METHODOLOGY IN LANGUAGE RESEARCH: A SAILING BETWEEN *SCYLLA* AND *CHARYBDIS*

METODOLOGIA NA PESQUISA DE LÍNGUAS: UMA VELA ENTRE *SCYLLA* E *CHARYBDIS*

METODOLOGÍA EN INVESTIGACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA: UNA VELA ENTRE *ESCILLA* Y *CARIBDIS*

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ABSTRACT: Unlike most linguistic theories, integrational linguistics does not include a methodology for linguistic inquiry. Integrationists are critical of the methodologies and assumptions of modern linguistics and find the notion of *linguistic data* highly problematic. For this, integrationists have taken a lot of heat from researchers from data-driven research traditions who ask for a methodological alternative and find the lack of empirical integrational research frustrating. In this essay, I consider some of the background for the integrational critique of linguistic methodologies and discuss how to address the difficulties pertaining to linguistic data. I conclude with an empirical example to illustrate the problems as well as their possible solution.
KEYWORDS: Linguistic inquiry. Linguistic data. Integrationism.

RESUMO: Ao contrário da maioria das teorias linguísticas, a linguística integracionista não inclui uma metodologia de investigação linguística. Os integracionistas são críticos das metodologias e das suposições da lingüística moderna, considerando a noção de dados linguísticos altamente problemática. Por isso, os integracionistas têm recebido muita pressão de pesquisadores de tradições de pesquisa baseadas em dados que pedem uma alternativa metodológica e consideram a falta de pesquisa integracionista empírica frustrante. Neste ensaio, considero alguns dos antecedentes da crítica integracionista das metodologias linguísticas e discuto como abordar as dificuldades relativas aos dados linguísticos. Concluo com um exemplo empírico para ilustrar os problemas, bem como sua possível solução.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Investigação linguística. Dados linguísticos. Integracionismo.

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RESUMEN: A diferencia de la mayoría de las teorías lingüísticas, la lingüística integradora no incluye una metodología para la investigación lingüística. Los integracionistas son críticos con las metodologías y supuestos de la lingüística moderna y encuentran muy problemática la noción de datos lingüísticos. Por esto, los integracionistas han recibido mucha atención de los investigadores de tradiciones de investigación impulsadas por datos que piden una alternativa metodológica y encuentran frustrante la falta de investigación empírica integradora. En este ensayo, considero algunos de los antecedentes de la crítica integracionista de las metodologías lingüísticas y discuto cómo abordar las dificultades relacionadas con los datos lingüísticos. Concluyo con un ejemplo empírico para ilustrar los problemas y su posible solución.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Indagación lingüística. Datos lingüísticos. Integracionismo.

1 INTRODUCTION

Universities from every corner of the world cannot be wrong when they define research for their students on their website. Or can they? It is recurrently acknowledged that research requires data and that it implies the application of a certain discipline-specific methodology. No special provisions seem to be made when it comes to researching language. It is assumed that "all 'scientific' disciplines need facts to go on, and these facts must be of an order appropriate to the concerns of the discipline" (HARRIS 2009a, p. 41). Without facts the researcher is unable to tell "'what can truly be said about something'" (HARRIS 2009a, p. 41). Integrational linguists, however, take a critical view on these assumptions. They question the benefits of methodologies, and they refute the notion of linguistic data (e.g., HARRIS, 1997; PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015; ORMAN; PABLÉ, 2016). The integrational sign as a historical and semiological fact is uniquely contextualized. It cannot be abstracted and turned into an object of inquiry. Therefore, it follows that linguistic research for the integrationist differs radically from the application of positivist methodologies within mainstream linguistics as well as the epistemological naturalism that supports them. It also means, however, that integrational inquiry hardly can be empirically informed, "[…] apart from the provision of anecdotal accounts of the specifics of particular communicative episodes" (LOVE, 2007, p.705).

Although this empirical predicament seems to apply to integrational linguistics in particular, the implicit assertion is that it applies more widely, but that researchers tend to ignore it, because it is customary within their research tradition to ignore it and/or because it makes them uneasy about the scientific status of their discipline.

Integrational linguistics never was a "'theory + methodology + data' model of linguistics" (HUTTON, 2016, p. 81). It was introduced by Roy Harris in 1981 as a "heretic" approach to linguistic inquiry "[…] which would examine language from a different theoretical perspective from that adopted in the Western grammatical tradition and its modern linguistic continuations" (HARRIS, 1998, p. 9). In *The Language Myth* (1981), Harris explains the myth of "orthodox" linguistics (HARRIS, 1981, p.10-11). According to the myth, language users require a shared language, a "fixed code", in order to communicate, because communication is essentially a process of thought transfer, or "telementation". The language has to be a fixed code "[…] in the sense that the same forms are paired with the same meanings for all speakers of the language" (WOLF; LOVE, 1997, p. 2), otherwise it would not enable speakers to exchange their thoughts by swapping messages in it. The myth is a product of these two fallacies, the telementation fallacy that posits the function of language and the fixed-code fallacy that posits the mechanism of language.

Integrational linguistics is concerned with human communication. Rather than being concerned with "the language" as in orthodox linguistics, it is "[…] a linguistics which takes as its point of departure the individual linguistic act in its communicational setting" (HARRIS, 1981, p.166). A linguistics which sees language as "a process of making sense of verbal behaviour" (HARRIS, 1981, p.165), as "continuously created by the interaction of individuals in specific communication situations" (HARRIS, 1981, p.167), and sees communication as including "[…] all processes in which human activities are contextually integrated by means of signs" (HARRIS, 1996, p.11). Signs are made when people communicate. Communicating participants are situated, "time-bound agents" (HARRIS, 1996, p.154), and therefore each sign is uniquely contextualized. Signs

are the contextualized products of communication (HARRIS, 1996, p.7). They do not pre-exist particular episodes of communication, for the simple reason that the integration of activities does not pre-exist the situation in which it is achieved.

This order of priority means that for integrational linguistics "languages presuppose communication" (HARRIS, 1998, p. 5), not the other way around as implied by the language myth. Rather, it is the interaction in particular communicational episodes "[…] which confers relevance upon the participants' past experience with words; and not, as orthodox linguistics would have us believe, past experience (that is to say, mastery of 'the language') which determines the communicational possibilities of their present interaction" (HARRIS, 1981, p. 167). The "complex, cultural objects" (HARRIS, 1998, p. 4) we call "languages" are second-order abstractions, and although a language can be institutionalized, codified, and taught by a society to its members, "[…] at no point does it become a first-order reality for individuals" (LOVE, 1990, p. 101).

The aim of integrational linguistics is to "demythologize" the study of language, and instead of erecting abstract fixed codes to "explain and delimit in advance what it is possible for a sign to signify" (HARRIS, 1996, p.245), Harris takes the perspective of the individual communicating participants when he invites linguists to consider:

> [H]ow do people actually use words to communicate, and how can this be described in ways which yield statements which both correspond to the language-user's experience and are open to the kinds of verification and disproof characteristic of the *empirical sciences*? (HARRIS, 1981, p. 164, my italics)

This empirical invitation was issued 40 years ago, but unlike other linguistic theorists, Harris never supplied a programme of research activity to go with the theory. In fact, he explicitly refused to do so (HARRIS, 1997, p. 309). For this reason, he was met with accusations of offering "[…] no alternative to the methodologies and assumptions of modern linguistics which he dismissed in such withering terms" (HUTTON, 2016, p. 82). Later this criticism has been extended to other integrationists who are said to "[…] heavily criticise work carried out by various sociolinguists and in return offer philosophical discussions instead of research alternatives" (RITZAU, 2014, p. 4). Between the lines, integrationists are reproached for being intellectual free riders "[…] who would prefer to discuss the limits of knowledge rather than to add to it" (LABOV, 1975, p. 56).

But what, according to integrational linguistics, is so problematic about the "theory + methodology + data" model of linguistics? And do these issues apply to all language researchers who want to take part in debunking the language myth, or should only integrational linguists be concerned? It appears that not just questions about methodology, and data are included, but that also conceptions of knowledge and the research process are involved.

In the following, Section 2, I relate the integrational position on methodology and linguistic data to Internet and textbook assumptions concerning scientific inquiry. Next, Section 3, I consider traditional approaches versus an integrational approach to the study of language and communication, and after that, Section 4, I discuss the question of linguistic data. By way of illustration, I present an example taken from a sociolinguistic interview, and I conclude, Section 5, that the empirical consequence of an integrational approach applies not only to integrational linguistic inquiry.

2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Methodology is the normative version of epistemology (BUNGE, 1983, p. 4) while epistemology is concerned with human knowledge in general. Methodological deliberations concern "the principles of successful inquiry" (BUNGE, 1983, p. xiv). When researchers engage with methodological matters they attend to best practices for their discipline, i.e., the best ways of conducting the inquiry, how they can be justified, and which methods or techniques to apply. In itself, a set of methods does not constitute a methodology, but the decision to include or exclude a particular method is a methodological concern.

A quick web search turns out a great many definitions of "research" from as many textbooks and university websites. Despite differences in wording, the similarities are striking. Research is a kind of inquiry characterized by being

careful/systematic/organized, and by the discovery/production/creation of new knowledge through the gathering/collecting/mining for and subsequent analysis of data/information on a particular topic/observed phenomenon with the use of a suitable method, generally called "the scientific method". This method, apparently applicable to all objects of study, is a procedure that consists of 4-6 steps, including observation of a phenomenon, formulating research questions and theoretical hypotheses, gathering data to test the hypotheses, analysing results, and drawing conclusions. (Enter "scientific method" in Google Image Search and see for yourself.) Hepburn and Andersen (2021, §6.1) also find that "[s]uch references to a universal scientific method can be found in educational material at all levels of science education", and they note that "[…] numerous studies have shown that the idea of a general and universal scientific method often form part of both students' and teachers' conception of science". Integrational linguistics questions the soundness of this method as well as the scientism that supports its acceptance, i.e., "[…] the belief that the methods of the natural sciences are applicable in all inquiry, especially in the human and social sciences" (MAUTNER, 1997, p. 511 *apud* HARRIS, 2009b, p. 125).

The pursued outcome of the research process is allegedly knowledge, preferably new knowledge. Data go in at one end, and an artefact called "knowledge" comes out at the other, but it is not as if research is a black-box process: Data are turned into knowledge when they are processed according to the scientific method. However, although the method provides a clear and easy-to-follow set of instructions for the production of knowledge, it conveys an incomplete picture of what research involves. First of all, it does not situate the research activity in a wider institutional setting, and hence fails to mention explicitly that the produced knowledge is not something researchers are supposed to keep to themselves, but that they should *disseminate* it.

In a sense, the cliché "publish or perish" puts the matter in a nutshell. The livelihood of professional researchers is based on the extent of their publications. The academic circuit materializes in writing, in books and articles, with the original research article as its flagship. The publication system is what makes the wheel of scientific knowledge production turn. It is no coincidence that the structure of the prototypical research article is isomorphous to the steps of the scientific method. Although the scientific method does not tell you in so many words what research *looks* like, the entire design incorporates visual dissemination as its primary objective. Even when researchers present their research orally at conferences and seminars, they either "read a paper" or subsequently commit their talk to paper to be published in the congress proceedings. Thus, it would be futile for any research method to include steps that could not be documented and reported within the limits imposed by two-dimensional graphic space. The advent of digital publication media has not fundamentally altered this limitation. Irrespective of the device on which the published text is displayed, the digital text bearer is still two-dimensional and requires readers to access information spatially. Every attempt to symbolize a phenomenon in a non-visual modality "[…] must pay the integrational price that visual communication demands" (HARRIS, 1996, p. 20).

Since the outcome of the research process is knowledge and this knowledge is created in anticipation of (visual) communication, it means that the forms of communication permitted by the material properties of the publication system effectively define the parameters for the forms of knowledge the academic community has the capacity to recognize. Thus, "[f]orms of communication make a crucial difference not only to what is known, but what is knowable" (HARRIS, 2009b, p. 2).

Researchers ask questions, and their methodology determines what is askable. Methods recognized among the practitioners of a discipline are the means by which (proposed) answers to such questions are developed. The methods constitute a (practical) tie between the (abstract) theory and its (concrete) object of study. They operationalize the concepts of the theory, verbalize the associated terminology, and instruct researchers in what to look for and how to process their observations in order to achieve their research goal.

A theory can be compared to an assertion about something, and in order to determine whether it, in practice, works as an assertion it must be possible to confront it, somehow, with the "something" it concerns. When a theoretical assertion is investigated, it is typically put forward as a question, a hypothesis, and the process of implementing it first and foremost involves a practical application procedure capable of detecting and identifying the phenomenon under consideration, i.e., a method. If the phenomenon is indeed "out there", in the section of the world that falls within the scope of the theory, it can, in principle, be observed, whether wholly or partly, directly or indirectly with the aid of sense-extending instruments. Once the phenomenon has

been identified, various things can be done with the observed object depending on its materiality, it can be described, measured, weighed, cut open to reveal its inside, etc., and from these activities pieces of information about it can be collected, i.e., data. The point is that the phenomenon exists whether it is observed or nor, and that observation is indifferent to the individuality of the observer, provided that the exact same methods are used for collecting the data on each instance. The "things of the world" are seen from a third-person perspective, "the view from nowhere" (NAGEL, 1986), and, in some cases, the observing and gathering of data can be left entirely to a machine. The observation is *objective*, and objectivity is the cornerstone of the scientific edifice.

Equipped with the data, the researcher can process and analyze them, with the use of additional methods, in order to discover what the data reveal about the phenomenon and determine whether the explanatory power of the theory suffices to account for it. Also, these methods are supposed to be objective and reliable in the sense that when applied by different researchers on the same set of "raw" (i.e., unprocessed) data, or by the same researcher on different instances, they will lead to identical results. If this outcome is an issue, there are methods to validate the results by ascertaining the degree of inter- or intra-observer reliability. Such methods may be formal, or informal as when conversation analysts meet in data-sessions to reach a "shared understanding" about the transcription of a recording (TEN HAVE, 2007, p.140).

By instructing researchers in *what to look for*, the methodology at the same time determines *what can be seen* "but, in virtue of its framing of the 'object of study', it also represents a form of systematic 'not-seeing'" (PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015, p. 40). The theoretical concepts invested in the technical terminology and implemented in practical methods become a lens through which "the world" is viewed and facts about the phenomenon are recognized. Not all observations count as facts, though, and therefore different researchers need to agree on their observations, how they are made, and whether or not they are indeed facts. This requires them to have access to a "common language" in which to talk about the object of study and their observations of it, i.e., a superordinate level of abstraction on which they can jointly fix their identifications. In short, a fixed code is required that will allow them to make and talk about identical reifications in contextual practice. The technical terminology of a discipline may be seen as an attempt to fulfill this role. The terminology makes the relevant cuts through the amorphous plane of thought for the members and shapes their thinking of the object of study. A carefully curated technical terminology is the thing that comes closest to a Saussurean *langue*, and through education students are initiated into its discriminations. University students are introduced to the terminology and receive training in its application through the practical implementation of the methods relevant to their field of study. The development in the grades they make is a reflection of how well they, according to their assessors, deploy the terminology and the degree to which they succeed in implementing the methods. Once they master both, they are ready to undertake original research projects of their own within the research tradition in which they are raised. Although desirable, it is not imperative that they have or are able to demonstrate any deeper understanding of the historical or theoretical underpinning of the concepts they are applying if only they are practically proficient in their methodological implementation. For example, unless they specialize in it, linguists are generally not expected to be erudite in the historical background and theoretical reasoning behind the part-of-speech system, so long as they can point out instances of nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. with professional certainty. In this way, the mastery of the technical terminology and the methods of the discipline serves as an admission ticket to the research community, but in addition it carries a certain risk of being a pretext for intellectual negligence. In a highly popular guide to researching language, students who venture into theory-only projects are encouraged to engage critically with the theory, but at the same time they are warned against embarking on such projects because "they are difficult to do well" (WRAY; BLOOMER, 2013, p. 10), whereas neither the same encouragement nor the same warning is issued against data-based research. Apparently, a data-based approach is a safer way to follow en route to knowledge.

However, and as also implied by "publish or perish", merely committing your research to paper is no guarantee for its publication. Once a work has been submitted for publication, it will be subjected to scrutiny by colleagues (editors and reviewers) who will assess whether or not it actually "contains" knowledge, and if so, whether this knowledge is new, i.e., significant enough to justify its addition to the "fund of knowledge" recognized by the discipline. The background against which this assessment is made is essentially the same as the one that guided the author through the research process, i.e., the scientific method. Authors who fail to meet the methodological expectations of their audience are not likely to pass through the eye of their disciplinary needle. (For this reason, especially junior researchers cannot afford to play havoc with such expectations as it may jeopardize their career prospects.) In academia, every member is in a sense their "brother's keeper", a function which is institutionalized through the peer

review system. Peer reviewers are gatekeepers whose task is to prevent deviant or low-quality research and "fake news" from being published (which is why predator journals and "unscreened" self-publication constitute a threat to the system). However, not all reviewers agree in their assessments. In actual practice, most journals require recommendations from more than one reviewer, and settle the matter in this way, but on a deeper level, such differences suggest that what counts as scientific knowledge is debatable. Ultimately, knowledge may become unrecognizable across research traditions due to the application of incompatible methodologies. For example, a practitioner of the quantitative research methodology may find it difficult to appreciate the outcome of a piece of qualitative research, and vice versa, even within the same discipline.

The integrational objections against the scientific method could be seen as a disagreement of this kind. However, this should not be taken to imply that integrationists would automatically endorse a methodology based on qualitative data. Irrespective of the kind of data, methodological rigour in itself is considered problematic, and "[…] we should not mistake the analysis of data for the uncovering of a hidden key or underlying essence which explains the practice from which the data is drawn" (PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015, p. 39). The danger is that "when theorists take it upon themselves to supply a methodology … the resultant analyses proceed, solemnly and inevitably, to 'reveal' a structure in the 'data' that reflects, point by point, the 'system' that is already tacitly incorporated in the methodological procedure" (HARRIS, 1997, p. 304).

Another objection concerns the assumption that knowledge can be passed around. The idea that the knowledge created by individual researchers can be shared by being added to a public fund of knowledge conflates knowledge with information. Knowledge presupposes a "knower", and "the self is necessarily implicated as a knowing agent" (HARRIS, 2009b, p. 3). Information can be published and passed around and the published work can be read, but every time a person engages in reading or writing new signs are created, and "something is known that was not known before" (HARRIS, 2009b, p. 78).

> Information, unlike knowledge, is always second-hand or third-hand or umpteenth-hand. It is always available in principle to as many people as are linked in any particular chain of communication. Knowledge on the other hand, belongs to the individual or individuals personally engaged in its creation. (HARRIS, 2009b, p. 143)

When knowledge is conflated with information, the individual knowing agent who created it is eliminated and "knowledge" becomes objective public property.

3 RESEARCHING LANGUAGE

Although the above is a gross simplification of the research process in academia across disciplines, it points out some of the integrational concerns. Methodologically, no special measures are taken with respect to language research. Quantitative, qualitative as well as mixed-methods methodologies seem equally applicable. It is taken for granted that the language researcher can collect linguistic data in the same way and on the same conditions as those that apply to all other researchers when they collect their data, i.e., through objective observation. Not all observational and analytical methods, however, are equally scientifically admissible, and this puts methodological discussion points on the agenda. Agreement in such matters is vital, partly in order to motivate researchers to pull together within their paradigm, and partly in order to avoid being suspected of substandard scientific practice.

While the Kuhnian paradigm model may adequately describe the organization of disciplines where one scientific paradigm successively replaces another, it does not make a good fit with the field of language studies. Although Saussurean structuralism may be said to have instituted a new paradigm in replacement of historical-comparative linguistics, the replacement was not effective. To this day, the comparative method thrives in Indo-European studies. Neither the advent of Chomskyan generative grammar thoroughly revolutionized linguistics. The Chomskyan or formalist paradigm is practiced side by side with its functionalist counterpart, just as post-structuralist theories co-exist happily with developments on a structuralist substrate. What can be reasonably said, though, is that both structuralism and generativism have had an impact on linguistic theorizing to the effect that later "hyphen linguistics" often contrast or relate their own position to either or both approaches. The bottom line,

however, is that each research tradition represents a different understanding of the subject matter "language", as noted by (the structuralist) André Martinet (1984, p. 31): "If asked point-blank what the object of their science is, I assume that few professional linguists would hesitate to answer that it is 'language'. But if asked what they mean by 'language' serious divergences would soon appear".

In light of this theoretical diversity, it seems even more pertinent for language researchers to demonstrate methodological consistency through their collective practice. Almost half a century ago, Labov pointed out the importance of methodological agreement when he concluded that even if "all linguists are data-oriented", "equally concerned with the empirical foundations of [their] field" there will be no progress in the field until they "can jointly recognize a valid and reliable linguistic fact" (LABOV, 1975, p. 5). Unless such an agreement can be reached, "[…] if one linguist cannot persuade another that his facts are facts", then "he can hardly persuade him that his theory is right, or even show him that he is dealing with the same subject matter" (LABOV, 1975, p. 7). More recently, and from the perspective of discourse analysis, Antaki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter, based on their "experience of refereeing journal submissions", discuss measures they feel that discourse analysts need to take in order to gain academic acceptance from "those who have been schooled in quantitative analysis" (ANTAKI *et al.*, 2003, p. §2). Although Labov here represents a quantitative approach and Antaki et al. a qualitative, both discussions rest on the "assumption that all 'scientific' disciplines need facts to go on" (HARRIS, 2009a, p. 41), and both are concerned with the scientific quality of their respective discipline.

Methodologically, both Labov and Antaki et al. lay out "principles of successful inquiry" (BUNGE, 1983, p. xiv) in terms of do's and don'ts. Labov identifies the problem as a question between observation through introspective judgement and observation of linguistic behaviour. He cautions researchers against "uncontrolled intuitions" that may result in analyses that rest "on a very uncertain foundation" and therefore should "be looked on with grave suspicion" (LABOV, 1975, p. 30). Anataki et al. aim to point out how to avoid activities such as summarizing text and transcripts, isolated quotation, feature spotting, unwarranted generalization etc., that do not qualify as analysis proper, and how to "[…] scotch the sort of errors" that "might lend credence to the quantitative researcher's dismissal that, in discourse analysis, 'anything goes'" (ANTAKI *et al.,* 2003, p. §10, §2).

While Labov's strategy seems to be aimed at borrowing "the institutional clout of the so-called hard sciences" (BENNE, 2017, p. 43), Antaki et al. lean "towards those aspects of rigour that mirror the positivist approach" (MEYRICK, 2006, p. 802) and argue for an equal scientific standing of quantitative and qualitative approaches. They find that a qualitative ("soft") approach is not inferior to a quantitative ("hard") since the practitioners of both approaches "want to do something with the data" (ANTAKI *et al.*, 2003, p. §4). Through analysis the qualitative researcher is enabled to produce an outcome of the same standing as the "sort of statistical testing" performed by the quantitative researcher on "raw data" (ANTAKI *et al.*, 2003, p. §4).

It appears that both Labov and Antaki et al. distinguish between unprocessed or "raw" data and processed data, and presumably the facts are the outcome of the processing. This explains why a joint recognition of facts is required among the practitioners of a paradigm, and why it is vital that principles and procedures of best practice are laid down for their identification.

It is worth noticing that in both cases the question of the ontological status of the "something" the facts are supposed to be evidence for, is a theoretical concern and not on the methodological agenda. It is posited by the theory, but not accessible to direct observation. Thus, the methodological considerations concern how its existence can be evidenced by the data. Given that there is agreement about what constitutes, for example, a repertoire, an ideology or a discourse, a passage of text or a transcript can be evidence for the existence of such phenomena for the discourse analyst (ANTAKI *et al.*, 2003, p. §7). Likewise, a syntactic form can be evidence for the speaker's grammar for the sociolinguist, provided that there is agreement about what constitutes a syntactic form and a grammar, and the item is observed in "ordinary conversation" (LABOV, 1975, p. 34). This latter constraint sparks another methodological difficulty, known as "Observer's Paradox": For the field worker the "[…] goal is to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" (LABOV, 1991 [1972], p. 61), and therefore efforts to solve this paradox "have been a central focus of sociolinguistic methodology" (LABOV, 2006, p. 86).

The theoretical assertion is, in both cases, that underneath communicating participants' (observable) contextualized behaviour certain abstract structures exist, and these structures (grammar, (Foucauldian) discourse, etc.) become evident through, i.e. as they are manifested in, the behaviour, although the participants are or may be entirely unaware of their existence.[1] The research output of such an empirical inquiry would then include documentation for the existence of the structures posited by the theory. In this way, the researcher is enabled to establish the existence of underlying structures that determine people's communicative behaviour and explain to them what they are doing. Hence, the implication is that the researcher becomes an expert on, i.e., more knowledgeable about the (first-order) language of the participants than they are themselves. Incidentally, both approaches by mistaking an underlying postulated abstraction for a first-order reality exemplifies "the essence of the language myth" (LOVE, 2002, p. 34).

In neither case, it is addressed that the object of study is language, and hence coincides with the medium of the inquiry. Language is treated like any other object amenable to observation from a third-person perspective. This means that the requirement of objectivity is applicable to the observation.[2] It is presumed that if sufficient care is exercised in the collection of data, linguistic data and their collection do not pose any qualitatively different challenge to data collection in general. The collecting of the data requires a method, and when the collecting researchers adhere strictly to its instructions, the collected data will provide a sound basis for further linguistic analysis.

In this connection, it is worth noticing that both sociolinguists and discourse analysts collect their data from speech communication,[3] but that in practice the collected speech data, fixed and stored as audio or video recordings, are subsequently transcribed. Transcription is inevitable for two reasons: because it "enables analysis of spoken language" (D'ARCY, 2013, p. 187), and because it is vital that the data can be presented in writing for publication. Although it is widely recognized that transcription is not entirely theory-neutral (e.g., OCHS, 1979), and hence may affect objectivity, detailed conventions for transcription have been codified in an attempt to mitigate these effects. The conventions, in particular the ones devised by Gail Jefferson, have "become a kind of 'common language'" (TEN HAVE, 2007, p. 95) for transcribers and analysts. Apart from these methodological concerns, the transmodal translation of the raw data from speech to writing is not seen as potentially disruptive to their integrity.[4] Transcription "prepares the data for analysis", but "it is not analysis in itself" (ANTAKI *et al.*, 2003, p. §4).

The idea that data can be *collected* from communicative episodes clashes with basic principles of integrational semiology. The integrational sign does not outlast the episode in which someone made it, and therefore whatever is caught on a recording cannot be the sign made by a historical participant; it follows that neither can the transcription of it.

> [T]o envisage treating linguistic phenomena as 'objects' is, in and of itself, to propose a distorted account of them. There are no (first-order) linguistic objects. Language is a temporally situated, ongoing process – the process of making and re-making signs in contextualized episodes of communicative behaviour. (LOVE, 2007, p. 705)

When a recording it listened to (and viewed) by a field worker, time has passed, and the original communicative event no longer exists. Instead, a new communication process is initiated with the participation of the researcher, i.e., the field worker/transcriber. The researcher engages with the recorded traces of the original event and makes their *own* signs from the materials. These new signs are the products of the new communication process in which they among other things are put in writing. It would be

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[1] For Labov, it disqualifies informants if they "are familiar with the theoretical issues", in which case their judgements "may not be counted as evidence" (LABOV, 1975, p. 31).

[2] The Observer's Paradox is concerned with difficulties involved in eliciting manifestations of a particular kind of abstraction, the "vernacular", for observation and does not affect the objectivity of the observing.

[3] Although discourse analyst may collect written texts as well, and more recently sociolinguists have included digital text communication data (from social media and mobile texting).

[4] Not all researchers agree is this conclusion, e.g., Bucholtz (2000, 2007), Ashmore et al. (2004); see Duncker (2019) for discussion.

impossible for the transcriber to make any transcription unless they were able to grasp what was being said on the recording. That is to say, the transcriber is required to engage with the traces *as* traces of language.

If the researcher listens to the same recording and/or reads the same transcript a second, third, etc. time, these communication processes will yield new signs as well, only each next time they will be experientially based on the signs the same person made on the previous occasions. A person can only make signs based on their own past linguistic experience, from their own unique first-person perspective here-and-now. No transcriber can ever reconstruct the same signs as the ones made by the participants of the original encounter. On the other hand, given the recording and the transcript, the transcriber and the analyst of the transcription (who need not be the same person) both have other options available for their sign making than the original participants. They can, for example, replay the recording any number of times, they can re-read the transcript, they can *see* what will be said in a minute from now, etc., whereas the historical participants had to make do with whatever they were able to perceive and remember in real time.

Because all linguistic inquiry and all dealings with collected traces of past communication require the participation of an inquirer, nothing linguistic is ever objectively "given" by nature.

> Language does not present itself for study as a neatly disengaged range of homogeneous phenomena, patiently awaiting description by the impartial observer, as is suggested by the misleading expression linguistic data. … On the contrary, language occurs nowhere as 'data'. Language offers a paradigm case of interference by investigation. The interference arises from the fact that in linguistics language becomes both the object and the instrument of investigation, as well as the medium in which the linguist's conclusions are ultimately formulated. (HARRIS, 1997, p. 272-73)

4 LINGUISTICS IS A LINGUISTIC EXERCISE

The failure to acknowledge and to act upon the fact that language is fundamentally different from other objects of study, leads to the misconception that linguists are free to observe language and collect objective data from it. The failure amounts to ignoring the reflexivity of language altogether.

> [L]inguistic description of the verbal activity of A and B requires the linguist also to engage in verbal activity. Linguistics itself is a linguistic exercise; … In order to describe or discuss the linguistic activities of others, we must ourselves engage in linguistic activity of our own. (HARRIS, 1998, p. 25)

Every step of the way, linguistic inquiry is itself linguistic. Language research is possible because and *only* because of linguistic reflexivity. "Language is our great general medium of concerted and systematic inquiry. It can be used to investigate and talk about anything under the sun, not to mention the sun itself" (JOSEPH *et al.*, 2001, p. 212).

When the reflexivity of language is ignored or taken for granted, it may *seem as if* language can be turned into an object of inquiry, rather than being "turned back on itself" (FIRTH, 1948[1964], p. 147), without further ado and without any theoretical, methodological, or empirical consequences. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although this omission may seem to some to be no more than a minor philosophical detail, it effectively pulls the empirical rug from under data-based linguistic inquiry in the traditional sense.

The reflexivity of language applies to all researchers who study language, one way or the other and irrespective of their "paradigm". It applies to all communicating participants: "For all human beings engage in analytic reflection about their own linguistic experience and use words to describe it. This is a *sine qua non* of engagement in language as a mature member of society." (HARRIS; HUTTON, 2007, p. 223).

The consequences of linguistic reflexivity to the *study* of language, however, are only fully recognized by integrational linguistics. It may be recognized that certain technical terms are metalinguistic, e.g., that "'dialects' and 'varieties' are artifacts of the ways sociolinguists talk about talk" (JOHNSTONE, 2006, p. 463), but otherwise the linguist appears to be exempted from the scope of linguistic reflexivity. Typically, lay metalanguage is recognized, e.g., in sociolinguistics with respect to people's linguistic attitudes to and comments about language, or in applied linguistics with respect to learners' metalinguistic awareness, and "folk linguistics" as a field of study investigates how non-linguists talk about language (e.g., AGHA, 2007; NIEDZIELSKI; PRESTON, 1999; PRESTON, 2004; SILVERSTEIN, 1993). Where linguistic reflexivity *is* recognized, it is recognized exclusively with respect to the persons whose linguistic activity is providing the researcher with data, not as something that applies to the researcher personally. The researcher is supposedly situated outside or above linguistic activity from which the linguistic activity *of others* can be observed, from a third-person perspective, but without requiring the researcher to engage in linguistic activity of their own. This situation, however, it not possible. To use a Wittgensteinian phrase, language is "unhintergehbar".

> [L]anguage itself has to provide the means by which linguistic phenomena may be analysed and linguistic information given. We cannot get 'outside' language in order to do this: on the contrary, we have no option but to remain 'within' the confines of language if our attempts at linguistic analysis are to be successful. We must be able to ask questions about language and propose answers to those questions. But questions and answers *are themselves linguistic operations.* (HARRIS, 1998, p. 25)

In the social sciences, reflexivity with respect to the researcher is recognized in qualitative research as a matter of distance vis-à-vis the data. If researchers are too close to or personally involved in the phenomenon being studied, it may affect their impartiality as observers and make it impossible to maintain full objectivity. Accordingly, they should openly state "the exact nature of their proximity through reflexivity. For example, a white, male researcher may focus on aspects of a topic that resonate with his own experience (SHERRARD, 1997) thereby shaping his findings and this should be acknowledged" (MEYRICK, 2006, p. 804). This recommendation, however, concerns research ethics and the integrity of the researcher. It does not concern observation per se. While being a "white male" may arguably "shape" what is observed, observation from a third-person perspective is still possible if the object of study exists "out there", independent of his own experience. It will only be the way he looks at it that is affected, and when this is declared "through reflexivity", readers are free to decide whether or not his proximity to the data disqualifies him as an observer – and ultimately whether the outcome of his research qualifies as scientific knowledge.

Dealt with in this way, the appeal to reflexivity becomes a personal disclaimer, a pre-emptive defence against accusations of behaving unscientifically, and a request for methodological absolution in advance. It puts reflexivity in an unfavourable light by presenting it as an empirical deficit. Although the whole point of the reflexive declaration was to break away from judgements of research quality "biased towards those aspects of rigour that mirror the positivist approach" (MEYRICK, 2006, p. 802), its apologetic character makes it effectively counterproductive. Moreover, this view of reflexivity does not translate to linguistic reflexivity. For the linguist, reflexivity is not a choice. Language cannot be conceived "from the outside" by any communicating participant. No one can leave language in order to adopt an impersonal perspective. There is no alternative to the perspective of the first person, and it is absurd to require of linguists that they should disregard their personal linguistic experience. It is because of this experience and not a lack of personal linguistic experience that enables a linguist to (perhaps) succeed in the attempt to reach a worthwhile insight about a linguistic phenomenon. Any serious account of a communicational event presupposes the analyst's "ability to integrate present experience with past experience" (HARRIS, 1998, p. 25).

Nevertheless, linguists should explicitly declare their interpretational efforts invested in the presented *material.* Not in order to make excuses or ask for forgiveness for creating the material on which they base their analysis. On the contrary, the linguist must claim responsibility for the data. Linguistic data are inevitably *sponsored data*, they are not objectively "given" by nature but hermeneutically (first-person) given as presented by the analyst (DUNCKER, 2019, p. 142-147).

The following – empirical – example is intended as an illustration of this point. The extract below is taken from a corpus of Danish sociolinguistic interviews, Corpus BySoc (available online at https://bysoc.ku.dk/). The recordings were collected and analysed in and around 1987, in connection with Project Urban Sociolinguistic (GREGERSEN; PEDERSEN, 1991). The corpus consists of 76

transcribed conversations with participants who were born and raised in Nyboder in central Copenhagen. The conversations were mostly recorded in the participants' own home and had no preset subject. In all conversations, a field worker participated. The recordings were transcribed in score format, and this is also how they appear on the website. Below, I have copy-pasted an extract from interview number 60010700 and added line numbers and an English version of the transcript in italics. (See transcription key below, before list of references.) Four persons participated in the interview, three informants and a field worker. In the extract, the transcribed talk of two participants is shown: Participant 1 (male, 61 years) and Participant 2 (male, 36 years).

```
          ----------------------------------------------------------
L. 1      1> da vi havde fået C%%%% ik' £ # så lovede jeg mig selv
             when we had <name> right £ # I promised myself
          2>
          ----------------------------------------------------------
L. 2      1>"nu skulle der fandeme ikke flere" £ for alene det der
             "now there should be no more" £ only for all that nappy
          2>
          ----------------------------------------------------------
L. 3      1>blevaskeri            og skylle det og [ vil du ] "hold
             washing              and rinsing it and [ would you ]
          2>
          ----------------------------------------------------------
L. 4      1>kæft" det er jo £ man kunne våg- vågne op badet i sved
             "good god" it is £ you could wak- wake up in a sweat
L. 5      2>                                       jamen der
                                                   but surely
          ----------------------------------------------------------
L. 6      1> bare ved tanken
             just to think of it
L. 7      2>må           da have været (uf) sådan nogle~ vasc- £
             there must   have been (uf) some of those~ vasc- £
          ----------------------------------------------------------
          1>
L. 8      2>nej der var heller ikke vasco- £     vaskerier vel'
             no there were no vasco-        £     laundries were there
          ----------------------------------------------------------
```

The reason why I noticed this episode was because of the spellings "vasc-" (l. 7) and "vasco-" (l. 8). In Danish orthography "c" is not a frequently occurring letter. It is used in names and loan words, e.g., "escort" (borrowed from English) and "lambrusco" (borrowed from Italian) and is pronounced as the letter "k" when it occurs before a consonant or back vowel letter. The anonymized name "C%%%%" (l. 1), for example, could perhaps be the boy's name "Claus" which could also be spelled "Klaus". The two spellings "vasc-" and "vasco-" are transcribed as truncated words, and later in l. 8, Participant 2, according to the transcript, said "vaskerier" ('laundries'). What made me wonder was why the transcriber would use the letter "c" rather than "k" in the two truncations. If they are read aloud in Danish "vasc-"/"vask-" and "vasco-"/"vasko-", respectively, sound the same.

A second later in the interview (not shown in the extract), the transcription of Participant 2 shows another truncated form, "vascoma-". Because of my personal experience of the textualized city space, I recognize this spelling with a "c" as the name of a chain of coin-operated laundries called "Vascomat".[5] Today (2021), this laundry chain has been discontinued, and young Copenhageners may no longer be familiar with its name. That is to say, readers of the transcript with a linguistic experience different from mine (and my generation of Copenhageners), would probably not make this connection. They may, however, still notice the spelling with a "c", but they will each interpret it in their way, i.e. integrate into their own personal experience, because "[…] each of us contextualizes in our own way, taking into account whatever factors seem to us to be relevant. The individual participants in any communication situation will each contextualize what happens differently, as a function of the integrational proficiency each exercises in that situation."(HARRIS, 2009c, p. 71).

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[5] A photograph of a Copenhagen Vascomat laundry façade, contemporary with the interview, can be viewed at https://kbhbilleder.dk/kbh-museum/32285.

As I interpret it, the transcriber was familiar with the name, and the transcription of Participant 2's contribution to the conversation with a "c" rather than a "k", suggests that Participant 2 also knew it, but that it had slipped his mind at the moment. Strictly speaking, I have no way of knowing how the transcriber contextualized the auditory traces on the recording at the time of transcribing it, but the exact same objection could be made against the transcriber's knowing about Participant 2's contextualization at the time of the conversation. The way the transcript came out is the responsibility of the transcriber, and the way I contextualize the information to which it gives me access is my responsibility. It would, however, be misleading to claim that the transcript constituted objective linguistic data, collected from a concrete historical communicational episode.

No matter how you look at it, the transcript is the result of the transcriber's personal interpretation of the recording. In order to make the transcript in the first place, the transcriber would have been required to decide "what was said" on the tape. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to render the recorded speech in glottic writing. In this case, according to my interpretation of the traces of the transcribing, i.e., the material artefact of the transcript, the transcriber made a decision about the sign making of a historical participant, an event the transcriber had no chance of knowing anything about from the situated perspective of Participant 2.

Transcription systems usually allow for transcribers to document their uncertainty about "what was said". This also applies to the transcription notation in Corpus BySoc (e.g., the square brackets in l. 3 and "(uf)" for "uforståeligt" ('unintelligible') in l. 7). The trouble is, that in this case the transcriber fails to provide the reader of the transcript with this crucial piece of information, and the reader is left to believe that this was what Participant 2 actually "said". However, it may not be entirely fair to reproach the transcriber for this omission since the notation does not provide transcribers with the means to explain why and how they reached their decision with respect to a particular "hearing".

This example may hit you in the eye because of its marked spelling, provided that you are familiar with the principles of Modern Danish orthography. All the same, it makes you wonder whether the same problem could potentially apply to the rest of the transcript – or to any transcript for that matter. At all times, when listening to a recording, or when participating in a conversation, you need to decide for yourself "What was said?" and "What was meant?", irrespective of whether or not you are going to transcribe it. These questions "are variables constantly subject to monitoring by the participants themselves" (HARRIS, 1998, p. 145). For transcribers (and analysts) do not "merely reproduce the spoken word in written form, but produce new texts that bear the mark of our authorship" (BUCHOLTZ, 2000, p. 1453). It is crucial that this authorship is accepted and declared, but when this is done there is no reason for integrationists to exclude empirical materials from their linguistic inquiries.

5 AN INTEGRATIONAL METHODOLOGY?

The problems posed by linguistic data to linguistic inquiry are not something just integrational linguists should be concerned with. They apply to everyone who engages in linguistic analysis. The empirical working conditions for linguists of all hues are the same, but depending on their theoretical orientation, and the degree to which they are willing to acknowledge the consequences, linguists are likely to draw different conclusions. In order to avoid introducing analytical inconsistencies, it will, however, require them to rethink the way they conceptualize linguistic facts.

The reflexive blindness is the Achilles' heel of mainstream linguistic methodology leading to the false belief that objective linguistic data are obtainable. "We cannot think our way out of our personal experience to find a neutral vantage point on language, nor should we trust any analytical methodology which purports to achieve this" (PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015, p. 8). There is no impersonal objective standpoint for the linguist to adopt, and there is no "getting out" of language in order to adopt it. The reflexivity of language is not an additional extra, although "[t]he typical assumption appears to be that reflexive discourse is a superficial *supplement* to language itself, one which could be removed without seriously affecting language" (TAYLOR, 2000, p. 486). Any linguistic business we may have with language, whether as laypersons or professional linguists, will have to be done within the confines of language – and that includes selecting traces of past communication for analysis.

Empirically informed linguistic inquiry along the principles of integrational semiology *is* practicable. It merely requires the analyst to take full hermeneutic responsibility for the presented (written) materials as well as their analysis. Language occurs nowhere as "data", and therefore linguistic analysts must acknowledge that the data on which they base their analyses are the outcome of their own interpretational efforts. This requires analysts – and their readers – at least to integrate present linguistic experience with past linguistic experience. All texts, including transcripts, have to be written and read "by *someone*, *somewhere*, at *some time*" (HARRIS, 2009b, p. 101). Both reading and writing "involves an engagement with a text by an individual" (ibid.), and each individual person is unique. For this reason alone, "laying down a methodology – i.e., mechanical application procedures" (HARRIS, 1997, p. 304) would be futile. In this sense, it is true that "[…] integrationism does not provide an alternative methodology for studying language, languages or signs" (PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015, p. xvii), but it is not entirely accurate to conclude that integrationists do not engage in methodological deliberations. Quite the contrary in fact. The trouble is that the "principles for successful inquiry" (BUNGE, 1983) laid out by integrationists are strange and difficult to deal with in comparison with similar "orthodox" principles. Integrational linguistics "[…] simply accepts that the observer is also a participant, and sees no virtue in a futile attempt to transcend the particularities of our own experience", it "seeks an engagement with experience, and is willing to use all kinds of methods and approaches in order to achieve this" (PABLÉ; HUTTON, 2015, p. 39). Harris does not mince his words when he openly states that integrational linguistics is linguistics without a methodological safety net, and that "to take an integrational approach in the first place requires some fundamental rethinking about what you are doing" (HARRIS, 1997, p. 309). However, if you are willing to put yourself on the line, take interpretational responsibility, and exercise the necessary "intellectual muscle" (HARRIS, 1997, p. 310), you will weather the mythical storm and safely reach the port of empirical linguistic inquiry.

Transcription key
(cf. https://bysoc.ku.dk/engine_main.cgi? > Transskription)

£ for pause

X%%% for anonymized name

\# for pause filled out with breathing

~ for hesitation ('eh')

XY- "(with possible replications)XYZ for stuttering" or "for self-interruption at Y in the sequence XYZ"

(uf) for unintelligible passage

? for question intonation

"" "for citation/direct speech (only used where the speaker imitates another person, subs. him- or herself)"

(XYZ) for transcriber's comments, relating to "udtale, nonverbal ytring etc." ('pronunciation, nonverbal utterance etc.')

[XYZ] "for a passage that we are uncertain about"

Overlapping speech in score format

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