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Generative semantics: Secret handshakes, anarchy notes, and the implosion of ethos

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Generative Semantics: Secret Handshakes, Anarchy Notes, and the Implosion of *Ethos*

> Groups of people become distinctive as groups sometimes by their habitual patterns of commitment—not by the beliefs they hold, but by the manner in which they hold them and give them expression. Such people do not necessarily share ideas; they share rather stylistic proclivities and the qualities of mental life of which those proclivities are tokens.
>
> —*Edwin Black*

Ethos is generally associated with individual rhetors.[1] Certainly that's the association Aristotle had in mind when he recorded the most influential usage of the term (*Rhetoric* 1356a). But there is ample warrant for moving to a broader level—the level adopted in this paper, a case study of the outrageous *ethos* of a group of generative linguists on the cusp of the sixties and seventies.

There is ample warrant for identifying *ethos* not simply with specific individuals in specific orations but also with identifiable communities. In ordinary language, for instance, *ethos* has always been far more communal than individual: "***Ethos***. . . . [1.] The characteristic spirit, prevalent tone of sentiment, of a people or community; the 'genius' of an institution or system" (*OED*, 1933 reissue). And it has a similar sense among our academic neighbors—in literary criticism, where books have titles like *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy* (Schneider); in sociology, where books have titles like *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Siu-Kai), or, more famously, in Merton's discussion of the general "ethos of science" (268). Coming closer to home, consider Augustine's notion of a Christian *ethos*, which presupposes that the rhetor stands for group values (*De Doctrina* 4.27-29). Consider the similarly presupposing admonition of George Campbell about the influence of "party-spirit" (97). Consider Black's above-epigramitized talk of patterned commitments and stylistic proclivities, which, as Halloran tells us, is essentially the projection of *ethos* to the communal level (Black 85; Halloran, "Molecular Biology" 71). Elsewhere, Halloran tells us more: "the word *ethos* has both an individual and a collective meaning. It makes sense to speak of the *ethos* of this or that person, but it makes equally good sense to speak of the *ethos* of a particular

type of person, of a professional group, or a culture, or an era in history" ("Aristotle's" 62). Elsewhere yet: "ethos is the spirit of a culture or people," a binding force which transforms "an aggregation of individuals into a community" ("Doing Public Business").[2]

To factor out the individual from the collective aspects of the term, I would like to borrow a familiar, *persona*. I have no illusions that this loan word will catch on systematically for these purposes in rhetoric, since among its confusions *persona* carries the unfortunate baggage of artifice, and rhetorical theory is already perceived as the luggage clearing house for artificiality.[3] But for the duration of this study, at least, I would like to split the senses of *ethos* that Halloran calls individual and collective by adopting *persona* to indicate an individual *ethos*, in contrast to a group *ethos*. The relations between these two notions are intricate, but the analogy that comes most quickly to hand is the constitution of a dialect by lots of overlapping idiolects.

This analogy is particularly useful because it gets quickly at the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Idiolects constitute a dialect, but a dialect also severely constrains its constituent idiolects. Anyone who speaks too idiosyncratically will simply be left out in the cold, in a private language and a private world. You can't go around using *glory* to mean "nice knock-down argument" (Carroll 268f) unless others in your dialect group do too, or unless you somehow let them know what you mean by *glory* and somehow get them to tolerate your deliberate flaunting of the group's semantic parameters. If neither of those situations hold, you're only speaking to yourself, and, even if you can win good will for your new usage, you can't make too many other innovations, or you will aggravate and alienate your community. You'll be on your own. In exactly the same way, a rhetor's individual choices are constrained: the group *ethos* strongly influences the rhetorical decisions of its members; therefore, their personae. You can't stray too far from the expected patterns of your group, or you simply won't be in the group anymore.

In large measure this influence comes because being a member of a group requires one also to be a member of the audience for that group—deconstructionists read other deconstructionists—and, as Demosthenes pointed out, the audience has a strong grip on every aspect of the oration, *ethos* certainly not least (*On Organization* §36; see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 24ff for discussion of the observation, Yoos for an especially perceptive treatment of the reciprocal pressures between *ethos* and audience). An audience of insiders has a stronger grip than most. There are often lots of outside communiques issued by the members of a group, particularly when there are outside stakes (recognition, recruitment, advancement, filthy lucre), but much of a group's discourse is for internal consumption: to rally one another, to supply each other with tools and ammunition, to shape the collective allegiances, to achieve and reinforce adherence. Writing to an audience that shares your beliefs and values, that sparks to your terminology, that buys many of your background assumptions, confers a powerful and exhilarating freedom. You can

get right to the heart of the matter, using the suasions keyed most directly to its shared positions. But that freedom often has a price: obscurity and aggravation for outsiders. Continuing to pick on deconstructionists, one sometimes gets the impression that they write *only* for other deconstructionists, that you have to enter their world because they aren't interested in yours.

To be an identifiable member of a group, then, is (as rhetor) to draw on its vocabulary, to echo its enthymemes, to wallow in its stylistic proclivities; in short, to evoke and perpetuate its *ethos*. To be a member of a group is (as audience) to demand its vocabulary, to resonate at its enthymemes, to wallow in its stylistic proclivities; to evoke and perpetuate its *ethos*.

But the picture still isn't complete. Groups often make decisions to display certain traits. Sometimes, they are tacit decisions, of the "social contract" variety—as with physicists who, for a goodly portion of this century, shared the notions of isolation and existentialism that gave rise to themes of "disintegration, violence, and derangement" in their work (Holton 79). At least as often, however, such patterns are deliberate. Scientists associated with a rising program, for instance, will frequently adopt explicitly evangelical personae; scientists associated with an established program will often adopt conservative personae. More directly, every group has exemplary members, members who have more influence over the collective definition than do others; their personae are picked up and eagerly echoed by others. These elite are the primary sources of most of the terms, the arguments, the stylistic traits, the attitudes and postures that come to define the group's *ethos*. Again the idiolect-dialect analogy rings true.

The affiliation between idiolects and dialects is not the inert super- and subset relation most often represented in introductory linguistics classes. That is, the relation is not always the way (drastically reducing the idiolect/dialect ratio) that it is depicted in a familiar Venn diagram like Figure 1.

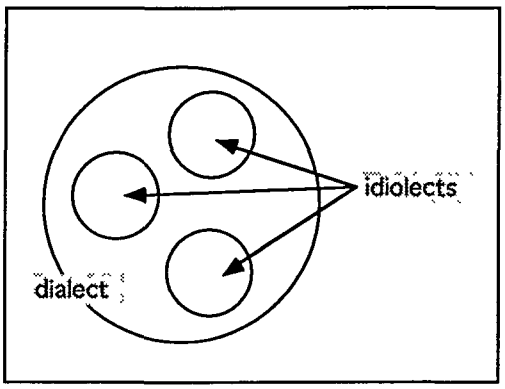


Figure 1: Idiolect as an inert subset of dialect.

Some speakers are content in such a static, sublimated relationship with the rest of their community. But others are more innovative and deliberately push their language around—borrowing from other dialects and languages, splicing together previously unrelated elements of their own dialect, even inventing *ab novo*—in such an effective way that they attract emulators. Artists and scientists regularly infuse and rearrange their language, imposing their idiolects on the general canvas. A new term, like Tzara's (later, Breton's) *dada*, or a reworked term, like Planck's (later Bohr's) *quantum* can be so influential as to define an entire community. Other rhetors can end up in leadership roles for various extra-linguistic reasons and attract linguistic emulators by sheer dint of position, even when they are busy mangling their language. Politicians, business leaders, and athletes are familiar in this role, littering various dialects with words like *prioritize* and expressions like "give a hundred and ten percent." In both cases—focused or gratuitous innovation—the relation between idiolect and dialect is the much more dynamic one depicted in Figure 2, where some speaker reshapes her language community.

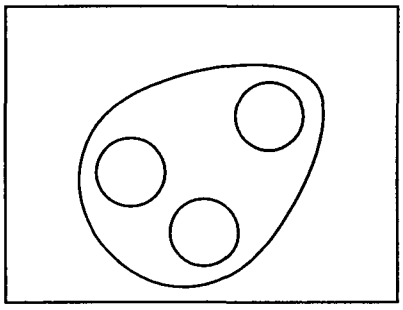


Figure 2: An Idiolect reshaping a dialect.

More realistically, when a wider range of contributions are considered, the dialect picture mutates toward the lumpy, straining bag in Figure 3.

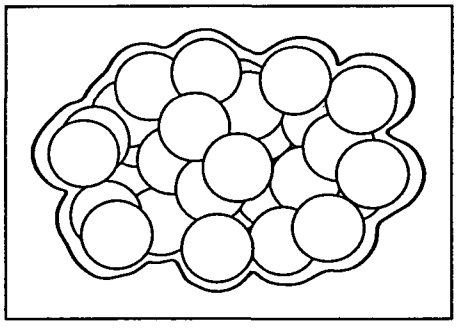


Figure 3: Dialect as a lumpy bag of idiolects

Figure 3 is already getting ugly and complex, though we haven't touched on the permeability of idiolects, interpenetrating one another in their heteroglossia, rather than simply piling up like a heap of old plates; and we haven't touched upon other ramified issues like style, register, and genre (all of which suggest that the idiolect, too, is a rather lumpy bag of permeable notions); and we haven't looked beyond the level of dialect, or at elements larger than words, when the diagram would begin to go into the third and fourth dimensions. Very similar complications arise when the lumpy bag in Figure 3 is seen as an *ethos* containing and constraining member personae. But the bidirectional moral of the analogy should be clear: personae (≈idiolects) shape group *ethos* (dialect), which determines and defines the personae.

All of which brings us to generative semantics, a waxed-and-waned offshoot of Chomskyan transformational grammar. This paper is a case study of the issues concerning communal *ethos*, chronicling the ethical adventures of a group of linguists who were spectacularly successful, and then, even more spectacularly, weren't. Over its brief life cycle (c. 1967-1977), the group's *ethos* became more distinctive, and more deeply entrenched, until, in fact, the group was defined almost entirely by its spirit. From the staid beginnings of Noam Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, with its fretting over sentences like "John plays golf," generative semantics bloomed into a rollicking, high-stepping movement that, leaving Chomsky way behind, hosted semantics festivals and *which* hunts and rummaged for data in medicine chests and rejoiced in sentences like "Spiro conjectures Ex-lax."[4] It also grew one of the more exuberant *ethoi* in modern science.

In the early stages of the movement, this exuberance was infectious. Generative semantics papers were deliberately humorous and overtly political in a characteristically sixties reaction to the staid, largely apolitical, doggedly scientific prose in which earlier transformational grammar had dressed itself. Generative semantics recruits were predominantly young and calculatedly anti-Chomskyan. In the later stages of the movement, this exuberance manifested itself in a giddy celebration of anomalous data and a concomitant frankness about the inadequacies of the theory to handle such data. This stance did not inspire confidence; desertions, defections, and (especially) denouncements were common. *Infectious* was still true of the movement's *ethos*, but in another sense. Linguists began to avoid generative semantics like the plague. The movement collapsed like a bad lung.

Generative Semantics

> This paper is concerned with claims about the applicability of transformations to idioms made in a recent article by the notorious war criminal, U. S. Air Force Lt. Bruce Fraser. Fraser maintains that 'conjunction reduction will never be applicable' within an idiom, than 'no noun phrase in an idiom may ever be pronominalized [or] take a restrictive relative clause', and that 'gapping never occurs' within an idiom; he in addition states that he has 'been able to find no idioms in which a noun phrase may be clefted'. Field

> work which I and my colleagues Yuck Foo and Tri Bung Quim have carried out, using as informants other U. S. Air Force war criminals who were undergoing political reeducation, has demonstrated the existence of a class of counterexamples to all of Fraser's claims of supposed inapplicability of transformations to idioms. I refer to the idioms *take a piss, take a shit,* and *blow a fart.*
>
> —*Quang Phuc Dong*

Generative semantics (not to be confused with the Korzybski-Hayakawa philosophy, *general* semantics, to which it bears only the most oblique relation) began as an orthodox development within the transformational-generative framework of the early sixties. Generative semantics reworked Chomsky's notion of deep structure until it became a semantic representation. Where Chomsky's *Aspects*-model generated syntactic structures and mapped them onto meanings, the generative semanticists began with meanings and derived the syntactic structures from them. This reformulation led to some friction.

Well, friction is litotes. There was a full-blown, vitriolic, so's-your-old-thesis-chairman schism. On one side was the formidable Postal, fresh from battles on behalf of Chomsky with the "structuralists," and from framework-stretching research with Jerrold Katz (see, in particular, Postal, *Constituent Structure, Aspects*; Katz and Postal); there was the brilliant Háj (John Robert) Ross, whose 1967 thesis under Chomsky reoriented syntactic research in ways that have still not been fully explored; there was the fiery George Lakoff; the quiet, razor-sharp Robin Tolmach Lakoff; and the man who was, in all senses of the term, the presiding genius of generative semantics, James McCawley.

On the other side was Chomsky. But, Chomsky being Chomsky, he wasn't alone for long. He quickly assembled a pride from his always-inventive, always-contentious, usually brainy MIT students. Still, he had lost (in Whately's sense of the term, 112ff) the Presumption. While he was busy recruiting and shaping new adherents, virtually all of the rest of the field swung toward generative semantics. The center of generative linguistics shifted from Cambridge to the Midwest, with the Lakoffs at Michigan, McCawley at Chicago, and various sympathizers at the University of Illinois-Urbana and Ohio State.

The dispute effectively ended in the late seventies with Chomsky's come-from-behind forces dominant and the generative semanticists dispersing like the crowd after Woodstock. As with every other scientific dispute of interesting dimensions, the outcome was not a simple matter of the either/or logic that usually makes its way into the folklore and the history books: either generative semantics was right or interpretive semantics (Chomsky's position) was right; there was a crucial test; generative semantics failed; therefore, interpretive semantics was right. Too many issues were on the table for that, and both programs had their respective strengths and liabilities.

The story of generative semantics and its dispute with Chomsky's forces is far too big to tell here,[5] but plotting the distinctive *ethos* of that movement provides a useful perspective on the brief, spectacular flowering of generative semantics. Plotting that *ethos* also has the practical and familiar virtue of any case study, helping to throw some light on general theoretical issues; in particular, the relation between persona and *ethos*.

More importantly, plotting the *ethos* of generative semantics exemplifies the totality with which *ethos* permeates group rhetoric. There are relatively "superficial" elements of the generative semantics *ethos*—stylistic proclivities, if you like. But there are some very "deep" elements of the *ethos* as well—the patterned commitments and qualities of mental life that drove the program. Both the superficial and the deep elements of the generative semantics *ethos* were responsible for the rise of generative semantics, and then for its later nose dive, as the audience shifted. But the superficial elements were more symptomatic of the wax. The deeper elements—the philosophical and methodological commitments that resulted in a veneration of data and a confessional honesty—are more directly related to its rapid wane.

The generative semantics *ethos* was suffused with the attitudes and artifacts of the sixties, and it had, like much of the rhetoric of that era (let's take the famous Peter Townsend line to be metonymical, "I hope I die before I get old"), a self-defeating quality about it. It wasn't built to last. In fact, it isn't going too far to say that *ethos* doomed generative semantics, but only if we look deeply at *ethos*, beyond the surface style to the patterned commitments of the group.[6] Such divisions are always problematic, but as long as we keep in mind that the talk of "superficial" and "deep" levels is something of a convenient fiction, we can identify two characteristics of the generative semantics *ethos* that fit more easily in the superficial category, two in the deep category. At the surface, the two most distinctive features of the *ethos* were humor and political concern. Deeper down, the two most distinctive features were the veneration of data and a frankness that bordered on suicidal. The humor tended to be absurdist and tended to be directed, rather narrowly, toward other generative semanticists; it was not invitational. Robin Tolmach Lakoff has called the generative semanticist style "a kind of secret handshake" ("The Way" 977), and a big part of the secret was in the humor. The politics tended to be anarchic and directed mainly against the personalities and beliefs behind the invasion of Vietnam, rather than toward any particular ideal. Nixon and Johnson and J. Edgar (or Jedgar) Hoover showed up in a wide number of data sentences, as buffoons or criminals or general objects of derision; serious contenders for heroes (like Bakunin or Marx or Lenin) did not get much attention, though some rock stars put in an appearance.

The Surface *Ethos: Humor and Politics*

Is it not, then, better to be ridiculous and friendly than clever and hostile?

—*Socrates*

Two events were especially important for the growth of generative semantics, for its roots in the Midwest, and for defining its *ethos*: the Linguistic Institute at Urbana in the Summer of 1968 and the fifth meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society the following Spring.

Lakoff and Ross taught at the Institute, as did McCawley, who brought many of his more promising students over from Chicago. Robert Lees, the legendary Chomskyan polemicist of the romantic pre-*Aspects* days, was the Institute's Director, and he was decidedly sympathetic to the new trend. The mix was, in the argot of the period, mind-blowing. The spirit of the Institute has been immortalized by several of the participants in "Camelot, 1968" (Lancelot, le Fay, and Knight[7]), an underground paper so recklessly panegyrical toward generative semantics and abusive of Chomsky's forces that even McCawley, a free-speech advocate and itinerant pornographer, felt compelled to bowdlerize it before bringing it to publication in *Notes from the Linguistic Underground* the following decade (249). Lancelot and his companions offer "an account of some of the linguistic Events of that Year: wherein are detailed the Declarations of the New Court and the Weapons used in the Awefull Battle to repeal Certain Decrees of the Old Court" (249). Frederick Newmeyer, who attended the Institute, has somewhat harsher words for the Events of that Year, saying the Institute "stands out not only as the high-water mark in the ascendant tide of generative semantics, but also as the epitome of mixing reasoned argument with pure showmanship and pure salesmanship" (*Linguistic Theory* 152).[8] This appraisal is only harsh, of course, if *showmanship* and *salesmanship* are construed, according to the standard academic bent (which, in fact, Newmeyer shares here), in which the only function of rhetoric is to make the worst argument appear the better. From a lyceum vantage, mixing reason with showmanship is the blending of *logos* with *pathos* for the more persuasive propagation of the truth; Aristotle quotes Prodicus approvingly on "slipping in a bit of the fifty-drachma show lecture" to keep the audience alert (*Rhetoric* 1415b). From a more deeply sophistic vantage, reason and showmanship are not so easily detached, and the participants in the 1968 Institute are best described as foraging around enthusiastically in discourse, trying to make some truth. And *enthusiasm* is the operative term. The pervading spirit of the Institute was the irreverent gusto of Lakoff, Ross, and, especially, McCawley—one of whose pseudonyms (Quang Phuc Dong) for his occasional scatolinguistic articles was said to hail from the

Southern Hanoi Institute of Technology, and the Institute participants wore their S.H.I.T. tee-shirts with great pride.

The generative semanticists quickly became well known for having fun, fun that spilled into and all over their work, which had everything to do with the times. We are, don't forget, in the late sixties and early seventies, when the cultivated, farcical alienation of the hippies had a pervasive influence on all things academic and most things nonacademic, and the generative semanticists—"a bunch of people who got together at conferences to make puns and play Fictionary and smoke funny cigarettes" (R. Lakoff, "The Way" 62)—are as representative of that period as beads or bomb threats or Bong pipes.[9] Their work teems with the themes of drugs, music, casual sex, and radical politics.

Their data sentences, for instance, implicated all three of the most notorious elements of the counterculture, elements which (like much of the spirit of that decade) rapidly degenerated into seventies' clichés; in this case, into one of the most mindless and hedonistic slogans of all time: "Sex! Drugs! And rock n' roll!" (respectively illustrated by sentences 1a-c, 2a-c, and 3a-c)

1 a The fact that Max plorbed Betty did not convince Pete to caress her on the lips. (Postal, "Anaphoric Islands" 74)
  b The M.C. introduced Mick Jagger's penis as being large enough to amaze the most jaded of groupies. (Borkin, *Problems* 18)
  c Let's fuck. (Tolmach Lakoff, "What you can do" 82)
2 a Hey, if John went to Chicago, that means we'll soon have a big supply of dope. (Schmerling, "Presupposition" 249)
  b My cache of marijuana got found by Fido, the police dog. (Tolmach Lakoff, "Passive Resistance" 154)
  c Fred does nothing but smoke hashish and play the sarod; John is similar. (McCawley, *Grammar and Meaning* 304)
3 a *Sam snarped 10 Beatle records for a nude photo of Tricia Nixon. (McCawley, *Thirty Million* 80)
  b Paul is dead and I do not believe he is dead. (G. Lakoff, "Pragmatics")[10]
  c She left one too many a boy *behind*. He committed *suicide*. (Bob Dylan, cited in Zwicky 683)[11]

Along with the colorful data sentences came equally colorful rule names. Postal called one transformation *Flip*. Ross named another one *Slifting*; then, embracing alliteration, he proposed *Sluicing* and *Stuffing*. Carden proposed *Q-magic*. These names at least had some reference to the actions performed by the rule (Slifting, for instance, raised a Sentence node, an S node, to a higher clause, so its etymology is *S-lifting*; Flip exchanged noun phrases; Q-magic concerned quantifiers).

Later in the game, as the distance from Chomsky grew, the contempt for his descriptive machinery bred a snide nominalism, and names for transformations became deliberately arbitrary; in particular, there was a fad of adopting proper

names, like *Irving*, *Ludwig*, and *Richard*. Other names became absurdly specific, like Grinder's *Apparel Pronoun Deletion* (for the syntactic behavior of certain sentences concerning disrobing) and Postal's *Euphemistic Genital Deletion* (for sentences where certain body-part nouns are demurely spirited away, as in *John is too big for Mary*, or *Max is playing with himself again*).

> [My earlier paper] contained the ultimate solution to the problems of pronominalization, reference, identity, as well as an item of overwhelming and irrefutable empirical evidence against [Chomsky's] lexicalist position. Unfortunately, it was handwritten on a package of Puritan Hog Chow, and was eaten by a hungry Chicago policeman who tore it from me during a tear-gas attack on three jaywalkers, thereby being lost to mankind. ("Cryptic Note" 340n1)

Little of the humor, though, could be said to occupy center stage. The papers don't exist to tell jokes; serious work goes on among, and within, the jokes.

The jokes participate in the papers—sometimes propelling them along, sometimes offering commentary on the author's confidence about the analysis—but mostly just contributing a general tone of goofiness to the work, in deliberate counterpoint to Chomsky's dogged earnestness. To use a slightly effete word for the practice, it is more whimsical than humorous. The whimsy depends on odd situations, in-joke references to other linguists or to cultural figures outside linguistics, and a general mood of surrealism, not on punchlines or strenuously sustained metaphors. There is also a very clear gradation of the amount of whimsy as a function of audience. The rabid-hog quotation above, for instance, comes from an underground paper circulated amongst core generative semanticists. To stay with the same author, Morgan's conference papers are still loose and whimsical, with subheads like "Pickles and strawberries" and the extended participation of Ernie Banks, but they are markedly less informal. His more mainstream publications, in journals like *Language*, are positively tame (though hardly Chomskyan).

The role of forum, that is, and consequently of audience, was an important factor in the generative semanticist *ethos*. Newmeyer accurately attributes much of "the whimsical style of presentation that pervaded so much written in [the generative semanticist] framework" to "youthful enthusiasm (the average age of generative semanticists in 1970 was well below 30) and [to] the rambunctious personalities of several prominent generative semanticists" (*Linguistic Theory* 2: 136, 137). But he fails to mention that a good deal of that work was prepared initially for oral delivery at gatherings of the clan, particularly for the yearly celebrations of the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS).

The CLS meetings were primarily oral events, and effective oral techniques do not always work equally well on paper. Ross and Lakoff set the early standard with energetic presentations in the sixties that recruited so many generative

semanticists, such as their rabble-rousing classes at the Urbana Linguistic Institute, raising wit and flash to the top of the rhetorical currency market. But it is noteworthy that this work never made it to press.[13] More importantly—and here is where audience is crucial—the CLS gatherings were largely gatherings of the faithful. In Booth's terms, CLS presentations were principally directed at a community of the blessed, and the style reinforced the group *ethos*. "You could always tell a G[enerative] S[emantics] paper" Robin Tolmach Lakoff recalls, "by its title, its breezy style, its funny examples. You knew who belonged, who your people were. It was cozy comfort in a heartless world" ("The Way" 977).

Equally important for the exuberant *ethos* is what Hagège (21) contemptuously dismisses as the "whiff of amateurism": many of the more outrageous generative semanticist disquisitions did come from amateurs, graduate students. The chief generative semantics schools all followed the practice that Chomsky (and Morris Halle) had begun in MIT of urging students out into the fray as soon as possible. But where inexperience and eagerness tended to manifest themselves in MIT students as vicious polemics, in young generative semanticists they showed up more often as loony humor, political asides, and declarations of awe at the complexity of the data. Among the ethical attributes that George Campbell said impairs audience adherence are "youth, inexperience of affairs, former want of success, and the like" (97)—a pretty fair description of graduate students. So long as the audience was largely sympathetic, the exuberance was more infectious than infelicitous, but once the words were down on paper and in wider, more hostile circulation, they became virtually self-condemning.

Group *ethos*, to refract a phrase from Burke that captures the essence of Figure 3, arises from "a peculiar complexity of motives" (33). Newmeyer's *rambunctious* is right on the mark for the overall spirit of generative semantics, but a group *ethos* (≈dialect) is a composite from bits and pieces the audience finds in the personae (≈idiolects) of individual rhetors. It is instructive to look more directly at the specific motives constituting the general spirit. In George Lakoff's hands, humor could be downright nasty. One of his attacks on Chomsky ends—cross my heart—with "Nyahh! Nyahh!" ("Fuzzy Grammar" 290).[14] And his data sentences occasionally took potshots at the other side—such as the cheap move of tainting by proximity, setting *lexicalists*, a term for Chomsky's troops, side-by-side with *whores* ("Presupposition" 333), or this lovely data sentence:

4 Chomsky is the DeGaulle of linguistics. ("Linguistics and Natural Logic" 196)

For McCawley, who has a very widespread reputation for gentleness, even when directly challenging someone's argument, the humor was clearly more jubilant. Robin Tolmach Lakoff falls somewhere in the middle; Ross a little closer to McCawley; and Postal's humor, a juxtaposition of deadpan scholarly prose and

data sentences teeming with wombats and gorillas, is more difficult to pin down. Many of their students also had similarly individual clusters of stylistic character traits—some leaning more toward politics, others towards absurdity—each one indicating a slightly different configuration of motives, and a different hierarchy of role models.

Similarly, individual patterns are present in the political dimensions of the *ethos*. Linguists were among the most concerned protesters in the sixties. A very Beat-looking Háj Ross, for instance, can be seen in the foreground of a picture in *Time* accompanying the story of Dow Chemical's Lab Director, Frederick Leavitt, being barricaded in a Harvard conference room for seven hours, to protest Dow's napalm production (3 November 1967, 57). McCawley was a vocal participant in the 1966 University of Chicago protests against Selective Service having access to class rankings, at one time sneaking dangerously into a meeting for tenured-only faculty on the question, taking notes, and reporting back to a student meeting. Jerry Morgan was very active in Chicago convention protests. It was "an era in which to be a linguist it seemed necessary to protest the war in Viet Nam" (Darnell v), reflected in the dedication to one of the more important collections of essays from the era: "To the Children of Vietnam" (Jacobs and Rosenbaum). And, of course, there was Chomsky.

Much of the political activity of linguists may have been indirectly related to the impassioned stand Chomsky took against the American invasion of Indochina. Certainly a partial motivation for many students who joined the MIT linguistics program at the time was a political affinity with Chomsky (just as one of Chomsky's motivations for studying at the University of Pennsylvania in the fifties was his political affinity with his teacher there, Zellig Harris). More generally, a partial motivation for many linguists going into the field at the time, and particularly into transformational grammar, was Chomsky's political reputation. Although he kept his politics and linguistics quite distinct then, his political feelings were extremely well known, and widely applauded, in the linguistics community. McCawley, for instance, ends a long letter to him about a technical dispute with the postscript, "There is no truth to the nasty rumor going around that the CIA is subsidizing my research in hopes of thereby diverting your energies from the war" (McCawley:Chomsky, 18 January, 1968).

The generative semanticists, while no more deeply concerned about the political pathologies of the day than Chomsky's followers, were far less reluctant about spreading their activism to linguistics. Again, data sentences offer the most succinct illustration:

5 a Since Nixon was elected, I've come to miss LBJ. (Davison 190)
  b Even Muriel didn't vote for Hubert. (Horn, "Negative Transportation" 126)
  c Mitchell can't bear to look at his wife, and neither can I. (Morgan, "Criterion" 383)

d Amerika's claim that it was difficult to control Vietnamese aggression in Vietnam surprised no one. (Grinder 300)
e When may the FBI arrest Angela? (Lawler, "*Any* Questions" 164)
f It's obvious that Dick's hiding something. (Schmerling, "Subjectless Sentences" 578)

These examples are all from the "second generation" of generative semanticists. Among the early leaders, Postal never blended politics and linguistics, Ross and the Lakoffs only occasionally and peripherally, taking a few swipes at Republicans, for instance. Then comes McCawley. He was somewhat more politically active than the others—getting involved in the Selective Service protests, demonstrating for civil rights in Jackson, Mississippi, burning his draft card, refusing to pay his taxes—but the more important characteristic was his lack of reservation about involving his political views in his linguistics. Under his famous *nom de guerre*, Quang Phuc Dong, he founded what Pullum (101) calls "the *Fuck Lyndon Johnson* school of example construction," and, as that designation indicates, it was a distinctively counterculture sort of involvement. Here are some of his data sentences:

6 a J. Edgar Hoover is an old fart. (Quang 203)
b Nixon, you imperialist butcher, take your lunatic Secretary of Defence and shove him up your ass. (Yuck 19)
c It's likely that Nixon won't send the marines to Botswana until 1972. (McCawley, *Grammar and Meaning* 220)

McCawley was also the most influential generative semanticist teacher, and it is with the second generation that the FLJ examples really began to flower (5a-c are from McCawley's students; 5d-e from assorted other second-generation generative semanticists).

The geographical, as well as the temporal, location of the movement also contributed strongly to this tendency. Chicago, the home of McCawley's institution and the site of its yearly CLS festivals, was a political hotbed—witnessing, as a small sample, the Democratic convention riots, by the police; the subsequent conspiracy trial; the murder of Fred Hampton; the Weatherman's Days of Rage; assorted acts of autocratic weirdness by Richard Daley; and assorted acts of anarchist weirdness by groups like WITCH (the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell).

The Deeper *Ethos:* Data-worship, Frankness, and Not Being Chomsky

> Any beginning linguistics student will discover with a little thought that men of great stature in the academic establishment, even very bright ones like Chomsky, can be wrong on just about every issue. It makes me wonder about the "experts" who are running our governments.
>
> —*George Lakoff*

In the early to midseventies, the counterculture was taking generational discord to lengths unfamiliar throughout much of Western history (Roszack 1-41), making any assault on authority attractive almost by definition. "The Oedipal Conflict has replaced Marxian Dialectics," proclaimed Abbie Hoffman (25); "KILL YOUR PARENTS!" screamed Jerry Rubin (194). And, just as the hippies defined themselves in pained relief against "the establishment," a major impetus of generative semantics was the rejection of the Chomskyan orthodoxy (the parallels also extend to the level of irony, since they came from the Chomskyan orthodoxy just as most hippies came from the mainstream and the middle class). "Transformational grammar is," he warned the upcoming students, "as much a part of the intellectual establishment as General Motors is a part of the military-industrial complex." Not only that, but "the pronouncements of a writer on transformational grammar can be just as full of hot air as the pronouncements of any White House aide" (Foreword ii). And, as with any establishment, there was a central representative who instantiated all that was wrong with it, and a central tenet of Lakoff's defining persona, he has said, was "the idea of not being like Chomsky."

Robin Tolmach Lakoff, in a clear example of this rejection, identified one proposal with "some of the more radical transformationalists" (*Abstract Syntax* 168) and opposed it to "more conservative transformational linguists (such as Chomsky)" (*Abstract Syntax* 215n5). "More conservative" might have been the mildest description generative semanticists offered of Chomsky. Because he was regarded with almost religious fervor when the schism began, Chomsky was promptly demonized. Reflecting on this definitional swing many years later, Tolmach Lakoff used exactly these terms: "once Chomsky was seen not to be an idol," she recalls, "he was recast as satanic, the Enemy" ("The Way" 970).

The two central manifestations of this rejection of Chomsky—and the central themes of this half of the case study—were a celebration of data and an extraordinary frankness about theoretical limitations.

The generative semanticists saw Chomsky as dishonest in his handling of data—reworking it to serve his temporary purposes, discarding what he couldn't rework, ignoring vast regions altogether—and they took a sharply contrasting attitude, jubilantly celebrating all kinds of data. They raised hosannas not just for data that supported their work, and not just for problematic data that gave their enemies trouble, but also—indeed, especially—for data that gave their own approach the fits.

An exactly parallel pattern holds for theoretical machinery: where Chomsky's tendency is to redefine and retain modifications of his flawed proposals, usually in terms which point to their new and improved abilities, not their former inadequacies, generative semanticists tended to renounce theoretical innovations very publicly, to proclaim their errors from the rooftops.

And there was another related pattern, at least in the eyes of the generative semanticists, in the social extensions of the two models. They found Chomsky

exclusionary in his disciplinary politics, defining other linguists in a concentric Dantesque vision: "There were the inner circle," as Robin Tolmach Lakoff characterizes Chomksy's vision of linguistics, and "the various outer circles, Limbo, and Bad Guys" ("The Way" 972). The generative semanticists, in distinct counterpoint, wanted everyone to join their party.

Where Chomsky turns his back rapidly on people from his program who head off in directions he does not personally find promising, generative semanticists encouraged diversity, welcoming any and all forays into uncharted data; their corresponding Limbo was a true purgatory, not populated with hopelessly misguided researchers (the way Chomsky views, say, sociolinguists), but with people working on things generative semanticists just hadn't gotten around to yet. Where Chomsky works on a rather narrow, almost individual, set of linguistic problems—always using images of isolation to describe his own relation to the rest of the field—generative semanticists eagerly looked for problems in other areas of linguistics, in psychology, in philosophy, in logic, in literature, even in the medicine cabinet.

Consider the reverent title, *Adverbs, Vowels, and Other Objects of Wonder*, a title which would stand out like a sore thumb against the antiseptic titles in Chomsky's canon—*Syntactic Structures, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, Some Concepts and Consequences of the Theory of Government and Binding*. The reverent title, in point of fact, belongs to McCawley, but it would be equally natural coming from almost any generative semanticist. Chomsky's titles emphasize the theoretical. He has always been wary of problematic data, and in the early sixties began erecting walls to keep pristine the sorts of evidence he finds theoretically valuable (or, in his favorite approbatory adjective, *interesting*). This divide-and-conquer approach is perfectly reasonable, of course; indeed, inevitable. Like other scientists, linguists need to isolate relevant phenomena from irrelevant phenomena; a cough comes out of the same mouth as a word, and both have meaning. But Chomsky's detractors have often accused him of using these distinctions to shield his theories from counterevidence, charges which have never been louder than during the generative-interpretive semantics dispute.

Generative semanticists especially zeroed in on Chomsky's famous competence/performance dichotomy, finding some very weak sections in this particular wall, and rapidly coming to regard his deliberate neglect of language use (performance) as a pernicious narrowing of data that isolated linguistics from all the human aspects of language. McCawley, as on most issues, was the most eloquent on this one, even appealing to the rhetorical aspects of language in his attempt to broaden linguistics:

> I reject the widespread belief that one is not doing linguistics if one is studying how language is used in reasoning, telling jokes, writing poetry, or persuading people to buy Volkswagens or vote for Eugene

> McCarthy, or how language malfunctions when one has a bullet in one's brain or is high on hash. I find the idea that such studies are not linguistics as peculiar as the (fortunately not very popular) idea that one should study the physiology of the digestive tract without reference to food and drink. (*Adverbs, Vowels* 221)

Ethos and action are intimately related,[15]—as our primary term's more famous lexical cousin, *ethics*, illustrates most clearly—and it is through this relation that we come to what I have been calling in this study (albeit unsatisfactorily) the "deeper *ethos*." McCawley's credo reveals this relation, especially in its wide-ranging implications for methodology. McCawley is not just talking about an abstract position, about the incidental rejection of some widespread (read *Chomskyan*) belief. He is talking about how to do linguistics. In particular, he is arguing that the principal way to get beyond the isolation of Chomskyan formal linguistics is to introduce functional and contextual notions (what language is used for, and in what circumstances—that is, performance).

Generative semanticists, in short, quickly went after all aspects of language use. This pursuit had some very positive ends, and the linguistic subfield of pragmatics dates largely from the efforts of generative semanticists to accommodate and develop the insights of the use-driven school of ordinary language philosophy (the work of thinkers like Austin, Searle, and Grice). It also spelled out in very clear terms the limitations of Chomskyan linguistics, and generative semanticists became particularly excited when they discovered that the data which fueled Chomsky's theories seemed, contrary to his claims, to be sensitive to use. For instance, a typical interpretive semantics analysis of 7a treats it as ungrammatical (or ill-formed), a violation of a rule to the effect that *conjecture* must take a sentential complement (as in *Spiro conjectures* [*that he will resign*]).

7 a Spiro conjectures Ex-Lax.

Jerry Morgan ("On Arguing"), however, argued that in the right context—namely, as an answer to 7b—it is perfectly well-formed:

7 b Does anyone have any idea what Pat Nixon frosts her cakes with?

This data broaches exactly the sorts of issues that Chomsky set out as a principal concern of his program in *Syntactic Structures*—determining which strings of words are possible combinations in a given language, which are impossible—and it clearly implicates use. In vitro, 7a is ungrammatical; in vivo, it is perfectly fine. The only way to exclude such data is by fiat. It must be discarded or, at best, temporarily shelved.

The generative-interpretive semantics debate, that is, came down in many instances to the cost of discarding data. Generative semanticists concluded that throwing it out was too expensive, that the price was a false theory, incapable of handling the day-to-day functions of language. The celebration of data in generative semantics papers reflected choices to portray the ethical virtues of hanging on to even the messiest and most problematic facts. Interpretive semanticists, on the other side of the battle, came to another conclusion, that discarding certain data was a necessary evil, the price one pays for a coherent theory. And, alas, alack, many aspects of generative semantics did begin to look incoherent when discussions of context entered the picture. Sticking with Morgan, consider the following passage ("Verb-Agreement" 380-81):

> Suppose that the baseball player Ernie Banks gets beaned, develops amnesia, and is taken to the hospital, where I am his doctor. He doesn't know his name. I, his doctor, know who he is, but don't tell him. I observe his behavior over a period of time while he's in the hospital with no identity. During this time, he reads in the newspapers about a baseball player named Ernie Banks, and would like him to leave Chicago and go to New York to play for the Mets. I the doctor want to report this behavior of my patient Ernie Banks.

Morgan uses this scenario to set up a discussion about sentences like *Ernie Banks wants to leave Chicago*, arguing that even "the most radical and abstract proposal" cannot account for data of this complexity.[16] Aye, there was the rub.

Morgan's confession of inadequacy was far from unique. Let's look at a typical Ross paper from the period, "Doubl-ing" (the title comes from its interest in explaining the facts surrounding the tandems of present participles and gerunds—double-ing constructions—as in **It is continuing raining* and *The police are stopping drinking on campus*). The paper is awash in phrases like "I am at present unable to account for my feeling that [this sentence] is odd" (169) and "the complete remote structure of [this sentence] is opaque, to say the least" (174) and "there are some verbs that mysteriously do not occasion doubl-ing violations" (178). It also contains explicit disavowals of previous work, such as an earlier paper he introduces to repudiate one of its premises: "When that paper was written, I believed it to be necessary for the *be* of the copula to be a transitive main verb. I now see no reason for such an assumption" (181). Many proposals are directly flagged as inadequate, such as the counterargument that an output condition on demonstratives does not meet the technical criterion of stupidity (160), though Ross introduced it largely to illustrate that criterion and to set off his claim that the double-*ing* condition is "refined, intelligent, sophisticated" (159-60).

Most tellingly, the focus of the entire paper is to motivate one type of analysis which Ross then abandons in the last few paragraphs, because he says the data

actually calls for another type of analysis altogether (185). Ross's case is actually fairly strong—some of it, for instance, supporting the now widely accepted trace-theory—but it reads like a catalog of the "obscure and intuition-bound notions" that Chomsky assailed when he originally launched transformational-generative grammar in *Syntactic Structures* (5).

Ross was the most extreme of the leading generative semanticists in his constant declarations of ignorance and explicit acknowledgment of data which undercut his case; another of his papers ("More on *Begin*") has been called "two conflicting papers—one in the text, the other in the footnotes." But there was a strong tendency in all generative semantics work to acknowledge the provisional nature of the analyses, to bring up recalcitrant or conflicting data, and to exclaim that the vastness of natural language dwarfed linguistic attempts at genuine explanation. All of these traits were ethical, in the ordinary language, as well as the technical, sense. Georgia Green expresses the motives behind this impulse when she praises Robin Tolmach Lakoff's dissertation (*Abstract Syntax*) because of her "cold-blooded presentation and honest evaluation of the disadvantages of [her] analyses, [which] is a healthy sign in this day of mud-slinging" ("Review" 152), a dissertation that the second-generation generative semanticists took as an exemplar for their own work.

Frankness was manifest in all aspects of the theory. Take attribution, about which generative semanticists were particularly scrupulous. This scrupulosity led to some rather odd acknowledgments, like "Sentence (1) was brought to my attention by Háj Ross (who in turn had heard it from Avery Andrews)" (G. Lakoff, "Syntactic Amalgams" 25), and "I am grateful to J. L. Morgan for producing this sentence [*Since Nixon was elected, I've come to miss LBJ*], thereby setting me off on a productive train of thought" (Davison, 199n3). The winner in the acknowledgment category is probably George Lakoff's "Linguistic Gestalts," whose attributive note begins, "This work has grown out of conversations and correspondence with more people than I can possibly remember, let alone list," but goes on to mention twenty-five people anyway, and two restaurants (236). Lakoff also linked frankness specifically with the choice of deliberately artificial rule names we saw earlier: "one way to [remember where you're fudging]," he told his students, "is to use obviously arbitrary names like CLYDE instead of arbitrary names that sound profound but aren't, like Determiner" (Foreword iii). But it was in statements like the following that frankness was most overt:

> We are forced to conclude that, awkward though it may seem, the similar properties of *both* and *each* cannot be accounted for by the same formal mechanisms in our existing theory. An explanation of whatever underlying regularity there may be will have to wait for a cleverer linguist. (Carden 189n10)

And

> This paper was undertaken as an attempt to shed light on some very mysterious problems. I fear I have done little more than show which lamps have cords too short to reach the outlets, but hopefully this information will be helpful eventually in finding explanations for these mysterious distributions. (Green, "Some Observations" 93)

And, most revealingly:

> It is not a very satisfactory experience to write an entire paper without being able to offer any decent analyses or explanations for the phenomena I have discovered. (Lawler, "Generic" 255)

These last two quotations belong to papers which partake in a genre that pushed this tendency to the limit—a genre that Gragg calls "Creature Features" and defines as a type of article that "is intended to point out some oddities which a theory of . . . speech will eventually have to come to grips with" (75), but which nothing on the horizon appears capable of treating. In Kuhn's terms, of course, the word is not *oddities* but *anomalies*, his label for data that strain the current paradigm, potentially to its breaking point, and the seminal document in the creature-feature genre—Postal's highly corrosive underground classic, "Linguistic Anarchy Notes"—makes it very clear that straining the paradigm is exactly what these papers are about. The first Note begins :

> This is the first in a random, possibly nonfinite series of communications designed to show beyond any doubt that there exists no linguistic theory whatever. There are apparently endless numbers of fact types not incorporable within any known or imaginable framework. In particular, what has been called the theory of transformational grammar, seems to have only the most partial relation to linguistic reality. (203)

The Notes, in fact, turned out to be finite (although McCawley introduces them with "it is not clear whether Postal . . . discontinued the series or whether he simply ceased labeling his papers as belonging to the series"— *Notes* 201[17]), but they sparked an increasing number of similarly dissensual efforts, papers whose sole aim was bringing to light data that gave any and all pretenders to theoryhood the heebee-jeebees. The high point of the cycle was hit in the first few years of the seventies, with creature features like "Semi-indirect Discourse and Related Nightmares" (Gragg), and "Read at Your Own Risk: Syntactic and Semantic Horrors You Can Find in Your Medicine Chest" (Sadock). Again, however, such

papers were only just the most overt symptoms of a mood pervading generative semantics of the period, one which shows up in the nooks and crannies of the overwhelming majority of papers.

Postal's anarchy notes raised something of a stink. Yet it is important to notice that the motive behind this traffic with embarrassing data is not simply a nihilistic blow to the kidneys of the entire transformational enterprise. One of Postal's avowed aims, true, is to demonstrate in the most graphic terms he can that the enterprise is "not just slightly in error and rather incomplete"—the attitude that characterized much of the revisionist Chomskyan camp—"but in deep ways hopelessly far from linguistic reality" (215). But he also has higher aims. Indeed, he claims that his goals "are entirely positive," that he is trying to save grammatical theory from itself:

> Many people today are engaged in the attempt to construct linguistic theories. My view is that an important difficulty with all such attempts is that there is not a good *a priori* statement of the full range of known facts which a theory must handle. To the extent that theories are formulated in the absence of explicit awareness of this range of facts, they are dreamlike. (205)

This desire to save grammatical theory from its own shortsightedness was the strongest single motive fueling the preoccupation with problematic data. Robin Tolmach Lakoff, for instance, tackled the difficulties of modal verbs, "not to solve the problems [they present], but to point out just how insoluble they are at present, and"—adding the crucial proviso—"to ask what sort of linguistic theory would be needed in order to account for [them]" ("Pragmatics" 229-30). But there were other motives, too. In particular, generative semanticists had a very open pedagogical attitude. The important generative semanticist teachers (chiefly McCawley and the Lakoffs; Ross was at MIT, under Chomsky's formidable shadow, and Postal was with IBM) believed that exposing the inadequacies of their models and the recalcitrance of their data was the most honest way to prepare their students for the field (see, in particular, Lakoff's Foreword).

Conclusion: The Implosion

> [Generative semantics] is presumed to have failed because its practitioners *said* it did: how often, publicly and privately, we bemoaned the fact that our theories didn't fit the data! That everything was getting too complex for our understanding! That the phenomena of language went beyond the realm of science and into the realm of aesthetics and even the supernatural!
>
> —*Robin Tolmach Lakoff*

As with most of the defining traits of the movement, frankness was a reaction to Chomsky, an ethical stance deliberately antithetical to that of a man whose handling of data is often extremely cavalier, a man who has something of a reputation for slighting sources and for practicing a certain rhetorical sneakiness when discussing the implications of his theory.[18] Generative semanticists were determined to let no influence go unacknowledged, and no pimple on their theoretical glutei go unexposed. Too, it is not coincidental that the elevation of frankness was also a counterculture trait. Jerry Rubin, for instance, denounced the hypocrisy of the Chicago police testifying in court, who insisted they could not repeat some of the defendant's words in front of women jury members, but who boasted to one another in the back room about how they busted the heads of "the fucking little fagots"; yippies, on the other hand, don't hide anything (124-26).

Whatever the motives, characteristics, or origins of the generative semanticist *ethos*, it is difficult to quarrel with Newmeyer's general conclusion that it had powerfully negative effects, many of them resulting from the existence of the *CLS Proceedings*. The youthful exuberance of Chomsky's early students—the vicious polemics that regularly issued from MIT against "the structuralists" in the early-to-mid-sixties—remained primarily oral. Printed versions circulated, if at all, only in mimeograph, and only among the faithful. The youthful exuberance of McCawley's and the Lakoffs' students went very quickly to press. The impulse here was certainly admirable: to get the key ideas out rapidly for criticism and development, and to give graduate students a high-profile forum. But it had significant drawbacks. *Proceedings*' audience saw the looniness, the regular declarations of theoretical inadequacy, the recantations of earlier positions, and the exaltations of the unfathomable mysteries of language—leading inevitably to perceptions that the aversion of seriousness went beyond stylistic proclivities. O'Donnell (75) is typical when he sniffs that "serious grammatical studies may, as [George Lakoff] claims, be in their infancy: serious grammarians, however, are not," and when he complains about the immediate dissemination of partially digested notions:

> What is at issue is whether every new speculation, no matter how ephemeral, should be broadcast in the literature when the development of ideas is so continuous and rapid that the latest speculation is already out-of-date by the time it is published. (79n1)

More acerbic, at least in its persona, is Wall's suggestion to linguists who have trouble keeping up with syntax:

> Look, maybe the thing to do would be to go into historical linguistics and let syntax go for a while—at least until things settle down a little

> and these assholes stop printing every hare-brained hallucination that afflicts their heads. (167n15)[19]

The most extreme examples of generative semantics uncertainty are in Ross' work, some of which contains the "embarrassing candor and intense emotional involvement" that Holton says has marginalized Kepler in history of science (54). Ross's arguments are not as wild as Kepler's, but they are remarkable all the same—multilayered, tortuous, and subtle, sensitive to the smallest fluctuations in the data. They contain dozens of threads, looping around one another in the main text, most of them annotated with lengthy, contorted discussions, some notes offering counterexamples, some notes offering alternative analyses, virtually none offering any support for the annotated point. They consist of long catalogs of subarguments—some strong, some weak, the weak ones always identified as such—interspersed with declarations of mystification and awe. Ross is, in Parmenides' term, one of "the men with two heads" (147), someone who has taken dialectic to almost crippling levels; one generative semanticist is said to have summarized a Ross presentation, with "it's fifteen arguments for us and nine for them; so I guess we win" (Terry Langendoen, as recounted by James McCawley).

Honest is an appropriate descriptor for Ross's style, but not alone; the style is *painfully* honest. The effect is confessional, in a way that perhaps makes one empathetic to the difficulties of his program—and he really was tackling phenomenally difficult issues in this period—but hardly kindles interest in joining it. If there is an appeal here, it is to a Popperian type of fragility: look, I'm a proper scientist, because I've just shown you how fragile my theory is; in fact, I've just broken it. But what's an audience to do with a broken theory except follow Popper's advice and reject it?

The effect of Ross's rhetorical style is also cacophonous, with argument countering argument until it is all but impossible to hear a clear line of thought rising above the noise. The following assessment is telling: "it must be seriously open to doubt whether there is a coherent point of view to communicate." But this assessment is not of Ross, who isn't even cited. It is of generative semanticists as a class. The assayer continues:

> Add . . . that some of them appear to change their minds almost continuously and that they are addicted to somewhat tendentious publication of views they no longer hold at the time of publication and you have a recipe for an intellectual confusion which might daunt even the most committed seeker-after-truth. (O'Donnell 74)

In short, Ross's individual papers are not only representatives of the frankness-gone-amok rhetoric of many generative semanticists, but microcosms of the entire movement.

At just about this point, when Ross's papers were at their most relentlessly conscientious, generative semantics had become almost completely defined by its party spirit. This was in part because their *ethos* was so distinctive and boisterous that it overwhelmed other aspects of their program. In part, it was because other aspects of the program were becoming less easy to view as consistent with one another: Postal had left to work on another linguistic model (relational grammar), which only some generative semanticists incorporated into their research; Robin Tolmach Lakoff and some of her students had begun working in a direction that combines sociolinguistics and ordinary language philosophy; Ross and George Lakoff went in other directions yet, working on quite amorphous material, and working on it in much different ways. Almost everyone had abandoned the use of transformations and an identification with the label *generative*. Only McCawley continued (and continues) working on the defining themes of early generative semantics, but even he dropped the name *generative semantics* for his work in the late seventies.

The party was over, and the partiers drifted away. Some formed into other clusters of interest; some gravitated toward other, independently formed clusters; some worked pretty much on their own; a few even felt the powerful draw of the unmoved mover, Chomsky, and, chastened, went back to his program.

Generative-semantics-bashing articles became the order of the day, most issuing from the Chomsky-hallowed halls of MIT, or from graduates of those halls. The themes were not "proposal x from linguist y is wrong" so much as "generative semantics is totally bankrupt, unscientific, and vacuous, which is illustrated by problems with proposal x, from the misguided y." Many of these articles were crowing, self-conscious proclamations of the death of generative semantics, and they didn't stop with counterarguments to one or two or three generative semantic positions. They reeled off long catalogs of alleged failures—driving nails into the coffin, chucking it into a grave, shoveling dirt over it, and erecting tombstones with epitaphs like Brame's "Final Verdict" (67).

Returning to our persona:*ethos*::idiolect:dialect analogy, recall that my (idealized) diagrammatic offering for *ethos* was a lumpy bag of personae, just as a dialect is a lumpy bag of idiolects. When clusters of idiolects diverge sufficiently, the bag, ameba-like, brings forth a new dialect, as in Figure 4.

Similar processes go on when *ethoi* diverge, and Figure 4 is a reasonable representation, if a greatly abbreviated one, of Postal's departure from generative semantics: a small party of researchers followed him, new recruits joined, and soon relational grammar was its own community. With the relational-grammar mitosis; and with the drifting interests of key figures like Ross and the Lakoffs, generative semantics was, all of a sudden, gone.

At the superficial level of humor and political affinity, one might say that the membrane of *ethos* wasn't strong enough to hold generative semantics together. But going deeper, to the levels of perspective and methodology, *ethos* was an active

ingredient in its death. The combination of data-worship and obsessive confession-offering was too volatile to last, and the movement crashed in upon itself. The effect on linguistics was profound.

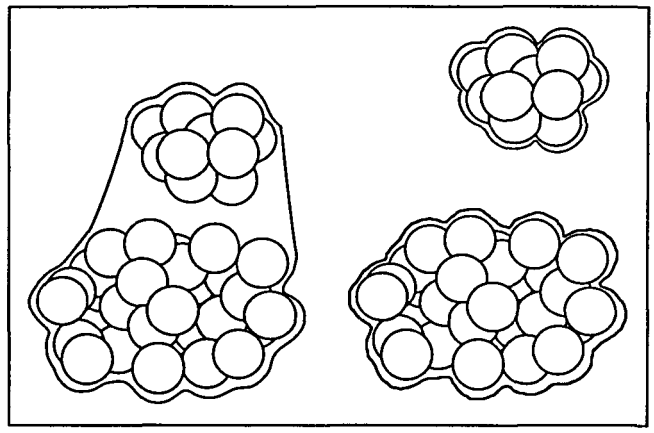
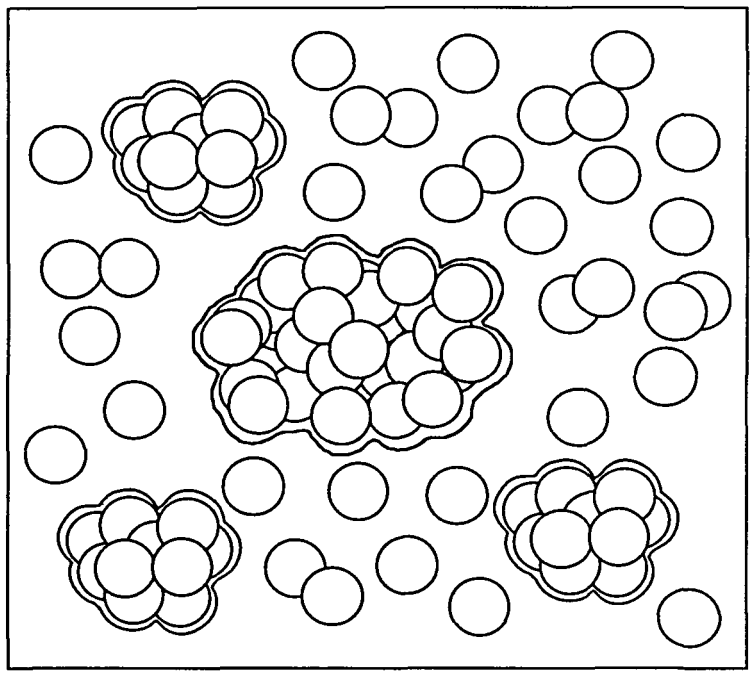


Figure 4: Diverging dialects.

Including the flotsam and jetsam from generative semantics, the resurgence of Chomsky's forces, and the development of several independent approaches, the linguistic picture in the mid-to-late seventies looked like Figure 5.



In fact, Figure 5 doesn't really do justice to the Brownian activity in linguistics at the time. We might take the biggest sack in Figure 5 to represent Chomsky's attractively mutated approach, and one of the smaller sacks might be relational grammar, and, to be arbitrary, we could call another sack Montague grammar, after a new and influential approach, one which attracted a number of disaffected generative semanticists. The remaining sack, again arbitrarily, could be functional grammar. The free-floating spheres, attracting and repelling each other, are the various independistes striking out on their own. But we've just scratched the surface: a conference in Milwaukee at the close of the decade showcased thirteen distinct syntactic frameworks ("sacks"); fourteen, if you count the two varieties of functional grammar. Officially, the Milwaukee gathering was the "Conference on Current Approaches to Syntax," but everyone called it "The Syntax Sweepstakes."[20]

The sociology of linguistics for the past few decades—indeed, since Chomsky's arrival—is a fascinating topic. But we're here to look at the contribution of *ethos* to the death of generative semantics, the first dissenting movement to Chomsky, and, for its brief life, the most successful.

Part of that contribution resulted from the alienating nature of the movement's affection for humor and politics, injokes and pop-culture allusions, drugs and other passé themes, and assorted other dislocations from its external audience. But another factor is the profound commitment the leading generative semanticists had to the deep, methodological elements of their *ethos*. Veneration of data became one of the driving themes of generative semantics. Data worship raised the exceptions and counterexamples which frequently surface in science up to the same billing as the theoretical principles and their supporting data. The *attitude* toward data and theory became as important as the data and theory, and what was left of the framework was hidden behind a mass of facts and observations no one could extract much sense from.

There are some links in the death of generative semantics with the counterculture as well, and the clearest lesson in this case study may be in the not-very-surprising observation that *ethos* is temporal. What fit in the sixties was quickly shunned in the seventies. The counterculture went out of fashion. This is not the place and I am not the person to explore why the issues and stylistic proclivities of the sixties fell so rapidly out of favor, but much of their transience surely had to do with the complete lack of focus on (and, in many cases, outright lack of) positive proposals to the institutions and practices under attack; the counterculture was, says Roszack in the thick of the flight, "much more a flight *from* than *toward*" (34). Indeed, the very label is negative, *counter*culture, and even the ideas and institution that were being rejected grew quickly, from a fairly tight set of concerns about civil rights inequities and the invasion of Vietnam, into a great amorphous stew of beliefs, objects, people, culture.[21]

The same trends are apparent in generative semantics: flight from Chomsky; rapid expansion of the grounds of dissent from a few specific technical questions to a rejection of virtually the entire generative program; and an ever-widening range of phenomena to be embraced. As the research developed, the *ethos* ranged off in several directions. But the audience also changed out from underneath the movement, and since *ethos* is really the property of the audience, generative semanticists were somewhat stranded. Initially, the *ethos* added cachet to the individual papers, attracting other linguists to the program, but it soon repelled them. The generative semantics spirit became a liability; by the late seventies, the slightest whiff of generative semantics *ethos* was enough to preclude a hearing.

But it's not just that the times they were a-changin'. Much of the generative semanticist *ethos* was also, unfortunately and unintentionally, exclusionary. It alienated people with more conservative politics, and people more squeamish about epithets. Hagège, for instance, says that "even if the scatolinguistics displayed in [*Studies out in Left Field*—Zwicky and others] may cause some embarrassment to the more tender-minded," it is just a symptom of a phenomenon which amounts to nothing more than "good humor." But he adds, with a familiar adjective that is clearly meant to cut two ways, "the problem is . . . that more serious scholars, who already consider that amateurism does not stop with form, risk finding elsewhere a justification for their reservations" (22).[22] That unsympathetic scholars (where *unsympathetic* has Campbellian implications to be discussed shortly) would find reasons for hostility, is not, or should not be, much of a concern. Their predispositions would be satisfied no matter what *ethos* they encountered, manifesting "the most pernicious . . . the most inflexible and the most unjust" of all "the prepossessions in the minds of the hearers which tend to impede or counteract the design of the speaker" (Campbell 97).

More worrisome is that neutral scholars, ones without any strong party allegiances, might simply be discouraged from reading material they found offensive for reasons other than its linguistic claims—because of general irreverence, or allusions to drugs, or aspersions to public figures. As a dramatic case in point, Quine seems only to recall that Lakoff and McCawley "were over-eager to amuse . . . with whimsical examples" at an important 1969 conference on logic and language where generative semanticists had a good chance of striking up alliances in philosophy. He doesn't even comment on their work, just their "chatter and clowning" (358). Humor hurt.

So did politics. It is very difficult, at least for me, to fault someone familiar with the stunning brutality of Vietnam for expressing contempt of the men with the most guilt on their hands, and once the door was open on people like Johnson and Nixon, the sad-sack Humphrey and the buffoonish Mitchells were obvious and easy targets. But whether one faults this trait or not, it is an undeniable fact of scholarship that neutral prose is the safest course. The familiar saw about the rhetor-as-good-(hu)man has its flip side, for which we can again thank George

Campbell. The sympathy of an audience, he tells us, is chiefly lessened in two ways, both connected intimately to ethos: "by a low opinion of [the rhetor's] intellectual abilities, and by a bad opinion of his morals" (Campbell 97). Generative semanticists were not people of low character—or, at least, no more so than with any group of academics—but drug allusions, activist politics, scatotology, and a general association with the hirsute and unkempt, certainly feeds such impressions among conservative readers. Scholars come in all persuasions, but a relatively common trait among them all is pricklishness, and annoyance is not the road to adherence.

Aristotle says that there are three main aspects in the perception of *ethos*—*arete* ("virtue"), *phronesis* ("common sense"), and *eunoia* ("good will")—all of which can only be nailed down by reference to a specific audience (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1144^{a}). What one audience (or section of an audience) perceives as virtue (say, recognition and publication of political outrages), or common sense (say, the restraint from offering theoretical principles that only work for small subsets of data) or good will (say, loopy humor) can be perceived as petulance, irresponsibility, or smart-assedness by another audience (or section of an audience). What calls forth sympathy from one audience precludes it for another.

Sympathy is a critical element in Campbell's theory of rhetoric, and a useful lens through which to view generative semantics' ethical problems. But the word loses some of its power outside his eighteenth-century faculty psychology: a roughly appropriate translation into contemporary theory is *consubstantiality*. Certainly Campbell's term is closer to Burke's than it is to the connotatively pity-laden word that now wears the same garb in ordinary language. Sympathy for Campbell is, in fact, "the common tie of human souls" (15; cf. also 90); successful rhetoric for him brings the audience into a frame in which it shares the values and perspectives of the rhetor. Unsuccessful rhetoric, which "weakens the principle of sympathy," does "the speaker unutterable prejudice" (96) and therefore "impair[s] belief" (97).[23] Generative semantics, after successful recruitment in the late sixties, soon found itself unable to broaden its sympathetic base; indeed, soon found itself alienating many potential sympathizers.

But there is—cutting to the central moral—more to the failure of generative semantics than a haphazard and faddish bag of now-obsolete mannerisms. It *is* true that much of the generative semantics *ethos* went out of fashion, and thereby lost the sympathy of the field; linguists don't spend much time these days bashing Bush or Clinton or snickering about rock stars' genitals, at least not in their publications. But the major damage to generative semantics was done not by the relatively superficial characteristics. It was done by the deeply methodological characteristics—data-worship and confessional frankness. The rejection of Chomsky included an empirical dedication, a tendency to celebrate rather than marginalize anomalies, and a remarkable level of honesty about the shortcomings of the theory—all of which run a virtually reverse course from Chomsky's program, and all of which began to undermine the movement.

What could a working linguist do with a paper full of facts whose *raison d'etre* was that there was no conceivable explanation for them in current theory? What could a working linguist make of a data set presented with this sort of swooning praise:

> Her [Borkin's] examples are dazzling and remain deep mysteries to this day. Such mysteries are central to our vision of what problems should be addressed by the linguistics of the 1980s and beyond. We are grateful for the gift of mysteries so worthy of the attention of those who would understand how language works. (G. Lakoff and Ross, in Borkin, *Problems* viii)

As always, the contrast with Chomsky is extremely sharp:

> I would like to distinguish roughly between two kinds of issues that arise in the study of language and mind: those that appear to be within the reach of approaches and concepts that are moderately well understood—what I will call "problems"; and others that remain as obscure to us today as when they were originally formulated—what I will call "mysteries."
>
> [About mysteries] although there is much that we can say as human beings with intuition and insight, there is little, I believe, that we can say as scientists. . . . Some would reject this evaluation of the state of our understanding. I do not propose to argue the point here, but rather to turn to the problems that do seem to me amenable to [scientific] inquiry. (*Reflections* 137, 138-39)[24]

The generative semanticists in the late stages of the debate celebrated mysteries; Chomsky, then as ever, avoided them. And the implications of these two strategies for working linguists are similarly antithetical. Lakoff and Ross's program offered other linguists a chance to work on dazzling data that promised to remain deeply mysterious; Chomsky's offered them a chance to work on amenable problems. There is little mystery as to why the majority accepted Chomsky's offer. The many and various limitations of Chomsky's approach had been exposed, and it has never gained the hegemony it promised to achieve in the midsixties, before generative semantics. But most of the alternatives pursue versions of his goals, and none of them has the deep, patterned commitments to anomalous data and theoretical fragility that doomed generative semantics.

Notes

[1] I acknowledge, very gratefully, the contributions to this study by a number of people, some for their direct discussion of its issues, some for comments on earlier versions of this paper, and some for both: Victoria Bergval, Thomas Bever, Dwight Bolinger, Wallace Chafe, Noam Chomsky, John Goldsmith, S. Michael Halloran, Lou Hammer, Geoffrey Huck, Ray Jackendoff, Jerrold Katz, S. Jay Keyser, George Lakoff, Robin Tolmach Lakoff, Howard Lasnik, Robert Lees, Judith Levi, James D. McCawley, Stephen O. Murray, Greg Myers, Frederick Newmeyer, Paul Postal, Háj Ross, Jerrold Sadock, James Zappen, and Arnold Zwicky. I would also like to thank *Rhetoric Review* readers Duane Roen and Muriel Saville-Troike for their detailed and very helpful suggestions.

[2] For a valuable discussion directly tying these notions to the rhetoric of science, see Miller's account of community and *ethos* in her "Public Knowledge" (esp. 42ff). Moving to specific cases, there is Booth's discussion of clashing *ethoi* during the University of Chicago sit-ins (154-58) and Weaver's treatment of social science writing (184-210). A notion of group *ethos* is also frequently assumed when individuals are studied, particularly when communal expectations are enlisted for suasive duties, as with Bazerman's characterization of Newton depicting "himself as a proper Baconian" (140), and with J. A. Campbell's account of Darwin setting up an *ethos* "calculated to reassure the Baconian prejudices of his audience" is exactly parallel ("Polemical" 377), and, using another set of community values, Campbell's analysis of Darwin's employment of "the very language of natural theology" ("Darwin" 9). Newton and Darwin, like many before and since, put on the ethical mantles of groups they wanted to persuade. See, for other examples from the rhetoric of science, P. N. Campbell, Halloran ("Molecular Biology"), Myers (46-52), and Prelli.

[3] Beyond the baggage of artifice, I am also reluctant to hang the individual/group distinction on the word *persona* because it is in mild conflict with Cherry's fine article, "*Ethos* versus Persona." But the call of nominalism is too strong, *ethos* is more closely associated with group values, and *persona* is more closely associated with the individual. Too, I take heart that Cherry's *ethos*, like mine, invokes community values, and that his *persona*, like mine, invokes more individual characteristics; see, in particular, his rereading of Myers on page 267f, whose *persona* is indistinguishable from mine. P. N. Campbell's *persona* also has decidedly individual elements, as does Lyne and Howe's (143). Bazerman, while his use of *ethos* is somewhat amorphous, uses *persona* in exactly this way (e.g., 216-17). Weimer's idiosyncratic use of *persona*—as a collective image of an audience, not as a rhetor (21)—runs decidedly orthoganol to this trend, and does not, so far as I know, have any other employers.

[4] "Semantic Festival" comes from the name of the 1969 Ohio conference whose proceedings were edited by Fillmore and Langendoen, "Which Hunt" from a Chicago Linguistics Society conference in 1972 (Peranteau and others), and the Spiro sentence is from Morgan ("On Arguing").

[5] But see Newmeyer (*Linguistic Theory* 93-173, "Rules and Principles"), Robin Tolmach Lakoff ("The Way"), McCawley ("Generative Semantics"), Huck and Goldsmith ("Gaps," *Deep Structure*), Harris ("Life and Death," *Linguistic Wars*, "Origin and Development"), for various slants on the movement and the dispute.

[6] One cursory analysis, centering on the movement's penchant for humor, also goes this route, asking the subtitular question, "Did Generative Semantics Die Laughing?" (Gordon). But Gordon remains on the level of analysis I have (uneasily) dubbed *superficial*. My suggestion depends on the "deeper" levels of scientific *ethos*—perspective and methodology.

[7] That is, Lancelot of Benwick, Morgan le Fay, and The Green Knight: there was a brief flirtation with pseudonyms, influenced by McCawley, whose *noms de guerre* included *Yuck Foo* and *Quang Phuc Dong*; the given names for these authors are, respectively, Robert Binnick, Jerry Morgan, and Georgia Green.

[8] Unless otherwise flagged, references to Newmeyer's *Linguistic Theory* are to the more widely available first edition.

[9] In large part, Robin Tolmach Lakoff ascribes the generative semantic style and its impact to the temper of the times, "when experimentation with lifestyle and personality was encouraged" ("The Way" 977).

[10] This allusion may be obscure for some (especially nonbaby-boomer) readers: there was an elaborate and bizarre rumor, characteristic of the paranoia and mysticism of the period, that Paul McCartney was dead, that there had been a massive cover-up of this by evil-minded money-mongers, but that the genuine remaining Beatles were trying to get the truth to the faithful in the form of cryptic lyrics, symbolic album covers, and, strangest of all, by encoding messages that could only be discerned by playing certain sections of their records backwards. This strange set of beliefs seem to be the direct ancestors of the even more strange set of beliefs that have Bible-Belt evangelists playing heavy metal albums backwards for acoustic whiffs of Satan.

[11] The rambunctious humor of the data sentences began innocuously, the first symptom being a penchant for flamboyantly named protagonists in data sentences, a thoroughly contra-Chomskyan symptom. Chomsky's sentences are famously dull. His favorite protagonist at the time was *John*. The generative semanticists went for *Max* and *Seymour* and *Floyd*; later, for *Knucks McGonagle*, *Figmeister*, and *Norbert the Nark*. The sentences also began to populate with gorillas, wombats, penguins, toads. The situations got weirder, the cast of characters expanding to include cultural icons, like Willy Mays and Yoko Ono. Patterns and themes recurred. One leitmotif had Richard Nixon loitering in men's rooms.

[12] To keep this and the preceding paragraph from getting too bogged down by parenthetical references, I've saved them all for here: Flip first appears in George Lakoff's Irregularity, though Ross tells me Postal coined it; Slifting, Ross, "Slifting"; Sluicing, Ross, "Gapping" 252; Stuffing, Ross, "Doubl-ing" 162; Irving, from an unpublished manuscript by Morgan, cited in Horn, "Ain't it Hard" 325; Ludwig, Neubauer, 403; Richard, Rogers; Apparel Pronoun Deletion, Grinder 300; and Euphemistic Genital Deletion is attributed to Postal in Borkin, Problems 105-06.

[13] This work revolved around elaborate syntactic analyses of the sentence "Floyd broke the glass." Epitomes and data-sheets from these talks were widely available, and various secondhand reports were published (e.g., Bach and Harms, vii-viii; Shenker; and Abraham and Binnick, 40ff). There was even a floor-to-ceiling, tree-structure mobile of the analysis in Ross's office. But neither Ross nor Lakoff published these extremely influential arguments.

[14] Even the generally forgiving editors of the CLS *Proceedings*, among whom Lakoff is a favorite, felt compelled to add an editorial comment on this one, quoting (Charles Schulz's) Snoopy, commenting on some of his own ill-behavior in a tennis game: "Actually, after you ace someone, you really shouldn't say 'Nyahh, Nyahh, Nyahh!'" (G. Lakoff, "Fuzzy Grammar" 290).

[15] In this connection, see Yoos' enlightening discussion of *ethos* and ethics, and Halloran's remarks on *ethos* and rhetorical action ("Aristotle's" 61).

[16] Actually, it turns out that this case can be handled by a proposal George Lakoff made, even when Banks regains his memory and remembers his behavior during the amnesia and makes assertions about his past desires; it breaks down in more complex situations yet, from which I have mercifully spared you.

[17] Certainly Postal circulated other unpublished "notes" of the same genre. Bouton (167), for instance, cites several samizdat papers from Postal, including "Crazy Notes on Restrictive Clauses and Other Matters Dating from April 1967, and Now Less Than 42.5% Believed" and "Notes on *So, Too, Also, Do So*, Conjunction, Linguistic Identity, and Big Trouble" (dated 1968).

[18] These are very widespread charges (though, in my own reading of Chomsky, not entirely founded), but I cite only the two sources I know which are rhetorically informed: Hoey and Botha. For a not-altogether-satisfying discussion of "Chomsky's honesty," see my dissertation ("Life and death" 404-11).

[19] O'Donnell is discussing generative semantics generally, not the *CLS Proceedings* specifically, and Wall, as should be clear from the tone, is conducting a satire. But both are clear indicators of contemporary attitudes. O'Donnell is confused and hostile, but nonaligned to either the generative semanticists or the interpretivists, and so is a pretty good barometer of the general linguistic community in the midseventies. Wall, who was something of a insider, offers a terrifically biting view of the movement (though he certainly does not spare Chomsky); *hallucination*, for instance, is not a randomly chosen term.

[20] See Moravcsik and Wirth, which only includes papers on twelve of the frameworks (Michael Brame withheld his paper on functionally interpreted base-generated grammar).

[21] See, for instance, Timothy Leary's pledge of allegiance to the Weatherman, which Booth—also in the thick of the flight—uses to lament the fall of good reasons (3). Booth was so appalled by the pledge that he thought it might be completely fictional, but the full text can be found in Horowitz and others' *Counterculture and Revolution*, attributed to Leary.

[22] Since the book is a translation, and I have not seen the original, the double-edged adjective may have come from the translator, Robert Hall, whose contempt for the entire Chomskyan program is well known and vastly surpasses that of Hagège (see his *Linguistics and Pseudo-linguistics*); my point, however, is unaffected by the origin of the insult. Notice, too, that *serious* is the word O'Donnell uses in similar circumstances.

[23] In this connection, too, see de Romilly's discussion of *eunoia*, which she says "means something more than good will: it means approval, sympathy, and readiness to help" (91).

[24] Chomsky's contrast with generative semantics here is even more direct than these quotations indicate, since he specifically singles out late generative semantic issues (like the "use of . . . cognitive structures"—138), as falling in the mystery camp.

Works Cited

Note: Since there was a good deal of unpublished and quasi-published material among the generative semantics literature, some entries include two dates, the date of (eventual) publication and the date [in brackets] of composition. A similar policy is followed when there is more than one title, and when there is a pseudonym.

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