Metaphors We Live By: The Terminology of Linguistic Theory

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It has been frequently noted that gender role stereotypes can be found in the illustrative material of almost any linguistic book or paper. Examples such as (1), which reinforce the view of a dominant male and a passive, inferior female, are common:

(1) John even kissed Kate (cited by Treichler, 1990:32)

However, it is not just in the examples, but in the formulation of theoretical concepts as well, that one finds stereoypes embodied in scientific prose. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) our whole conceptual system is metaphoric. I want to show that the theoretical vocabulary expressing "what we know when we know a language", in Chomsky's sense, turns out to be an entire set of metaphors reflecting what I will call, following Eisler (1988), a "dominator model".

A dominator model is a cultural paradigm in which the idealized power is the power to control to dominate and to kill. Violence is instutionalized, depicted in the art and tolerated both in the state and in the home. The economy is based on greed and exploitation. Life is a hierarchical process with God above men, men above women and children, and humans above animals and plants (for discussion see Dodson Gray, 1979; and Griffin 1989). Although this is roughly the paradigm we have been living in for the last 4 000 years, Gimbutas (1980) and others have provided evidence for another cultural paradigm in human history, which Eisler (1988) and Eisler and Loye (1990) call the "partnership model". In a partnership society, the idealized power is the power to give and to nurture, to trust and to care. Cooperation, mutual pleasure and responsibility are enhanced in the art (Gadon,1989). The economy is based on sustainability and sharing. The Earth and female energy are sacred. Life is a web of interconnected forms of life in which all participate.

I think it is urgent for us in the field of Linguistics to be wary of certain metaphors inherent in the theories we may be developing or pursuing in our work. The theory of syntax entitled "Government and Binding" (Chomsky, 1981) will be used here as an example of how the dominator model can shape the terminology of scientific concepts we believe to be objective. While my remarks are not intended to bear on the scientific value and explanatory power of this syntactic theory, it is nevertheless important to stress that terminology might well affect the scientist's perspective.

The two major books in which this theory is developed are entitled *Lectures on Government and Binding* and *Barriers*. What ideas do the words "barriers", "binding", "government", trigger in you? For me, these words are metaphors of a dominator model.

In this theory, a sentence is represented by a tree, which by definition is a hierarchical structure in which some constituents *dominate* others.

If hierarchical structure is indeed correct, why do the notions concerning relationships need to be defined in terms of dominance? The implicit assumption must be that "to be located above" somehow relates to a position of domination rather than a position of responsibility.

The important relation of (c-)*command* is defined in terms of *dominance* :

(2) α c-*commands* β if and only if α does not *dominate* β and every γ that dominates α dominates β. (Chomsky, 1986:8)

$$\gamma \, [\alpha \, \beta \, [\, [...] \, [\beta]]]$$

An alternative definition of c-command in a partnership society could be worded as in (3):

(3) β is a PARTNER of α if and only if α is not RESPONSIBLE for β and every γ that is responsible for α is responsible for β.

Syntax also accounts for certain relations of coreference between constituents, as for example, the fact that *Jane* and *herself* refer to the same individual in the sentence *Jane loves herself*. The sub-theory which handles this relationship is called *Binding Theory.* Principles A and B of this theory, as they are now formulated, illustrate a slave-master dichotomy:

(4) Coreference relations, dominator style:

Principle A of the *binding* theory: An anaphor is *bound* in its (*domain* or) *governing* category

Principle B of the *binding* theory: A pronoun is *free* in its (*domain* or) *governing* category

In a partnership society, these principles could be formulated as follows:

(5) Coreference relations, partnership style:

Principle A of the INTIMACY theory: An anaphor SHARES its reference within its area of INTIMACY/ with a close FRIEND.

Principle B of the INTIMACY theory: A Pronoun only SHARES its reference outside its area of INTIMACY/ with a more remote FRIEND.

Consider some other examples of dominator metaphors and how they might be replaced by partnership terminology:

(6) (a) *Barriers,* naturally erected for 'protection' of *domains*, which can be void by L-*marking*, take us back to the rodeo metaphor of cattle marking and ownership. Instead we could speak of BUD configurations which can BLOOM.

(b) *Governors* which compete in minimal domains so that "*protects* § from government by α " and "γ immediately *dominates* β "(Chomsky, 1986:42).

In such a warfare among categories in the tree the only way to explain its cohesion? Why cannot a category OPEN UP its domain/BUDS?

(c) *Theta-roles* (semantic roles) which are *assigned*, leaving no choice to the individual arguments which receive them. Seldom do we speak of an argument ACCEPTING a theta-role or being RECEPTIVE to it.

(d) *Chains*: when some categories are linked, they form *chains*, not waves, circles or webs. If one element in this chain is of an unusual kind, it is a *parasitic* gap, whose content can be recovered by *exploiting* the other *chain*.

(e) The "theory of *control* ": in *John wants to leave* it is said that the subject John *controls* the subject of *to leave*. Why don't we talk about SUBJECT SHARING in such a case?

It is curious that a relationship that is fundamentally missing in *Barriers* is AGREEMENT. Although Chomsky states (p.13) that "agreement appears to enter into determination of both barriers and proper government", AGREEMENT has only one entry in the *Barriers* index, while *government* with its subentries has 29. AGREEMENT appears again under the head-head agreement entry but with no entry on its own, while all the government entries are crossed. If agreement plays a role in the definition of government, why is it all but ignored? Agreement is often mentioned as a possible solution and used when nothing else seems to work, but is not pursued: on page 77 Chomsky writes: "the assumption we need is that independent of raising there is head-head agreement (index sharing)..." On page 75, FEATURE SHARING OF AGREEMENT is mentioned as an alternative to *chain indexing*. One wonders why these alternatives are not pursued.

While this inventory is far from complete, it shows that linguistic theory is not immune to the cultural paradigm we live in. The dominator model perpetuates itself through the most pervasive way: the metaphors with which we construct our theories.

We often feel powerless with regard to our abilities to induce change in our everyday lives or work. Often people working on abstract theoretical notions see very little connections between these theoretical issues and the ones they encounter in their lives.

I think this does not have to be so. We have a choice. Small actions are possible, like remythifying the terminology of our theories. After all, awareness of the choice of words should be a minimum for a linguist. Let us insure that the obvious does not remain unnoticed. Let us try to invent "partnership" linguistics.

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