ‘hablar en potencia’: un saber hablar según una tradición. Y para el lingüista es un sistema deducido del hablar” (31).

\textsuperscript{30} “Hasta lo que se llama ‘sistema de la lengua’ no es otra cosa que la sistematicidad misma de todo hablar históricamente determinado” (32).
causes, etc. As for “ordinary speakers”, a category we all belong to, more or less loquacious, without any particular opinions, nor any professional, ideological, cultural or political stakes in the matter—although that can change on occasion—one would expect that, through the retroactive effect of what they were taught by society and/or at school without being aware of it, they would call upon their “common sense”. If by chance they have no choice but to be an authority on the subject, one can expect that, invariably, they will look up the definitions in a dictionary. Which in fact can only return the lexicographers’ frozen version of the lessons drawn from the practices of those self-same “ordinary speakers”. In other words, in the context of specialized uses as in ordinary life, we are in the presence of fuzzy notions and designations, only determined by the historicized effect derived from their usage (which can also be theorized). These are notions which, just as I noted for ‘contact’ are—and remain—the usual linchpins for the propositions we express when we speak.

However, discussing the indeterminacy of notions such as ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ and how we grasp what they refer to, would be illustrative but could nonetheless appear a moot point and purely rhetorical, so often has it been rehashed and ideologically “tainted”. Let us therefore examine some more concrete and unusual aspects and look more closely as these ‘evidences’ in ‘language contact’. Not to rigidify their link to the terms used to refer to them since I just showed that such hopes would be fallacious, but rather to better illustrate the proposition I am defending here on the subject of indeterminacy, because, naturally, the designators of the references and of the objects in the world seen by we are not rigid designators in the sense of Kripke (1980). Obviously this is not a question of “proper nouns” and we is/are still at once in the real world and in all possible worlds! This is probably the sine qua non decentering condition of the dynamics we develop, which are always partially governed.

The example of code switching is a good one, and I will illustrate the phenomenon with a particularly instructive excerpt from Myers-Scotton (1993: 48) where she describes how she became aware of the phenomenon’s existence:

even though I was doing field work intermittently from 1964 to 1973 on language use in African multilingual communities, I never recognized code switching as a special phenomenon until 1972. Previously, I had obtained interview data on language use among urban workers […]. Workers had made statements such as, ‘We sometimes mix languages when speaking with fellow workers’. But, operating within what I will call the

31 By ‘ordinary’ I mean those who are not taking a stance as “specialists” supposed ex cathedra to have the last “word” on words!
prevailing ‘allocation paradigm’ in sociolinguistics for dealing with multilingual situations, I interpreted ‘we sometimes mix languages’ to mean ‘we use language X with such and such persons and language Y with other persons’.

Then, analyzing her behavior, she continues:

Even when I myself observed language in use as I often did, I managed to ‘ignore’ code switching. Why? I suggest two reasons. First, the current literature on bi/multilingual communities led me to expect a simple allocation within any community of generally one language per speech-event type. Second, my familiarity (through the literature) with language contact phenomena was with borrowing as a ‘respectable’ phenomenon worthy of study, but not with code switching.

A quarter of a century after she made those remarks, a quarter of a century since she became “aware” of the phenomenon, one can see how important this theme of code switching has become in current issues, and note the sheer mass of the phenomena which this notion has helped shed light on and the importance of the theoretical developments it has led to. Such an example and such a realization illustrates how ‘construed’ an object attesting to language contact is, which came into existence through the regrouping of phenomena which were invisible (as opposed to inexpressible) in mindsets previously. This new object—code switching—thus results from the reconceptualization of the qualities and properties of the phenomena concerned by this regrouping, and the reconceptualization itself is induced by other contextual changes, whether related or not, potentially resulting from metaphorical extensions it has generated, or developments induced by new fields of exploration: all language and linguistic issues raised due to the recognition of the importance of the actions and activities of communication actors.

Following reconceptualization and the attending regrouping, the initial data are the same and of course their nature remains unchanged; only their interpretation has changed, based on new relevancies being noted or introduced, leading to the emergence of new issues within the transformed conceptual framework. In parallel, and as a consequence of the fact that it is now unavoidable (or at least it is now part and parcel of the intellectual landscape) one notes that this formerly inexistent\(^{32}\) research object which is ‘code switching’

\(^{32}\) Very concretely, as Stell and Yakpo (2015) note, it would seem that the first mention of ‘code-switching’ is to be found in the review by Vogt (1954) of Weinreich (1953). However,
has gone, for research, from being a ‘non-phenomenon’ to being an ‘evidence’ in the sense defined above and not—according to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*—in the sense of “the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid” which the word ‘evidence’ introduces in the subtitle of the work by Myers-Scotton (1993).

With these two examples, we can identify two types of evidence, the latter, once again, by definition, being constituted of entities determined by *we*: (i) perceived evidences such as the phenomenon ‘language’, having almost ontological vocation; (ii) masked evidences or ones possibly considered accidental such as ‘code switching’ (which in time take on the status of perceived evidence), for a time with possible edge effects before being considered within a relevant theoretical framework which considers that they “exist”.

9 **WE as Second Enclosures**

The second important ‘pre-extant’ for understanding language contact is *we*. When broached with more or less elaborate or theorized perspectives, this *we* is embodied through ordinary terms such as ‘subject’, ‘speaker’, ‘actor’, ‘agent’ which refer to individuals, or terms such as ‘community’ which refers to groups. A *we* whose observation and recognition imply a reflexive process (*we* as a presupposing entity and as a presupposed entity). Thus a complex *we* which cannot be excluded, which both acts and is acted upon, which both experiences its actions and the dynamics behind the actions. The dynamics of this *we* is essential for producing what is set and what is transforming within the linguistic and language space; however in that space there is a blind spot. The reflexivity which makes it possible to objectify the actions of *we* is not (except for a field set up specifically to study the reflexivity) the quality deemed paramount in the study of describing or construing entities in the world and in our minds. There is rarely interest—in the field of study where we do what we do—in how we effectively do what we do, in the modalities and modeling of such doing, and subsequently in the description of this state of affairs. This type of exploration is left for another field of study: epistemology. And yet this type of approach is highly informative, and therefore eminently useful both as knowledge per se and as a strategy for construing knowledge.

Now if, in the perspective of deepening the exploration of ‘language contact’, I should decide to look into this *we* from the angle of the dynamics of

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it was not until the 1970s that the theme was developed, for example by Blom and Gumperz (1972).
communication actors in their role of regulator actors, it would be the entire set of conceptual tools which would enable determination, categorization and delimitation of the phenomena.

As examples of these conceptual tools I will mention dichotomies such as ‘unity / multiplicity’, ‘homogeneity / heterogeneity’, ‘identical / different’, which partially depend on ‘delimiting’ notions such as ‘boundary’ or ‘cleft’ which all partake in the recognition, dynamics, active and decisive intervention linked to the we. Such dichotomies are essentially linked to the notion of ‘contact’ given that what is at stake is a break in continuity in the perception and/or understanding of what is manifest.

10 ‘Boundary’ as a ‘Delimiting’ Notion and WE

Among the ‘delimiting’ notions, let us look more closely at the most elementary one: boundary. What is interesting is that it seems to ineluctably impose itself, and this from two opposite directions: either as a given, considered an object in a recognized or implicit exteriority; or blanked out or even denied, not appearing because it constitutes the very framework of what is being considered.

In both cases, and especially when it is a question of what I call evidences, we is concerned as an active factor through the recognition, acceptance, creation or, inversely, the denial of the material or conceptual tracing of a boundary and the ensuing categorical partitions. WE partakes in the creation process, in grasping or refuting a boundary, which is why looking into ‘boundaries’ is always such a challenge.

33 As mentioned above, the regulator actor analyzes the (representations of the) language phenomena previously construed on the basis of selected features taken as indicative and a few rules also selected, construed, posited. See also: Nicolaï (2011, 2012).

34 What are we dealing with when it is a question of ‘boundaries’? Constraints inherent to any perceiving of phenomena, manifestations of forms and meaning ascribed to events. Boundaries are in effect ‘necessary props’ on a physical level (boundaries susceptible of distinguishing languages and forms) as on an intellectual one (construed representations, structurally or socially, intersubjectively reified). Which is to say that they are always there. One can decide to make them a specific object of study, but this would necessarily be within the framework of a new set of constraints, and therefore a new set of boundaries. Boundaries, in other words, materially and conceptually, condition all analysis and serve as a given framework for grasping phenomena. In correlation, they also serve after the fact as justification for the manifested results. I explore these issues in several texts (Nicolaï, 2004, 2007, 2013, in press); what I am developing here builds on their propositions.
Boundaries are perceived through the processes which actualize them, and are thus linked to the actors and interpreters which we are / is; they partake both in the external world and in its perception by we. On a practical level, they can be grasped either as static elements, when exploring their materiality, or as dynamic elements if one is interested in examining the processes which lead to their creation as they constitute the formation of signs based on functionalized stigmata to develop new meanings (in which case creating the boundary is a goal to be reached, materiality to be built), or when they are being used for prospective purposes (which is an entirely different way of grasping them). They can be studied through a variety of angles. These exist on different levels but from the perspective I am developing here, boundaries require that one take into account the activity and activism of actors who have “to do” with the phenomena which actualize them (vs. which they actualize).

The important thing to remember is that boundaries are part of ordinary life since we all determine them and are all determined by them, we are all led to experiment with them, establish them, destroy them, affirm them, refute them. Whether physical or conceptual, they are everywhere and condition how we understand, read, grasp and build the world we are part of. Considered in their dynamics, they are a tool which can be used to construe representations of the physical and conceptual, scientific and ordinary world; furthermore, through their objectivization and materialization, they introduce constraints on phenomena and actors alike. Borders thus presuppose reifiable phenomena, construed or recognized, of concern to humanity, and lay or regulator actors to recognize, interpret, displace and build them. They can be broached through two different interfaces:

– one where the aim is to take into account phenomena, realia (corresponding to positive traces of ‘evidences’ and ‘constructs’), i.e. confronting them with manifest, patent constraints (here, of a linguistic nature). This is the most often explored interface;

35 Without doubt, my wavering and the syntactic uncertainty I show between “we are” and “we is” translates—without it being quite intentional—the complexity of the status of we taken as both ‘actors’ in their double functionality of lay actors and regulator actors, and as a global concept.

36 By ‘constructs’ I mean entities which have some of the characteristics of ‘evidences’. These are the characteristics (2) be positively identifiable, (3) impose themselves on us and (4) specifically result from human processes and developments, but which do not possess the characteristic (1) of evidences which is to be stabilized over time. In other words, this and that norm, this and that phenomenon elaborated in the hic et nunc are ‘constructs’ in the hic et nunc and are destined, if they last, to become ‘evidences’ for future generations.
the other where they are concerned by the processes of interpreting and representing phenomena (i.e. not only the establishment of constraints but also reflexions around projections and the moves and behaviors strategically introduced by the actors). It is perhaps less obvious since it is not manifested in positively identifiable forms, but this is the interface which is fundamental for understanding and clarifying phenomena, at least in their emergence.

So how to conclude? Simply by summarizing a few points. Boundary? It is a non-notion, a necessity, a tool, a construct, an unavoidable fact. It is a necessary presupposition for grasping the phenomena, it is a reference for understanding them, an implicitation, situational substance, and guarantor of the presence of we. One would thus expect approaches which take into consideration the contextuality and historicity of phenomena, as well as a log of their actualizations, integrating everything done by the actors, to be theoretically and methodologically more relevant for accounting for boundary facts and dynamics than apparently more positive, more objective examinations which consider them in the supposed intangibility of one or another of their representations if not in their materiality. Because, in the end, to come back to linguistic matters, it is through such complex dynamics that language functions, gives meaning and performs and that language contact can be made manifest and perceptible, for a given time and place.

Without considering boundaries, there can be no claiming of sameness or difference—notations which denote an assessment of X, whatever its qualities in terms of homogeneity or heterogeneity, unicity or multiplicity.37 No ‘language contact’. Nor any we. In other words, boundaries also belong to the category of evidences: they are situational evidences—not that, to be perfectly clear, this lessens in any way their force and their pervasiveness. They serve to discriminate and delimit, and are susceptible of creating, redrawing, imposing or erasing objects, entities, and even ‘universes’, from the world of our representations if not from the inventory of phenomena, i.e. they act on the state of the world and of our knowledge.

37 I specify the distinction between ‘multiple’ and ‘heterogeneous’ as follows: ‘multiple’ refers to entities of the same nature and/or status considered equivalent (languages, dialects and all other forms); it entails reproduction of “the one”. Heterogeneity refers to entities of a different nature and/or status which can be compounded and which partake in the construal / constitution of a given object, in singulating a phenomenon grasped as and/or defined (or even redefined) as ‘homogeneous’ in the framework of its examination where it is perceived as ‘unitary’ (Nicolaï, 2008).
WE, Languages, and our Construals

As I said above, there can be no language contact without taking boundaries into account, without recognizing that the elements in contact are necessarily different. I also posit that there cannot be boundaries without WE, and of course the link between these notions is of a “constituent” nature! With this in mind, several observations can be made. Those that follow will begin by questioning the heterogeneity and variability of linguistic forms with regard to the homogeneous representations we construe to subsume them; they also question how we retain—or not—the historicity of these phenomena. My first two remarks will bear on the articulation ‘plurality / heterogeneity’ vs. ‘unitarity / homogeneity’ and belong more specifically to the exploration of what I have dubbed ‘evidences’, whereas the two final ones will explore the objectivization of how phenomena are understood and the reflexivity of descriptors, addressing more directly the question I introduced on the subject of WE as it is continuously concerned by a process of occultation manifested under the mantle of idealized objectivity, taken to be the opposite of subjectivity, to be avoided at all costs! These remarks bring us back to the enclosures of ‘language contact’ mentioned above. Remarks:

1. On the topic of ‘evidences’, one notes that there exist things which could be called ‘plurality’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘variation’ and ‘continuous differentiation’ in languages and language use. But, WE (speakers and descriptors, singular and collective) build / builds in a stable manner—despite calling upon variable sets of criteria—representations which crush these “realities” to replace them by homogenized, unitized representations: whence one perceives an interesting object (subject?) of study concerning language dynamics opening up vistas for the study of the link between this objectively manifested ‘plurality / heterogeneity / variation’ and a construed, or reconstrued, ‘homogeneousness’ for reference (a topic partially explored by various fields in sociolinguistics). One is then authorized to wonder what the place and functions are of the abstraction properties continuously solicited in our ordinary practices for construing signs, and therefore for conceptualizing?

2. We also established that there exists a dimension of historicity inherent to the development and constitution of languages which, without explaining all of the dynamics and transformations which affect them in the process leading to their state at a given point in time, contributes significantly to their explanation. But, either as a consequence of the
rigidification of certain dichotomies (e.g. ‘synchrony / diachrony’), or because some elements relevant to the contextualities of their usage are not taken into account, we often tend(s) to construe ahistorical representations of what is manifested in a given state: thus there are modalities behind the construed representations of the phenomena which are interesting to examine since not only do they tend to characterize languages through a certain desired homogeneity, they also tend to place them in a stable and atemporal, perhaps “Platonic” state, potentially endowing them with ontological status (a theme which partially underlies systemic approaches in general). Thus one is led to wonder: to what extent is it possible to conceive of the construal of signs outside of any process of essentialization and categorization?

3. On the subject of we, we established the existence of language ‘speakers’ and ‘descriptors’ (regulator and lay actors, subjects, etc.). Yet, as much as possible in description practices, we act(s) to erase ourselves in the perspective of building an often ad hoc objectivity, even though this objectivity is presented—posited—as seemingly necessary for establishing the representations to be retained, thereby preventing any questioning of the practice. Thus one notes a need (ideological? cultural?) to objectify, even to the point of erasure, the problematization of the process whereby speakers give meaning to linguistic constructions, and even more so to the epistemic representations construed by their descriptors. It therefore seems important to ask why, despite various strong positions taken and constant resistance, this dichotomy between objectivizing and subjectivizing postures still persists?

4. Lastly, which factors come into play, in addition to those determined by social interaction and its historicized reinterpretation in the construal of linguistic phenomena and in the modalities of their transformation? What of recognizing the reflexivity and subjectivity (the ineluctable presence of which I stressed above) of the descriptors and speakers in their activities of construing objects and amassing knowledge? Neither one entails dissolving all objectivity and invalidating all empirical descriptions: there is always a relative and construed objectivity which will be manifest in context if one develops a rigorous attitude and an attendant well critiqued methodology for studying phenomena. In contrast, masking them appears to be the source of inappropriate misunderstandings whereby black is called white, and ‘constructs’ and ‘evidences’ established for a given here and now taken as “objectalities” discovered in the world, as if they had been spotted from Sirius.
Not Quite a Conclusion

In my view, these “meanderings around the notion of ‘contact’” do not call for any particular conclusion. That is why, rather than closing with a conventional “send-off”, I prefer to continue broadening the debate with a few questions on “what is said”, and “what can be said” depending on “who” says it and “where”.

So let us take a look at the “politically correct” of academic writing, in which we are/is partaking. What is it? Support for reflections or a strain? Let us then have a look at the disciplinary framework. What is it? A set way of presenting things, ostensible allegiance to the rules of propriety and manners, or one’s own “phrasing” amidst the chorus of speech? Let us be frank. Instead of developing the exploration of the material consequences of these practices and frameworks, let us examine where they are initiated. The place where they are ‘produced’, in all meanings of the word.

Where am I Speaking From?38

In an academic context, “I speak” only takes on meaning when it signifies “I say” which is supposed to offer a “saying”, which is a sentence.39 The “Where am I speaking from?” becomes a “Where is it saying from?” because “speak” simply implies a flow of “speech”: one can speak “too much”, speak “nonsense”, speak “too fast”. “I am speaking” does not have the inherent transitivity of “I am saying”. If for example I use “speak” in an apparently transitive grammatical modality, what is in question is only the modality of speech (cf. I speak French). Lastly, while indirectly “I am speaking of X” comes down to “I am saying something about X”; “I am speaking to X” comes down either to saying that I have a relation with X which entails language in one form or another (it is only the possibility of interchange which is recognized) or, within a clearly established context, I am uttering “sayings” to X (and it is a modality of “saying” which is denoted).

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38 Jean Sommer, “vocal coach” and former singer, professionally explores the teaching of these questions on his blog. He has namely illustrated his approach by analyzing a time-stamped phenomenon: the television appearances of Sarkozy, cf. http://jean-sommer.fr/prise-de-parole-en-public-les-5-lecons-de-sarkozy-15/. For him, the “where I’m speaking from” he is interested in concerns the physical voice, its function, action and place in the communication process. The context here is different.

39 Translator’s note: the original French terms are “je parle”, “j’énonce”, and “(un) dit”. The closest equivalents I was able to find were speak and say, but it should be noted that the transitivity of ‘speak’ appears to be expanding, at least in American English.
“Say” presupposes the objectivization of an assessable “saying”: one says *something* (true, false, incoherent, interesting, etc.), however one doesn’t speak *something* (except languages)! ‘Saying’ is a performative act, ‘speaking’ is only an affirmation or an existential modality. As for the “speech of an ‘academic profferer’”, it is not supposed to be recognized for the modality of speaking, but for the nature of the “sayings” in his speech and where the proffering happens. In other words, in an academic context, the “where from” (chair, reference, which is both the place of and the authentication for speaking) is preserved for the same reason as the “saying”; the “I” (in all its subjectivity) is erased by the mask of an “it” given as objectivizable; the “speak” (which is potentially without an object and is validated by its ‘I’) is occulted in favor of a “say” (which is potentially without an ‘I’ and is validated by its object). Hence there is an apparent translation, from a “Where am I speaking from?” via a “Where is it saying from?” to a “Where is it saying X from?”. Even if, obviously, this is far from always being the case. Even if, after some thought, it turns out that it is never the case (or even that, in fact, it can never be the case)! But in an area where interpretation partakes in the construal of what is grasped, whether there is translation or not is not essential: what is important here is that it is objectified and given as the standard of use and rule of reference.

**Whom am I Addressing?**

If the “Where am I speaking from?” leads to “Where is it saying X from?” then one would expect, when “Whom am I addressing” is an ‘academic profferer’, that he have the status of an “it saying”, which presupposes an “appropriate addressee”.

In general, the appropriate addressees are ‘sociologically and academically’ his peers, students, assessors; they partake in a complex network organized both hierarchically and systemically: the world they share and manifest together. Those addressees seemingly have no interest in an “I”, they simply function within the enclosure of a shared universe and are concerned both with the representation of what constitutes (who constitutes) this “it saying”, and by the contents of X conveyed by the “saying’ said”.

**What Role do I Play?**

Again, the role is constrained. It is necessarily accepted, predefined in the enclosure of the universe shared by the ‘academic profferer’ and his appropriate addressees. Each role has its standards. It is important to know them and to master their underlying norms and rules. To step into a role which is not

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40 Just as “write” presupposes the materialization of a text.
predefined is to leave the enclosure. That is to say, to leave the shared universe, to become an “outsider”.

**What For?**
To stay in the enclosure, change places within the enclosure vs. recognize or impose the “saying X”. To possibly shift the boundaries without—completely—becoming an “outsider”. For practical reasons.

**Acknowledgments**
I circulated several versions of this work in French and thank all who took the time to read it; more particularly Sylvain Auroux, Michelle Auzanneau, Josiane Boutet, Ihor Burkowsky, Juan Carlos Godenzzi, Jean-Marc Lévy-Leblond, Gilles Siouffi, Andrée Tabouret-Keller, Georges Véronique. Whether in the form of detailed remarks, assessments or overall opinion, their comments and viewpoints greatly helped me “finalize” it! My thanks also go to Margaret Dunham for her translation.

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