

Linguistics and the Third Reich

Mother-tongue fascism, race
and the science of language

Christopher M. Hutton

Routledge Studies in the History of Linguistics



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LINGUISTICS AND THE THIRD REICH

In this ground-breaking work, Christopher Hutton demonstrates that an important component of European fascist thought was derived from linguistics, not least the notion of an Aryan people with an original language and homeland. In Nazi Germany, linguistic fascism took the form of a cult of the mother-tongue, expressed in a horror of linguistic assimilation and a xenophobic assertion of German language rights. Jews were considered to lack a healthy relationship to the German language and therefore to threaten the bond between the Germans and their language.

Linguistics and the Third Reich presents an insightful account of the academic politics of the Nazi era and analyses the work of selected linguists, including Trier and Weisgerber. Hutton situates Nazi linguistics within the policies of Hitler's state and within the history of modern linguistics. Drawing upon a wide range of unpublished and published sources, he attacks long-standing myths about the role of linguistics within the Nazi state and about the relationship of linguistics to race theory.

This is the first single-volume guide to the linguistics of the Third Reich and fills a large gap in the literature on National Socialist ideology. Hutton's research makes a remarkable contribution to the understanding of links between linguistics and the development of European racial theory and to the field of the history of linguistics.

Christopher M. Hutton currently teaches linguistics in the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong. He previously taught Yiddish Studies at the University of Texas, USA and at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, UK.

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY
OF LINGUISTICS

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INTRODUCTION

This research began as a project to look at linguistic theories as models of society. I intended to read inter-war European linguistics as offering models of social coherence and social order, focusing on German linguists such as Leo Weisgerber, Jost Trier and Hans Sperber. It was not at all my original intention to deal with the National Socialist period; however I gradually came to see that I had a naive view of the history of German linguistics, and of linguistics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that much received wisdom about categories of race and language in the history of linguistics was misleading.

Linguists working today assume that the concepts and paradigms within which they work differ markedly from those of the Nazi era. If they pay the matter any thought at all, they assume that Nazi linguistics fell from grace through the sin of identifying language with race. Modern linguistics sees itself as a forward-looking discipline, and regards the activity of linguistic analysis as either ideologically neutral ('scientific') or ideologically positive, in that most linguists rhetorically claim the equality of all language systems. The rise of the discipline is presented as a liberation struggle from the tyranny of traditional grammar and the Latin parts of speech, and from allegedly absurd beliefs such as the etymological 'fallacy' (i.e. the assertion that the 'true' meaning of a word is to be sought in its etymology). The history of linguistics is thus conceptualized in a manner akin to nationalistic histories, in which the former oppressors are blackened and the stages in the development of national (disciplinary) autonomy celebrated.

Whatever the merits of this position, I do not believe it encourages honest contemplation of the history of linguistics. Linguistics is a scholarly discipline, not a liberated nation, and many of its descriptive or methodological principles reflect the politics of European nationalism in the last two centuries. Notions such as 'native speaker' and 'native speaker intuition', 'natural language', 'linguistic system', 'speech community' have their roots in nationalist organicism, and the fundamental 'vernacularism' of linguistics needs to be seen as an ideology with a complex history and real political consequences. That ideology is alive and well today and informs much thinking in all branches of the discipline, including theoretical and cognitive linguistics. The widespread

belief held by linguists today that some great conceptual distance separates them both from nineteenth century German linguistics and from linguistics in the Nazi era is unfounded.

In the National Socialist period, the academic presses kept rolling until well into 1944, and the amount of published and unpublished writings available for evaluation is vast. While I have tried to cover a range of topics and scholars, many important areas have been treated only in passing or not at all. I have not discussed specific descriptive models of grammar and grammatical description, except in general terms. My treatment of the question of the homeland of the Indo-Europeans and related matters of 'Aryan' linguistics is far from comprehensive; there are, however, extensive discussions of these issues in Poliakov (1974) and Römer (1985). Inevitably the choice of topics and linguists reflects my own interests within linguistics; the linguists to whom I pay the most attention (Trier, Weisgerber, Kloss) are, however, arguably the German linguists of the post-Neogrammarian generation who made the biggest impact in the discipline as a whole. Kloss in particular remains influential today.

The biographical details on individual linguists provided here are incomplete,¹ and the absence of an indication that a particular individual was a member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) should not be taken to imply that that person definitely was not a member. My strong impression, having done a certain amount of archival research in connection with this project, and having read the results of those researches by others, is that the more one looks the worse the picture appears. Distinctions between 'core Nazis' and 'fellow-travellers', 'opportunists', 'objective scholars', 'modernizers', 'inner emigrants', 'conservative-reactionaries', 'race theorists', while they have their uses, have too often been applied without consistency and without thought, thereby serving in the creation of protective myths around scholars and ideas.

National Socialist scholarship is part of Western scholarship, and Nazism has its roots in many aspects of the European past, and in ideas found both in twentieth century Europe and North America. I have found no fundamental contradiction between adherence to Nazism and adherence to high standards in scholarship or to scientific method, however chilling this conclusion might be. All the sciences of human measurement – physical anthropology, human biology, race science, linguistics, etc. – contributed to Nazi scholarship, as they have contributed to new forms of self-understanding in the modern world. Indeed, many of the ideas that are now picked out as fascist were common currency among educated Europeans during the first half of the twentieth century.

The discipline of linguistics has in general preferred not to look at the central role played by ideas derived from linguistics in Nazi ideology, and the problem is often defined away in terms of a 'confusion of linguistic and racial categories'. In particular I now find it peculiar how the postulation of an original Indo-European or Aryan language and people has been hailed as an

achievement within the history of linguistics, and the role of those ideas in intellectual and practical politics passed over in silence. Discussion of the political impact of these ideas has been largely confined to intellectual history; in survey histories of linguistics only brief mention is made of the ‘abuse’ of these ideas under National Socialism. But the term ‘abuse’ begs the question, and an ill-defined race theory has been left to play the role of ‘fall-guy’.

At the conclusion of his history of the idea of race, Hannaford puts philologists in first place in the list of the guilty:

I hope I have shown that the fictitious unities of race and nation whipped up by philologists, anthropologists, historians, and social scientists of the nineteenth century as alternatives to the antique political state led them to forget a very important past and to invent in its place novel forms of governance that were pursued with vengeance and arrogance and all the cunning skill of the fore-thinkers.

(1996: 399)

Even the most superficial look at the problem makes it clear that ideas about an Indo-European (Indo-Germanic, Aryan) people (or race or tribe) derive from linguistics; race science took its lead from the study of language. In a wider context, the ‘evil aristocrat’ Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau has been cast as the villain of nineteenth century Western thought, whereas in fact race theory belonged as much to bourgeois, progressive liberals such as the linguist August Pott, and natural scientists such as Ernst Haeckel.

Linguistics is both the parent and the child of race theory. It is the parent, in the sense that nineteenth century physical anthropologists took their lead from linguistics and linguistic categories. It is the child, in the sense that linguistics has reclaimed its role as the premier science in the classification of human diversity, elaborating a ‘characterology’ or ‘typology’ of the world’s languages, and therefore of the world’s ethnic groups. In recent years, the discipline of cultural anthropology has entered into a period of political self-doubt about its ‘master-narrative’ of cultural description, while linguistics has resisted, or rather ignored, the disruptive discourses massing at its gates. There has been a tendency in recent years for practitioners of neighbouring disciplines such as anthropology and archaeology to compare their own disciplinary foundations unfavourably with those of linguistics. Thus Anthony (1995: 96), in a critique of both Nazi and eco-feminist readings of the archaeological record, looks to historical linguistics for an objective source of knowledge. Linguistics ‘rests upon a theoretical and methodological foundation that is more secure than that of prehistoric archaeology’. Linguistics can make ‘predictive statements’,

whereas '[n]o descriptive method or theory of culture change would permit an archaeologist to predict accurately the shape or decoration of the pots belonging to an as-yet undiscovered phase of a prehistoric culture'. The question of the status and objectivity of linguistic methodology is complex (and is not directly the subject of this book); however there can surely be no reason to argue that linguistics enjoys any special autonomy or privilege in relation to ideology.

One key ideology to be found within National Socialist thought was that of the mother-tongue, and this ideology was particularly associated with linguists and linguistics. While the importance of mother-tongue ideology in Nazi scholarship has been widely recognized by German scholars (e.g. Ziegler 1965: 159; Simon 1982, 1986a; Römer 1985; Ahlzweig 1994), aside from these specialist studies by intellectual historians, there are few signs within linguistics of even the most basic grasp of the history and explosive impact of this ideology. Nazism was an ideological coalition, and one of the fundamental elements in that coalition was the defence of mother-tongue rights: Nazism was a language-rights movement. Pan-Germanism, as much as pan-Turkism or pan-Slavism, was a consequence of ideas ultimately derived from linguistics.

The centrality of the notion of mother-tongue can be seen in its links to other concepts within Nazi thought. One of these was 'world view' (*Weltanschauung*, *Weltbild*, *Weltsicht*). In Nazi Germany, the term *Weltanschauung* was used as a short-hand way of referring to Nazi ideology, and in the bureaucracy of personal and political evaluation individuals would be assessed with respect to their reliability in matters of 'world-view'. There is a clear link between this emphasis on world-view, and the notions of linguistic relativity and mother-tongue autonomy propounded within linguistics. For Nazi thought was steeped in anti-universalism and in the rhetoric of cultural difference. Different peoples were held to have different world-views, and no one nation had the right to impose its understanding of the world on any other; different languages embodied different cultural and ethical values. Behind this attack on universalism was a rejection of universal religion ('Judeo-Christianity'), universal rationality, universal languages (particularly 'artificial' ones), and Anglo-American democratic liberalism.

In 1934, Schmidt-Rohr contemplated the possibility that one day all the inhabitants of the earth would speak the same language, perhaps some kind of 'Basic English'. This would be a great loss to humanity, even if economic and diplomatic communication would be facilitated, for the rich diversity of human cultures would be lost. While it is true, continued Schmidt-Rohr, that this linguistic disorder creates dangerous tensions, especially now that it has been recognized that linguistic territory equals national territory, nonetheless that struggle between peoples is a necessary stage in the creation of a world fit for humans to live in. The Führer and the German people need to recognize the geopolitical importance of language questions (1934a: 232).

Universalizing ideologies were perceived to be threats to mother-tongue (or 'Germanic')

religion, native patterns of thought, national and ethnic languages, and particularistic ethical systems and values. Within the cultural politics of world-view, beliefs about both race and language played key roles, with the rhetorical emphasis often on race alone, or race and language, or language and race. But whatever the order of priority given to these two aspects of national inheritance, language of necessity played a crucial role. For race is mute, and language can speak; it *is* world view, and it has the power to bring race into the realm of historical action (Schmidt-Rohr 1939b: 162).

One key aspect of the ideology of the mother-tongue was its importance – in the context of Nazism – as an anti-Semitic ideology. For Jews were held to lack a sense of loyalty to their mother-tongue, and were therefore regarded as having an ‘unnatural’ relationship to language. Jews lived in many countries and spoke many tongues; they were rootless nomads with loyalty only to their race. The separation of mother-tongue and race meant that language for them was an instrument of communication only, and a means of entry into other cultures and countries. Furthermore, Judaism was built on veneration of a sacred language, and that sacred language was not the mother-tongue.

Jews, given that their culture was based on a separation of the sacred and the vernacular, could maintain their identity across different cultures and language situations. In contrast, German identity was inextricably tied to the mother-tongue. In the German diaspora, the situation was critical. At home, not only were Jews speaking German as their quasi-native language, but the spirit of the German language was under attack from liberal universalism and communism, both reflections of the Jewish spirit.

German linguists tended to see German history as an exile or diaspora, a stateless confusion in which only the language had held the German people together and marked a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Weisgerber 1938b). The Germans had survived ‘diaspora’ through the will to language, and this special relationship to the mother-tongue was the key to the survival of the people as a racial or ethnic unity. The language could unite an otherwise divided national consciousness, transcending confessional, regional, political and class divisions. But in post-Versailles Europe, it was clear that the boundaries of the *Volk* were falling.

On this model, German history offered a mirror-image of Jewish history. Jews were the evil twin of the Germans, their racial opposites (*Gegenrasse*). The story of the Jews was one of survival and continuity through a set of texts in a sacred language, and through a race instinct that was indifferent to mother-tongue. The Jews were a special case and a unique threat, since their capacity for racial survival was superior to that of the Germans, and since they had no need of territory and no need of mother-tongue. They thrived in cities, blurring the discrete boundaries

between the European peoples, and spreading various forms of universalist thought (communism, liberalism, capitalism, ‘Judeo-Christianity’, freemasonry, international languages). Thus – on this view – the post-Versailles European order represented a rising threat to the German identity, and a concomitant boost to the Jews and their allies.

German linguists like Heinz Kloss, Jost Trier and Leo Weisgerber saw in the German diaspora, which had been a symbol of the energy of the Germans and their civilizing mission, the threat of the Yankee ‘melting-pot’ on the one hand and assimilation by the Slavic hordes – conceptualized as Asiatic – on the other. Within this framework, the conquest of America, and the German expansion eastwards in the Second World War were state-building exercises carried out against ‘native’ peoples conceptualized as nomadic, rootless, passive, or underdeveloped.

In the newly open horizons of the United States of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and then in the Europe of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the First World War, diaspora German, which had for so long defined the boundary of Germanness in the absence of a central state, was clearly heading for extinction. For in a world of discrete national languages which were the property of autonomous political units, only the force of the state could maintain the boundary of the mother-tongue. If Germans were to be found behind the boundaries of other states, then they were logically destined to assimilate and disappear from the *Volk*. A national boundary that was defended only by the primal familial tie of the family and the bonding between mother and child was intrinsically vulnerable to assimilation. The German woman who raised her German child with a German father, but within a Slavic state, raised it with at best an ambiguous ‘father-language’. The father at home did not speak the language of authority and the state. That fundamental bond between child, mother and language could only be protected by a powerful father who represented the fusion of familial and state authority: the ‘mother-tongue’ needed the protection of the boundaries of the ‘father-land’. Hence the scholarly anxiety about which races had true ‘state-building’ potential. Only if the mother-tongue was the same as the father-tongue, both literally (the biological father) and metaphorically (the language of the state), and if the borders were secure, could assimilation be avoided.

In National Socialist Germany, the German language was the object of increasingly intense veneration by professional linguists committed to the notion of mother-tongue. These linguists believed it was their sacred duty to protect and preserve the mother-tongue, to contribute to the salvation of the German people itself and its liberation from history, hybridity and social divisions, and the horrors of assimilation, thereby reconnecting it with the foundation of national Being. Reverence for the mother-tongue reached at points a mystical level. It was expressed in the language of the cult, and had complex links with the Germanic-pagan ideal of a pre-patriarchal matriarchal order.

If this seems somewhat far-fetched, a sceptic might like to begin their reading on this subject with the closing paragraphs of Georg Schmidt-Rohr's essay 'Race and language'. There the 'Mother Tongue' is enthroned as a deity, the object of intense veneration ('unshakeable love') from which radiates life-giving and life-sustaining forces (1939b). This cult of matriarchal devotion can be juxtaposed to 'patriarchy', which in this context connotes the authority of sacred texts in 'dead languages' over life and the life-force. The language of patriarchy, the father-tongue, was the language of the scriptures, either Hebrew or Latin, i.e. Judaism or Catholicism. The mother-tongue gave life and energy, it was grounded in the earth, in the life-rhythm; the father-tongue was the universal voice of guilt and repression, it denied the link between human beings and the soil, the earth. It negated the life-force in name of the after-life; the world was a 'vale of tears'.

Faced with the rise of race theory and physical anthropology in the mid-nineteenth century, linguistics had a number of choices. One was to argue that language did in fact directly reflect physical race, that there were identifiable race-features in language, and this view has had a number of representatives in late nineteenth and early nineteenth century linguistics. A second was to promote a notion of a language as creating community, and as representing that force which united the members of a society in the absence of a common race, religion, or culture. This notion of a pure synchronic identity is to be found in Saussure's *Cours*, and in its pure or most logical form the *Cours* seems to represent a radical new form of European liberalism, one in which membership of a community was given simply by a shared language. However entry into this community seemed to be entry into a community of absolutely like-minded people. If we read Saussure's model politically, then we see that it offers German Jews who speak German membership of the speech-community. But this is a speech community in which difference is erased: equality is bought at the price of absolute 'mental assimilation'. The political force of Saussure's ideas was in any case mitigated by their presentation as a form of foundational rhetoric for a science of language. The postulation of a synchronic linguistic system, the *langue*, was thus part socio-politics, part methodological postulate. There remained the politically awkward question of which came first, the community or the language. This was the intellectual chicken-and-egg problem which was naturalized under the heading of 'speech-community' in the inauguration of a science of language.

The third possibility was to conceptualize the language-system as an organically-structured 'mother-tongue', and to see in the bond between mother and child the primal site of socialization. In this bond, the link between race and language was determined indirectly, but at a fundamental level by the primary socialization of the child.

The idealizations of linguistics might be seen as a harmless form of conceptual clarification or

idealization; but they can be linked to socio-political reality in politically radical ways. This can take the form of a worship of conformity, purity, like-mindedness, conceptual unity, and linguistic order. The rules of the language can be seen as social rules, and the meanings of the words as ideological meanings. Under these circumstances, the linguistic system can be conceptualized by the totalitarian linguist in the same way that law can be conceptualized by the totalitarian lawyer: as an autonomous force that determines the boundaries of the acceptable. The linguist is the gate-keeper of the language, just as the lawyer is the guardian of the rules of law.

Without the notion of mother-tongue, Saussure's notion of *langue* is of the linguistic system as a total structure. In combination with the notion of mother-tongue, it becomes a structure that is passed from one generation to another. It is therefore a historical product that grants cultural continuity and identity to the *Volk* and must be protected at all costs. There is clearly a tension between mother-tongue continuity and the notion of a synchronically defined system, and that tension was reflected in the works of Jost Trier and Leo Weisgerber.

In general, Nazi scholarship did *not* argue that the German *Volk* was a single racial unity; nor were the Jews a single unitary race (Günther 1930: 11ff.). Physicalist race theory thus was itself a potentially disruptive discourse for nationalism, for, according to its categories, the nation-states were not racially homogenous. The relationship of *Rasse* to *Volk* was not one of simple equivalence. Just as John Buchan argued that the Scottish people were made up of three race-stocks, the Saxon, the Norse and the Celtic (1924: 52), so H.F.K. Günther saw the German *Volk* as made up of several races, of which the Nordic race was just one (Günther 1933: 22–4).²

It was in this sense that only the language could create *Volk*, because it could unite distinct races within a common binding organic structure. The native language was the bridge between race and *Volk*; if you lost your language, one argument ran, you lost your identity, since the *Volk* was not a pure racial type.

Of course in the early twentieth century there were many different views of how language, race, landscape, climate and national character were related. John Buchan lamented that 'very soon, I am afraid, an Englishman will not be able to connect a Scotsman with the Scots language, or Scots theology, or even Scots drink. But we shall still be different – very different; not in externals, perhaps, but in the things that matter, our characters and our minds' (1924: 52). Lowland Scots was in any case the vernacular of only part of the Scottish people. In the case of Germany, its borders on all sides had fluctuated wildly with history; it had no heartland into which it could retreat, no Hadrian's Wall. From the point of view of Munich, Berlin could not be the heartland; nor could Frankfurt. These regional loyalties were tied to strong dialect loyalties. But linguistics – unlike race theory – offered a science of description that could make whole what

history, religion and geography were perceived to have sundered. For linguistics naturalized the normative discipline of grammar into a descriptive science, thereby erasing its dependence on the existence of a common literary standard, and projecting back through history a national myth of people united by a language. Linguistics could accommodate to many different levels of abstraction, and wholeness could be recreated on a higher level of generality. The mother-tongue was the force that could speak for race; it could recreate race in its own image and be its voice. Linguistics, in turn, was the voice of mother-tongue.

It was possible therefore to see the *Volk*-creating power of language in two ways. Firstly, one could argue that it was language alone that provided the unifying force of *Volk*, regardless of race, that therefore Jews could become members of the German *Volk*. Alternatively, it could be argued that race defined an outer boundary, so that one could Germanize members of certain races who belonged to other *Völker*, but not Jews, because their race mentality prevented it. The linguist Schmidt-Rohr apparently moved from the first view to the second under pressure in 1933. But – it should be noted – *both* views are compatible with anti-Semitism. For if Jews were part of the *Volk*, they could be required not to disturb its unity. They could be required to abandon particularism in matters of culture, belief, and to renounce their loyalty across national boundaries to Jews in other countries. For those other nations were Germany's opponents in the great struggle of the nations for survival, domination and cultural supremacy.

It might be objected that, whatever the involvement of linguistics with nationalism, there is an equally strong tradition of universalism within linguistics, one that looks to notions such as logical form and universal grammar, and draws its inspiration from philosophy, mathematical logic, computer science, information theory, semiotics, etc. However, any form of linguistics that purports to study the phenomenon of 'natural language', and does so under labels such as 'German', 'French', or 'the grammar of French', 'the phonology of German', 'the language instinct', drawing in this on 'native speaker intuitions', is involved willy-nilly in the politics of language and linguistic description. Indeed the political assumptions are all the more powerful for being unstated and unrecognized. Furthermore, questions of the social role of linguists, their roles as missionaries and colonial officials, their sources of funding, their moral responsibility, and the possible applications of their 'scientific' work are not generally addressed within the discipline of linguistics itself. As has been pointed out, the willingness of academics in the Nazi era to put their skills at the service of the state does not justify the retreat into an impenetrable and hermetically-sealed private academic world (Simon 1985b: 134–7).

Much of modern linguistics, in an effort to avoid the socio-political complexities of language and linguistic categories, has sought a realm in which 'pure science' can be practised. In this it has moved increasingly towards a neurological physicalism, and the science of evolutionary biology.

Linguistics has thereby been embraced the very intellectual forces it was seeking to avoid, and reinstated the biological study of human diversity. For no cogent explanation has been offered within currently dominant linguistic theories as to why systematic human linguistic diversity should exist at all. The increasing Darwinism of much recent speculation has therefore opened a path for the inference that the language faculty *qua* biological endowment is the product of human evolution, and that therefore – given that intraspecies variation is the foundation of evolutionary theory – the language faculty varies from one person, or group, to another.

One aim of this book is to show the links between Nazi scholarship, linguistics and wider intellectual movements and philosophies such as ‘vitalism’, ‘Theosophy’ and ‘characterology’. Vitalism as a philosophy involved the rejection of late nineteenth century biological materialism to embrace various theories of matter based on notions such as ‘life-force’. Linguistics, in its various flirtations with biological metaphors and with evolutionary theory, was a natural home for vitalistic theories, as the linguistic sign could be plausibly explained in vitalistic terms as the dynamic union of form and meaning. The rejection of Neogrammarian physicalist materialism, which underlies so much of linguistics under National Socialism, was ‘vitalistic’ in this sense.

The movement of Theosophy drew on the world’s mystical and philosophical traditions (occultism, esotericism, spiritualism, gnosticism, freemasonry, etc.) to create a new form of human understanding. While it argued for universal human equality, this movement also had a strongly elitist subtext, one that linked it to the then fashionable ‘Aryanism’ and Social Darwinism. This movement attracted a wide following in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; among its twentieth century off-shoots was the Anthroposophical movement of Rudolf Steiner in Germany. Characterology, which in its narrow sense refers to the theories of Ludwig Klages, can more broadly be defined as the disciplines of the measurement of human individual and group difference, ‘a physiognomics of everything human’ (Otto Neurath on Oswald Spengler, see Neurath 1973: 195). In this sense, both race theory and linguistics are ‘characterological’. The advantage that linguistics has over other forms of characterology (phrenology, physiognomy, graphology, physical anthropology, race theory, etc.) is that it draws on the prestige of writing, written notation, ‘traditional grammar’ and logic within Western culture. Characterology overlaps both with vitalism and with Theosophy (for example in the person of Carl Gustav Jung). In pointing to these links, I am not implying that these theories and philosophies are all ‘Nazi’; rather I do not believe that we can draw a convenient line around National Socialist scholarship. The drawing of such boundaries is generally done in the service of the quasi-nationalist histories that disciplines write about themselves.

Thus in this book I point to links between National Socialist scholarship and other intellectual traditions not normally associated with Nazism, in particular modern linguistics. This is not in

order to put the label ‘fascist’ or ‘Nazi’ on particular ways of thinking; rather in the hope of provoking a more profound reflection within mainstream linguistics on Nazism as a scholarly phenomenon, and to show how its personnel, ideas and theoretical constructs cannot be ‘imagined outside’ the disciplinary history of linguistics. Clearly this process cannot be entirely without consequences for one’s attitudes to certain ideas and traditions. In particular, I would not hesitate to include the ideology of mother-tongue rights within a survey of European fascist thought, and would argue for its centrality to many aspects of the Nazi regime’s policies. This should not be taken to imply support for (or rejection of) any particular model of language planning; I do however reject the promotion of a mother-tongue ideal as the *universally* most ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ or ‘valid’ option. But that is emphatically not the same as saying that all mother-tongue discourse is Nazi or fascist. ‘Mother-tonguism’ is a political ideology, and needs to be seen in each context against its socio-political and historical background.

Much of the material that follows is concerned with the minutiae of academic linguistics under National Socialism. However this book is about linguistics, rather than ‘Nazi linguistics’. These linguists were not deviants in the history of the discipline, but representatives of some of its long-standing beliefs. Academic linguists over the last two centuries have been involved in the promotion of their science as a key to the categorization of human diversity, and therefore have been active participants in the imagining of new forms of communities and community-ties. These new forms of human collective – ethnic groups bound by common language – have been internalized in the methodology of the discipline, and projected back onto human history as a universal law. It is not for nothing that the contemporary journal incorporating prehistory, archaeology and linguistics is called *Mother Tongue*.³ No mother-tongue ideology, no reconstruction of linguistic history (except through the history of written texts).

Even though the rise of a science of physical race had shown the disjunction between language and race, language – it was held – could still be used as a tool in prehistorical reconstruction. For the mode of linguistic ‘transmission and acquisition’ in human societies was not that of the animals (in which the cry was purely natural), nor did the nature of speech simply reflect the structure of the brain and the organs of speech (for an English baby could grow up to speak perfect Chinese). The link was the ‘native tongue’ or ‘mother-tongue’, in which the child was bonded to community, and the language thereby linked to race. Language could after all be a true ‘record of human history, even of race-history’ (Whitney 1875: 274); language and physical ethnology were both working with different methodologies towards the same end: ‘a tracing out of the actual and genealogical history of the human races’ (1867: 371). Language, said Whitney, was ‘[i]n every part and particle [. . .] instinct with history’ (1867: 381).

Nazism was an extension and radicalization of the colonial projects of the nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries, as well as the brutal application of nationalist and chauvinist ideas drawn from a wide range of disciplines and sources, including linguistics. One element in the crisis that it represented can be traced to British colonialism in India, and William Jones' famous lecture in which he stated:

The Sanscrit language, whatever may be its antiquity, is of wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologist could examine them all the three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothick and the Celtick, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanscrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family [. . .].

(1786: 422–3)

The rise of a science of language which looked back to this statement as a founding moment gave rise to an intense anxiety about the kinship that was implied between Indians and Europeans. The notion of an 'Aryan invasion', and a subsequent fall through assimilation, which was developed to account for the existence of an ancient and sophisticated civilization in India, offers a wider framework within which to understand Nazism as a radical fusion of nationalism and colonialism. The Aryans were alleged to have conquered India, and then declined into decadence through interbreeding with the inferior indigenous population. The Germans had been pioneers in Eastern Europe and the Americas, but now they seemed doomed to inter-marriage and racial decline. The expansion of the boundaries of the Reich eastwards in the Second World War was a deadly mixture of colonialism and nationalism, in which the boundaries of the Reich were also to be the boundaries of the *Volk*. That *Volk* was interpreted ambivalently as the Germans, or more globally, as the Aryans.

It was therefore not necessarily the view that speech articulation 'naturally' reflected race that was politically explosive, though of course that view could be used for racist ends.⁴ The profound crisis came from the perception that language and race were drifting ever further apart. It was the 'quasi-natural' primal bond between mother, child and language that was both the origin of the *Volk* and its point of maximum vulnerability. The language was imbibed with the mother's milk, and that socializing moment shaped the child in the image of the language, and fused it into

the body of the *Volk* through the intense emotional bond to the mother. The boundaries of the language were the surest boundaries of the *Volk*; the loss of the mother-tongue, linguistic assimilation, was the first step to complete assimilation.

In the post-First World War era those boundaries were felt to be on the verge of collapse. The primal bond was not strong enough on its own to provide continuity, and the threat of assimilation could only be fought off by the collective will, by sexual hygiene, by loyalty to the clan-nation. That will had to be realized in the state, and in the state's power to create a force-field around the innocent and vulnerable mother-child at its core. It had to defend that bond with all its power, for on it depended the psychological, racial and geographical borders of the *Volk*, and the triumph of the German people in the life and death struggle of the nations.

WHOSE HISTORY?

Introduction

The question of ‘historicization’ has come to be central to debates about the historiography of Nazism, not least the ‘historians’ controversy’ (*Historikerstreit*). The *Historikerstreit* involved a polemical debate chiefly among German historians and intellectuals about how or whether the National Socialist era could be written into general history, and how different regimes were to be evaluated in relative terms (Stalinism versus Hitlerism, etc.). In a commentary on this debate Friedländer summed up the objectives of historicization as the attempt to make the study of the Nazi era ‘similar to that of any other historical phenomenon’, without pre-set limitation on the questions that can be asked and the methodology used:

It should be understood that the Nazi era cannot be judged only from the viewpoint of its catastrophic end, and that many aspects of life and social development during that era were not necessarily linked to bolstering the regime and its aims.

(1987: 313)

The Nazi era should be reinserted into its context in German and world history, and ‘the complex and contradictory aspects of that era’ recognized as ‘the only possible basis for anchoring a renewed moral evaluation of history in general in light of the lessons drawn from the historicization of National Socialism’. While Friedländer is not opposed to the comparative perspective on the Third Reich, he is concerned about the ease with which historicization can lead to relativization.

In addition to the *Historikerstreit* controversy, there occurred a *Volkskundlerstreit* in the discipline of folklore studies or *Volkskunde* (Dow and Lixfeld 1994: 273–4). This controversy concerned the careers of individual folklorists before after and during the Third Reich, and the

question of whether one could speak of two *Volkskunden*, one that sold out its academic ideals and became corrupt, and another that retained its integrity (Brückner 1988; Emmerich 1968, 1971; Lixfeld 1994: 64–5; Strobach 1994). Ideological disputes between academics of the two post-war German states also became tangled in the historiography of the Nazi period (Jacobeit 1994).

The question of relativization and historicization is an extremely difficult one. For it is right that the ultimate judgement of the Nazi regime should be determined by the crimes it committed, crimes which have come to be symbolized by the name Auschwitz; yet one cannot read the writings of academics in that period solely through the ‘catastrophic end’ of the regime. Their work must also be read together with the histories of their disciplines. Nor should they be seen *en bloc* as faceless representatives of an authoritarian state: each individual scholar is different, and, for all the mass of material available, there is much that we do not understand.

The extraordinary case of Hans Ernst Schneider, the SS-Hauptsturmführer, Germanist and Nazi cultural activist who reinvented himself after the war as Hans Schwerte, and went on to a successful career in the German Federal Republic, can stand as emblematic for the enigma of National Socialist scholarship as a whole (see König *et al.* 1997). That enigma concerns inner life and private authenticity and the question: ‘Who is the real self?’, the National Socialist or the liberal democrat, or neither.

These questions are of relevance to all scholarly activity, unless we wish to hide behind a protective myth of unconstrained and disinterested free thought.

Structuralism oppressed?

At the turn of the century, German scholars could have justifiably claimed leadership in Western linguistics, with their domination of historical linguistics (the Neogrammarians or *Junggrammatiker*) and their pre-eminence in fields such as psychology, ethnology, folklore studies and speech sciences. In the inter-war years this pre-eminence was lost as the different forms of European structuralism began to emerge and the United States began to gain importance as a centre for academic research into language, benefiting in this ultimately from various waves of scholarly emigration from Germany and Eastern Europe. The United States was an attractive goal not only for the impoverished masses of Eastern Europe but also for young Jewish scholars like Franz Boas (1858–1942), whose career paths were blocked by anti-Semitism in Germany. While the Neogrammarians retained considerable influence over German linguistics in the inter-war years, this period also saw the rise of a German school of organicist linguistics associated with the names

of Leo Weisgerber and Jost Trier. These linguists rejected what they saw as the atomism, materialism and methodological individualism of the Neogrammarians to embrace various forms of collectivity, and this stance was maintained during the Nazi period (e.g. De Vries 1945: 49).

Relatively little attention has been paid to the history of twentieth century German linguistics in general histories and surveys of the discipline. In part this reflects the perception that European structuralism had at best a tentative and ambiguous hold on German linguistic thought in a century when structural (and synchronic) linguistics became for a time nearly synonymous with the discipline. While it is true that an obsession with a particular Germanic-cultic vision of the past was one expression of academic National Socialism, many of the younger German academics of the National Socialist period saw themselves as modernizers and innovators, anxious to sweep away old methodologies and entrenched privileges. They saw themselves as in opposition to the conservative academic establishment, and sought to establish the relevance and importance of scholarship for the national cause and the ‘New Germany’, to make the study of the past relevant to the present. In the Nietzschean tradition, they opposed dry philology and pedantry as the study of ‘dead languages’, and sought a role for scholarship in the revitalized ‘New Germany’.

The interdisciplinary disciplines of *germanische Philologie* and *deutsche Philologie* certainly loomed large in the academic study of language in Germany. They were not clearly distinguished from *Germanistik*, a term which had been in use since the 1840s (Maas 1993: 386). However it should be emphasized that other disciplines also played an important role. Between 1933 and 1945 the study of language in Germany fell under the various European national philologies (*Romanistik*, *Anglistik*, *Slawistik*), it came as part of social scientific disciplines, particularly folklore (*Volkskunde*), but also ethnology (*Völkerkunde*), sociology (*Soziologie*), pedagogy and education (*deutsche Bildung*, *Deutschkunde*), geography, physical anthropology (*Anthropologie*), race studies (*Rassenkunde*), historical disciplines like prehistory and archaeology, classics, oriental studies, psychology and philosophy. Phonetics provided a bridge to psychology, as well as to the natural sciences. Linguistics also had a strong role in normative approaches to language (*Sprachpflege*). General linguistics (*allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft*) tended to be linked with historical and comparative linguistics, in particular Indo-European linguistics (*Indogermanistik*), a discipline with the Germanic languages at its core. But a form of general linguistics on Saussurean lines, associated with linguists in Switzerland, Paris, Prague, Copenhagen and Vienna, also played an important role. For example, Fritz Stroh used the term *allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft* in this sense in his contribution to Otto Behaghel’s 1924 *Festschrift* (Stroh 1924). There was in any case no clear boundary between Indo-European general linguistics and Saussurean general linguistics. Leo Weisgerber, for example, was both a trained Indo-Europeanist and someone engaged with

Saussure's ideas. It is therefore difficult, when dealing with the first half of the twentieth century, to determine who should be termed a linguist and who not. Maas talks of a 'semi-professionalization' of the discipline in that period (Maas 1988a: 256). Simon estimates the number of linguists who were active in the Third Reich to have been about 250 (1986a: 527).

Intellectual questions about the nature of language, language in history and language in relation to *Geist* were part of shared intellectual baggage in the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and might be addressed by literary critics, sociologists, historians, folklorists or philosophers in addition to linguists. Often such discussions centred on the works of Herder and Humboldt, both founding fathers of German linguistics, but also central to the intellectual culture as a whole. As illustration of this tradition of language study, one could cite one work from the 1920s and one from the late 1930s: Otto Funke's historical study of the philosophy of language (Funke 1927) and Hanna Weber's account of Herder's philosophy of language (Weber 1939).¹ Funke discussed the eighteenth century, James Harris' *Hermes* and then gave an overview of the modern scene, dividing it into three groups: the 'romantic' group (Humboldt, Steinthal, Wundt, E. Cassirer, W. Porzig and L. Weisgerber), the aesthetic-idealist tendency (Vossler) and the empirico-psychological group (H. Paul, Fr. Brentano, A. Marty, K. Bühler).² Funke was also the author of an introduction to Anton Marty's philosophy of language (Funke 1924; Otto 1941/2). Among others, Weber looked at Herder in relation to linguistic works by the following: Ernst Cassirer, Hans Freyer, Gunther Ipsen, Hans Naumann, Georg Schmidt-Rohr, Hugo Schuchardt, Fritz Stroh, Karl Vossler, Leo Weisgerber and Wilhelm Wundt (Weber 1939: 97–8).

The names listed above include both Nazis and victims of Nazism. For example, Ernst Cassirer, a Jew, was forced into retirement in 1933 and eventually reached the United States in 1941; Gunther Ipsen became a member of the NSDAP on 1 May 1937.³ Karl Bühler was arrested by the Gestapo on 23 March 1938, released on 7 May and subsequently allowed to emigrate (Sebeok 1981).⁴

How can the history of linguistics, a discipline that holds to the view that it is a science of unbiased description, be written so as to include linguistics under National Socialism? In post-war German linguistics, general European structuralism came to be seen as ideologically neutral. It was felt to be distinct from 'native' German traditions of linguistic investigation that looked back to figures such as Herder, Humboldt and Grimm and the ambivalences of German linguists' allegiance to structuralism became for many an index of their commitment to a dispassionate investigation of language. Peter von Polenz appeals to just such an opposition in his discussion of Saussure's place in German linguistics (1968). For von Polenz, the late date of the German translation of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1931) and the isolation of German

linguistics – even after 1945 with Weisgerber’s ‘Humboldt-Renaissance’ – are symptoms of a lack of rigour in German linguistics. He argues that 1931 was an inauspicious year for the reception of the *Cours* in Germany, and that ‘one sided diachronic thinking’ is related to historicism and conservatism, since it involves judging the value of words according to their past (Polenz 1967: 148). Polenz thus links the ‘etymological fallacy’, the idea that the true meaning of a word is to be found in its original or historically established meaning, to political conservatism and anti-Semitism (1967: 148–9). As illustration he cites etymological sketches published by the linguist Alfred Götze in the journal *Muttersprache* in the early years of National Socialist rule (1967: 128).⁵

Newmeyer argues that the distinction between structural linguistics and National Socialist linguistics was officially defined:

The political opposition to structural linguistics was strong enough to keep it from gaining a foothold in other places as well. Both nazi Germany and fascist Italy had officially condemned structuralism as incompatible with the ideology of the state. During the nazi period, the pages of German linguistic journals were filled with vivid descriptions of how the German soul manifests itself in its people’s masterful language.

(1986: 37)

However any notion that structuralism was repressed under National Socialism must be dismissed as a complete myth (Simon 1989b), as is the notion of a delayed reception of the *Cours* in Germany (Maas 1993: 406n). Nor is there any corollary between the holding of racist views and anti-structuralism: Eberhard Zwirner, the founder of a specific branch of structuralist linguistics (*Phonometrie*), is a case in point (see Chapter 9).

Saussure’s significance as a linguistic theorist was recognized in Germany immediately on the publication of the *Cours*, as the perceptive review by Schuchardt (1917) shows.⁶ Saussure’s *Cours* had been assimilated without too great difficulty into inter-war neo-Kantian ‘organicist’ linguistics, as Stroh (1924: 231, 1934: 231) illustrates. In Weisgerber’s writings of the late 1920s and early 1930s Saussure’s *Cours* is taken for granted as part of the intellectual background. Mathesius (1935/6) used the term ‘synchronisch’ without direct reference to Saussure. Trier (1932b) – a critic of Saussure – lamented however that the Saussurean notion of the inter-relatedness of word meanings had been neglected; this paper was republished in 1939. Funke (1944: 23, 23n) noted that Humboldt, Marty, de Saussure and Bally had articulated the notion of a language as a system. In an explicitly structuralist article, Funke, writing from Bern, recorded in

a footnote (1944: 21n) that he had presented the material in talks at the universities of Bonn and Marburg in 1942, i.e. in the heart of the German academic establishment at the height of the war.

The late 1930s and the war years also saw intense discussion of Saussure as a general linguistic theorist in the journals *Acta Linguistica* of Copenhagen and the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* in Geneva.⁷ Lerch's discussion of the Saussurean theory of the sign (1939) was part of this forum, one which involved for example linguists from Belgium⁸ (Buyssens 1940/1, 1942/3), Switzerland (Sechehaye, Bally and Frei 1940/1), France (Pichon 1940/1) and Denmark⁹ (Hjelmslev 1942) as well as Germany. Volume 2 of *Acta Linguistica* includes a contribution co-authored by one Swiss and two German academics on the Saussurean concept of the sign (Borgeaud, Bröcker and Lohmann 1942/3). One of the German contributors, Walter Bröcker, was professor of philosophy in Rostock, and a member of the NSDAP.¹⁰

The literature on the linguistic sign and Saussure therefore involved active Nazi academics (Bröcker), a dismissed German professor still actively publishing in Germany (Lerch), academics from neutral countries (Bally, Frei, Sechehaye), and academics from occupied countries (Buyssens, Hjelmslev). It also included the British linguist Alan Gardiner (1944).¹¹

This is not to say that Saussure was uncritically accepted in Germany. Clearly discussion of Saussure as a foundational theorist was more prevalent in Geneva, Copenhagen and Paris than in German universities. One critical voice within Germany was Emil Winkler¹² (1937, 1938), who rejected the 'méthode statique' of French linguistic theory (1937: 439–40) and promoted a view of linguistics as *Geisteswissenschaft* based on 'inner form'. This inner form was 'the surviving element of the creative linguistic act' which was left in language in its 'debased' function as a medium of communication (Winkler 1933: 29, quoted in Glässer 1942: 455). Winkler (1938) sought to characterize the difference between French and German thinking about language. He contrasted Saussure and Bally's view of language with the Herder–Humboldt tradition that dominated in Germany, and suggested that the linguists of these two nations are influenced by their respective mother-tongues. Saussure claimed in making the distinction between *langage* and *langue* to be defining things, not words. But, Winkler points out, the linguistic means to make this distinction exist only in French. In the German tradition the emphasis is on the unity of *Volk* and language, and on language as constituting social unity; French thinking about language, which has a much more extensive vocabulary, is dominated by sociological categories (1938: 48, 81). When speaking in general terms about language, the French will use the term *langage*, rather than *langue* (1938: 48–9). French linguistics is concerned with 'external form'; it takes an instrumental view of language. Saussure's sharp differentiation between synchronic and diachronic facts implies that the etymology of a word is irrelevant for the present. However a child does not learn a

timeless object; but rather inherits a living view of the world (*Weltbild*) from its forebears, one in which the accumulated experience and values are stored and which derives its force from the past (1938: 92–3). Winkler builds his analysis on a series of oppositions: in the German tradition language is seen as a living force; in the French it is a dead tool for communication: the organic *Volk* versus the mechanical *société*. In conclusion Winkler concedes that he may have sharpened the picture somewhat, but insists that the opposition is a real one. Remarking that academic communication has lacked its previous vitality since the war, he ends with a plea for fruitful dialogue based on a clear perception of differences (1938: 93).

This article can serve as further illustration of an interpretative problem. One can classify this article as ‘scholarly’; it is not a diatribe against the French. It falls into the general European discourse of national character, which was not necessarily polemical in nature. A related opposition is found, for example, at the conclusion to Santoli’s discussion of the structure of Italian and German: ‘The Romance sentence is more symmetrical and clearer, the German more diverse and “organic”’ (1942: 117).¹³ Yet it can also be read in conjunction with Hermann Güntert’s mission statement in the same volume (see discussion below), and with the wider folkist–organicist rhetoric of German linguists under National Socialism.¹⁴ Organicism was realized on a continuum from the abstract–philosophical at one end to the ‘folkish’ notion of *Volk* as ‘organic community of blood and language’ at the other (Helbok 1937: 196).

Linguistics is a product of organicism, and as such it stresses integration and holism, and has difficulty in dealing with the fragmentary, the transient and the hybrid. The organicism of Saussure’s *Cours* can be seen in the equation of the modern city with an unnatural disruption of ‘natural geographical diversity’. It is asserted that Brussels is a Germanic city (even though French is spoken there), because it is in the Flemish part of Belgium. Similarly, Berlin is classified with Low German, even though High German is spoken there ‘almost exclusively’. The *Cours* comments: ‘This schematic simplification may seem to distort reality; but the natural state of affairs must first be studied in its own right’ ([1922] 1983: 269). This attitude to the city, and the concomitant sense of the natural diversity of language, was shared by German linguists, particularly dialectologists.

In Germany, where the cities were of relatively recent origin (modern Berlin being a product essentially of the nineteenth century), the linguistic effect of the city (*Grossstadt*), or even the town (*Stadt*), could appear disruptive, or at least problematic (Bach 1924/5: 41). The view that mediaeval German towns were a dynamic cultural force had been argued by Fichte in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, and this line of thinking can be traced to Schmitt¹⁵ (1942: 226) where the town is seen as ‘the driving force of linguistic life, the countryside as the force for stability’. But

Schmitt was arguing against those who wrongly equate the mediaeval town with modern cities, not against the contemporary anti-urbanism of German culture. Bräutigam (1934: 248–9) argued that the town dweller is more careless about language and life in general than country people.¹⁶ Urbanization since the 1870s had led to a loss of distinctions in pronunciation, and Bräutigam was attracted by the notion that the lazy ‘town dialect’ should be considered a symptom of linguistic decline or corruption (1934: 251). The carriers of the town dialect are the workers and the street youth, while the middle classes have increasingly distanced themselves and look down on urban speech as ugly and coarse (‘*unschön und unfein*’). In the countryside people evince pride and loyalty for their speech (1934: 251). The survival and development of the urban dialect is due most especially to the street youth who impose linguistic conformity on their social circles and are also linguistically creative (*sprachschöpferisch*). The loss of the ‘t’ ending in the second person singular of the verb is for example an innovation. In this sense one cannot simply characterize the urban dialect as a decline, as it produces innovations and levelling. Bräutigam was unsure in the end whether levelling of forms constitutes a linguistic decline. He concluded that the urban dialect was more endangered than the rural dialect, since it was exposed to the levelling influence of the *Hochsprache* (Bräutigam conceptualizes the urban dialect as lying between the rural dialect and the high language, 1934: 249).

In a report by the dialectologist Anneliese Bretschneider on the dictionary of the Brandenburg–Berlin dialects (1940), a project commissioned by the Ministry of Education, the relation between Berlin and the rest of Germany, in particular with Brandenburg, was envisaged as complementary, as one of exchange. This state of affairs persists in spite of the presence of foreigners and transient visitors. Berlin has its ‘natural hinterland’, and as the commercial centre of the district its influence radiates out into the surrounding countryside. There is also migration to Berlin from all over Germany, but especially from the Mark Brandenburg. The city and the surrounding countryside form an organic unity, one that encompasses the contrasting world views of the city dweller and the rural population. The aim of the dictionary is to capture this complementary relationship, formed out of the give-and-take between the two fundamentally contrasting world views. Bretschneider was a member of the NSDAP, and played an influential role in the politics of linguistics in the Third Reich.¹⁷

There is in any case an intrinsic problem in making Saussure’s *Cours* the litmus test for adherence to objective or scientific linguistics. Saussure’s *Cours* is too open for co-option by a wide range of socio-political and linguistic theories. Saussure has been seen both as the harbinger of scientific linguistics in Germany, and the representative of Continental mystification in Britain. When J.R. Firth (1968: 154) criticized the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski for a dangerous

confusion between theoretical constructs and items of experience, he was speaking with the philosophical caution of the empiricist British intellectual tradition, one self-consciously suspicious of speculation and mystification. Firth refers to a ‘hypnotic suggestion of reality’ that leads Malinowski to give priority to the categories of analysis over the actual experience, to give inappropriate ‘life’ to abstractions. In a similar vein, Firth had strong objections to Saussure’s reification of linguistic structure (Love 1988: 149–50). In the United States, Bloomfield (1923) praised Saussure as providing the foundations for a science of speech, though their explicit philosophical positions could not be further apart.¹⁸

In the German Federal Republic in the 1960s and 1970s, some of the younger generation of linguists embraced the notion of general linguistics or *Linguistik* as a welcome break from the domination of the study of language by the national philologies, and they welcomed transformational generative grammar as an ideologically neutral scientific discipline, one which they could oppose to what they saw as the ideologically suspect neo-Humboldtians. This represented a further swing of the academic pendulum between the cultural and the natural scientific understanding of language and linguistics. In this sense, the German generativists were the successors of Paul, as Chomsky is the successor of Bloomfield.

The leaders in the revival of the *Organismusgedanke* in inter-war Europe, one which reached its height in National Socialist Germany, were Leo Weisgerber, Georg Schmidt-Rohr, Jost Trier and Walter Porzig. All of these linguists can be accused of moral complicity with National Socialism.¹⁹ Similarly, Römer names Fritz Stroh, Georg Schmidt-Rohr and Leo Weisgerber as the central figures working on a folkish conception of language within the concept of Nazism (‘der volkhafte Sprachbegriff’, Römer 1985: 163). Simon (1982: 30) describes the German linguist Leo Weisgerber as struggling vainly to confront modern American structuralism or formal linguistics (*Systemlinguistik*). Weisgerber had set up a dichotomy between *Sprachwissenschaft* and *Linguistik*: an opposition between modern structuralist linguistics, emanating in the post-war period chiefly from the United States, but with its roots in pre-war Paris, Copenhagen, Prague, Moscow and Vienna, and the national-cultural linguistics of *Sprachinhaltsforschung*.

There is however a historical irony in this story: Chomsky’s self-proclaimed Humboldtianism, not to mention his (qualified) Jungianism (1980: 243–4). Chomsky proclaimed his adherence to the notion of ‘organic form’ over ‘mechanical’ form in behaviourist linguistics, and linked his notion of ‘linguistic creativity’ to Humboldt’s vitalistic concept of language as *Energieia* (Chomsky 1966: 19).²⁰ Weisgerber in effect did the same, only from his perspective Chomsky was the promoter of the mechanical view of language, and Weisgerber the organicist (Weisgerber 1971a; 1971d; 1972).

One linguistics or two?

Maas (1988a: 254) argues that the simplistic juxtaposition of traditional, corrupt linguistics and modern, ideologically objective, critical linguistics is a ‘myth of the modernization phase’ of the 1960s, and that the time has now come for a new, more differentiated view of the relation between fascism and linguistics in Germany. To this end Maas (1988a: 275) distinguishes between a ‘folkish’ discourse and a discourse of race (‘der völkische Diskurs’ and ‘der rassistische Diskurs’) under National Socialism. But can we make this distinction? Was there one National Socialist linguistics or two? One or two forms of *Germanistik*?

The exchange between Maas (1990) and Simon (1990a) turns in part on the difficult question of whether in dismantling one myth one does not create another, and whether in arguing for a graded view of linguistics in National Socialist Germany we are not writing an apologia for it. Maas seems to be arguing for the historicization of the study of linguistics in the Third Reich, and for its context within the professionalization of linguistics in Germany; Simon for the necessity of maintaining an absolute moral distance.²¹ Maas argues that in some sense 1933 was not as dramatic a rupture for the university academics as it appears to us today, and could even be perceived by them as a ‘normalization’ (1988a: 264); nor was the academic study of language drastically affected by the loss of personnel (1988a: 266).²²

I believe it is important to define National Socialist linguistics as simply the linguistics carried out by German scholars in Germany or under German rule after the purge of civil servants in 1933 until 1945. While this does not offer precision, I believe it offers a much better starting-point than polemical attempts to isolate the ‘Nazi core’. Any attempt at a definition would also have to deal with the question of the emigré linguistics of the victims of the Nazis, which on a theoretical level cannot be neatly separated from the linguistics of Nazi Germany (see Maas 1992 for a discussion of these definitional problems).²³ A particularly extreme case is that of Julius Pokorny, the Indo-Europeanist and Celticist. Pokorny’s political and academic views – not to mention his anti-Semitism – would have marked him as a strong possibility for an active career in the New Germany, and he was outraged to be classified as a Jew and dismissed.²⁴

It is important to emphasize this at the outset, for German linguistics was until recently the dominant force in the discipline, and concepts seen in the history of the discipline as theoretical advances came out of the traditions that fed into Nazi linguistics. Simon has argued (1985b; 1990b) that to date the origins of sociological concern with language within linguists to the essays by Basil Bernstein of the 1950s is to neglect an extensive chapter in the history of German linguistics, one that culminated in attempts to organize a language planning body in the National

Socialist period. Simon argues that it is important to study these efforts, because they give us insight into the relationships between scholarly activity and political power and help lay down clear guidelines for our own thinking on such questions (1985b: 99). Pre-war German linguists were well aware of the possibility of a sociological dimension to linguistics. Within the German tradition, the existence of terms such as *Hochsprache* ('standard language'), *Umgangssprache* ('everyday, informal speech') and *Mundart/Dialekt* (Seiffert 1969: 95–9), together with inter-war controversies within sociology, *Volkskunde* and dialectology about the social origins of innovation, gave the study of language an important social dimension. This can be seen in the controversies over Hans Naumann's notion of *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. According to this model, the culture of the elite descends the social scale, innovation goes unidirectionally from the top to the bottom of society (see Naumann 1929; Weber-Kellermann 1969; Simon 1985b).

One area where German linguists were obliged to confront the nature and boundaries of German-speaking society was that of the so-called *Nebensprachen* (languages such as Afrikaans, Frisian, Pensylfaanisch, German and Yiddish) and of the related question of 'colonial' dialects of German in Eastern Europe. Seiffert (1969: 92) defines the term as describing 'closely related, orally mutually recognizable idioms', observing that 'quite an extensive socio-political linguistics was duly to arise out of Germany's variously motivated concerns for the cultural and ethnic rights of the German "diaspora"'. This linguistics forms the theoretical basis for much thinking in the sociology of language today.

The problem of definition can be highlighted by pointing to an article by Hugo Moser. This article was originally written in honour of Walther Mitzka's seventieth birthday in 1959, and concerns some of the basic terms used to talk about varieties of levels of language ('folk', 'high', 'colloquial', etc.). This article (Moser 1979) falls within the folklorist–dialectological tradition in German linguistics. Among the authors cited are Adolf Bach, Gerhard Cordes, Friedrich Maurer, Hennig Brinkmann, Walter Porzig, Lutz Mackensen and Mitzka himself. All these cited linguists were members of the NSDAP.²⁵ In addition, Moser cites Leo Weisgerber and Adolf Spamer, the former a central figure in linguistics under National Socialism, the latter for a time the leading folklorist in Nazi Germany. Does this (unremarkable) article lie in the tradition of 'Nazi linguistics'?

THE DEFENCE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Introduction

If one were to take the following paragraph out of context, one might place it almost anywhere in Europe in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century:

An appeal to the intelligentsia of the world. All science is inextricably linked with the mental character of the nation whence it arises. The stipulation for the successful scientific work is, therefore, an unlimited scope of mental development and the cultural freedom of the nations. Only from the cooperation of the scientific culture – such as is born from and peculiar to each individual nation, there will spring the nation-uniting power of science. Unlimited mental development and cultural freedom of the nations can only thrive on the basis of equal rights, equal honour, equal political freedom, that is to say in an atmosphere of genuine, universal peace.

One might remark the appeal to a scientific universalism combined with a sense of the particularity of individual cultures, and perhaps categorize this statement as falling within the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt, one that emphasizes both the diversity of mankind and its ultimate unity, a unity of differences not a global uniformity. Different nations have different world views and different cultural traditions: to impose uniformity on these is to lose part of the heritage of mankind as a whole, since each culture brings its own particular insight, its own way of conceptualizing reality. Within this tradition, linguistics has played an important part, both in emphasizing the diversity of the world's languages and the need to study them individually and on their own terms.

In fact, as one might have guessed from the English, the original is in German. The first sentence reads: 'Alle Wissenschaft ist unlösbar verbunden mit der geistigen Art des Volkes, aus

dem sie erwächst. Voraussetzung erfolgreicher Arbeit ist daher die unbeschränkte geistige Entwicklungsmöglichkeit und die kulturelle Freiheit der Völker'. The English expression 'mental character' is the translation of 'geistige Art'. The text itself seems to embody the dialectic between particularity and universality found in the history of linguistics; it is clearly a translation, and as such it shows its particularity even while striving for general communicability (the document is also translated into French, Italian and Spanish). The passage continues:

On the basis of this conviction German science appeals to the intelligentsia of the whole world to cede their understanding to the striving German nation – united by Adolf Hitler – for freedom, honour, justice and peace, to the same extent as they would for their own nation.

These comments are from the prefatory remarks of the Vow of Allegiance of German Professors to Hitler, published in 1933, with contributions by Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Neumann and others.¹

This text can serve to illustrate a number of methodological problems associated with the politics of linguistics. An obvious question arises as to context. Once we associate the date 1933 and the name Hitler with this statement, it appears in another light. The 'Humboldtian internationalism' of the preface and the contributions to the *Bekenntnis* can be dismissed as hypocritical; the emphasis on the particularity of the German situation and the desire to be left in peace to build the national home as part of a desire to purify, to create a distinctive identity. One might feel impelled to look critically at the Humboldtian tradition within linguistics, a tradition which includes the work of Heymann Steinthal, August Port, Georg von der Gabelentz in Germany and the representatives of the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis in the United States. This might result in a clear differentiation between the (diverse) views expressed in the *Bekenntnis* and the 'real' Humboldtian humanist tradition. Alternatively, we might seek to cast doubt on the respectability of that tradition: Humboldt the 'racist'?² If interested in the history of German universities, we might look at the institutions and names listed in the *Bekenntnis*. We can find names familiar within *Germanistik* such as Hans Kuhn³, Walther Mitzka⁴ and Theodor Frings⁵; as well as two of the twentieth century's most distinguished philosophers, Martin Heidegger⁶ and Hans Georg Gadamer.⁷ The universities of Göttingen, Hamburg and Marburg are particularly well represented. We can point the finger, or we can emphasize the complexities of the personal, departmental, institutional and inter-institutional politics that must lie behind any such document. In particular we are confronted with a question of definition: what do we mean by National Socialist in the academic arena? Which doctrines at which time? Was there a precisely defined

Nazi academic orthodoxy? To what extent should we seek to judge individuals and on the basis of what kinds of information? How can we take into account the historical context when judging, say, a work written in 1944 as against a similar work published in 1924? How much should we simply interpret published work, and abstract away from the external pressures under which all academics – to dramatically varying degrees – work and publish?

In the *Bekenntnis*, we can perceive differences of approach and attitude among the contributions. For Heidegger, the Nazi revolution meant a fundamental transformation of national being: ‘die völlige Umwälzung unseres deutschen Daseins’ (1933: 14). Professor Eugen Fischer⁸ of Berlin put the emphasis on the populist aspects of National Socialism (*Bekenntnis* 1933: 31):

A people’s state has been established, the new national socialistic state made of blood and land. A nation – under the influence of the genial personality of the leader – becomes mindful of its own, old dried up fountains, its national resources, its blood, its race and its soul. [...] A people’s government, in the form as has existed hundreds of years ago, has been made, grouped in professions, with men who know again that they are of the same blood, that one mother-tongue binds them together, that they have leaders who want the whole, but not seducers who stir up class against class, who blast a precipice between those who give and those who take, who incite avarice and promise things impossible to fulfil.

[German text p. 9]

This Hitlerian socialism can bring down social barriers and encourage generosity of spirit among the rich, even in the degenerate, materialistic, egoistical Berlin of dance halls and bars (‘das Berlin der Lustbarkeit, der Tanzdielen und Bars, das grosse Sündenbabel der Vergnügung, das Berlin des krassen Egoismus und Geldverdienens’, 1933: 10). The English version of Fischer’s text was the more explicit. It emphasized the difference between National Socialism and Marxism and attacked Jewish agitation against Germany (*Bekenntnis* 1933: 32).

Friedrich Neumann⁹ considered what was meant by the word *Volk*:

Now comes the decisive question: What do we Germans really understand by the name People? By people we understand nothing else but the companionable union of men, who by a common fate, have become united to a great kinship in order to lead their own peculiar lives in their native country which History has assigned to them. One stands for the other, each true to his office, which necessarily serves the whole. Each shall really receive his due, because each lives in harmony with the other.

Just because we desire the close unity of the peculiar people, we give to each individual the chance of fully developing his powers within the frame of the whole. Nothing lies further from us than a dictatorship from without, which is forcing the individual into a ready-made scheme. But, on the other hand, we cannot tolerate the fact that an individual out of egoism is disturbing the unanimity of our people.

(*Bekenntnis* 1933: 48)

Are we here in the Humboldtian tradition? Humboldt is associated with the ideal of the cultural development of the self, with *Selbstbildung*, but also with a certain determinism with regard to national character and the individual character within the nation. Neumann is concerned with a moral force, a duty to develop one's self in accordance with the whole, with 'die Geschlossenheit unseres Volkes' (1933: 27). However he rejects any attempt to impose uniformity on different nations, any form of humanism that seeks to level out national differences, and also any form of imperialism: 'to each his own' (1933: 28). This right to develop the nation to its highest form applies in matters of race and of style of life (*ibid.*). The unity of the West is a harmony between distinct ways of life, the unity of human existence lies in the harmony between the different voices of the great cultures (1933: 29). There is a world order in which each genuinely mature people ('jedes echt gewachsene Volk', *ibid.*) would have a place.

Notions of 'race' and 'blood' figured prominently in Fischer's contribution, less so in Neumann's.¹⁰ Was there a Nazi orthodoxy with regard to national identity, and did these notions play a central role? What then of Neumann? Or should we talk of two competing notions of *Volk* within National Socialist academia, one where race is central, one where it plays a supporting role?

What of the following statement?

The world consists of peoples who find themselves at different stages of national development [*Volkwerdung*]. These national peoples are God-ordained and have their preordained tasks in the plan of creation, which no other people can take from them. No people is permitted to claim an absolute status for its most precious values, and force them as universal and objective values on other peoples.

These lines appeared in the penultimate paragraph of a discussion by Hans Galinsky of contemporary Britain's 'sense of mission' (1940: 335). Again the appeal is to a 'Humboldtian' notion of human diversity. Any genuine folkish belief in national destiny, and thus the German sense of destiny must reject the British world mission. The ideas of Commonwealth and Reich are

distinct. The former denies recognition of the sense of mission of other nations, the latter grants it (1940: 335–6).

An important strand in these assertions of German national autonomy was therefore a critique of British colonialism.¹¹ Colonialism was seen as the attempt to impose moral, social and cultural uniformity on the peoples of the world, and German intellectuals under National Socialism frequently took on the role of speaking out for the oppressed, identifying themselves for example with the struggles of the Celts against English cultural hegemony.

However British colonialism was also a model for some Nazi visions of a future world-order. This would be one in which each race would perform according to its abilities under benevolent German hegemony. It was a vision which drew on and sought to learn and supersede the British Empire. For example, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, envisioning a hierarchical division of labour between the races of the world, argued in 1942 that British colonialism was pragmatic and business-oriented, granting a degree of autonomy to subject peoples (1942: 42–3); the Germans had been previously too much guided by their emotions in matters of policy. Only Hitler had taught them look at things in a statesmanlike way. Germany's mission was that of saviour of the world ('an deutschem Wesen soil die Welt genesen'), but that world would inevitably be divided into upper and lower strata. Only in a racially homogenous group, such as the peasant and warrior peoples of the Germanic tribes, could all free individuals be equal. In such a society slaves were always of a foreign race (1942: 44). Schultze-Naumburg also cited the example of Indian caste law (his view was that Nordic peoples had conquered the Dravidian population and subsequently been absorbed, though not without leaving visible traces). The terminology that Schultze-Naumburg employs, that of upper stratum (*Oberschicht*) and lower stratum (*Unterschicht*) was also applied by the linguist Heinz Kloss in the articulation of his vision of an organically stratified society (see Chapter 6). One of the immediate sources for this terminology is the work of Hans Naumann (Simon 1985b: 111).

'The struggle for freedom in research'

Alfred Rosenberg, one of the pretenders to the role of National Socialist intellectual leader, announced in 1938 the end of all universalist systems of thought ('das Ende aller universalistischen Systeme', 1938: 11). The occasion was a lecture at the University of Halle, the Martin Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, where the close relationship between the National Socialists in the person of Alfred Rosenberg and the University was to be celebrated. The lecture was entitled 'The struggle for freedom in research':

All universalistic systems, however they happen to call themselves, have one characteristic in common. They proclaim a certain single message, one before which all nations and races are to bow down. They lay claim in some form or other to a spiritual and moral leadership over the whole of humanity and then strive in consequence whenever possible for complete political domination.

(1938: 12)

Unlike Bolshevism, National Socialism does not seek to apply a universal standard to all humanity. Religious toleration will be granted, provided the churches do not encroach on the domain of the Party. Similarly, academic research is in principle free (1938: 12).

The notion that all science should be seen as necessarily international had been earlier disputed by Gustav Kossinna, who saw the individual *Volk* as having special rights over some areas of study, including Kossinna's own field, prehistory (Kossinna 1911, 1912, 1921, 1928; Baker 1974: 50–1).¹² This proposition, combined with a call for socio-political relevance, became perhaps the single unifying factor in the early academic discourse of National Socialism. The triumph of National Socialism was hailed as bringing 'new content and impetus' to German culture (Krieck 1933b); the new education system would be one within which narrow academic specialization would have to give way to a general accountability to the German people (Krieck 1933c: 32).

Ernst Krieck (1882–1947) was, initially at least, one of the most prominent professors in National Socialist Germany. He was among the few German philosophy professors who had joined the Nazi Party before 1933 (he joined in 1932), and competed with Alfred Baeumler and Martin Heidegger for intellectual prominence in philosophy. Krieck was appointed rector of the University of Frankfurt in 1933.¹³ Baeumler was appointed to a special chair in philosophy and political pedagogy at the University of Berlin in 1933. In his inaugural lecture Krieck stated that all cultural activity was henceforth to be subordinate to the perfection (*Selbstvollendung*) of the German people (Krieck 1933a: 8). In the inaugural article in *Volk im Werden* Krieck wrote of a 'total' movement, a new cultural front on which the struggle was to be continued, now that the political victory had been won (1933b).

In justification of why only Germans can teach at German universities, Hermann Haberland (1933: 35) made the point that those of other races would no more be able to hold a course on the German ethical sense (*Rechtsempfinden*, i.e. their sense of justice, of what is right and wrong) than a German could grasp Chinese ethics. Foreigners cannot teach German history because they inevitably judge things from their own standpoint. In support of this relativism Haberland reported the case of a Spanish professor of theology who had no concept of animals feeling pain

(1933: 36). Psychiatrists who treat Germans must of course be Germans. Haberland also had some general criticism of university practice. Too many professors simply read their lectures (1933: 36); the teacher should also be a leader, or Führer (1933: 37). They should set an example to the students of good administration and impartiality; professors should be active in research in their field and should not abuse the system by having their research papers written by junior staff. Much of what is published is worthless (Haberland estimates that only about 20 per cent has any value). A commission should be set up to review academic staff and those who are unproductive should be dismissed. The post of university teacher should never be a sinecure (1933: 37–8). Teaching methods should be reformed to stimulate the students, and the medieval practices of teaching hospitals reformed. For example, those patients unfortunate enough to be receiving third class care are often used in lecture halls to demonstrate illnesses to the students. This would not even happen in the ‘Negro areas’ of the United States. What would a celebrated professor of gynaecology say if his lady wife were wheeled out into the lecture hall and examined internally by large numbers of students? (1933: 8). Haberland further recommends the ending of academic tenure and the enforcement of proper academic standards (1933: 38–9).

Joachim Haupt¹⁴ (1933: 1) declared that ‘the German institute of higher learning has never been a place for impartial research; nor will it ever become one’. Haupt uses the term ‘voraussetzungslose Forschung’, which could also be translated as ‘research without presuppositions’ or ‘disinterested research’. The new ‘political’ university will be a place where the researcher can realize his talents. Academic thinking will be grounded in biological–racial distinctiveness and achieve a level of objectivity greater than the ‘liberal’ university which pursues an unobtainable ‘unbiased’ science. Research will be freer because it will operate with an awareness of the presuppositions that must guide it, and because it has a factually based and generally applicable notion of value (1933: 2–3).

Von Wiese¹⁵ and Scheid (1933) envisaged a racially pure, organically integrated, authoritarian collectivity, in which teachers are also leaders (Führer), and in which scholarship and education are ultimately meaningful not only in the university but in the society as a whole. Engaged and committed educator-scholars and students would jointly serve a common, national–political cause and the German people. They also proposed reforms in the system of examinations (the students should not simply be stuffed full of facts (1933: 15)), in the awarding of the doctoral degree (*Promotion*)¹⁶ which should be genuinely for an elite, and in the appointing of teachers to the professoriat, which should not merely reflect time served or age (1933: 16). The organic is juxtaposed to the abstract and the mechanical; political centralization is to be combined with cultural decentralization, a process termed by Krieck ‘organic realism’ (von Wiese and Scheid 1933:16).¹⁷

Other declarations on cultural educational policy were published by Hans Freyer¹⁸ (1934) and Theodor Litt¹⁹ (1934). Both of these scholars signed the *Bekanntnis* to Hitler and National Socialism in 1933. Freyer first considers the tradition of ‘*Volkbildung durch Volksbildung*’. This means something like: ‘the formation (reconstruction, building up) of the folk-nation by the education of the folk-nation’. He contrasts this traditional view with a new, political conception of the place of the citizen within the state. For Freyer the tradition of *Volksbildung* is mired in organicist Romantic liberalism, unable to deal with the facts of an industrialized Germany, and looking to the restoration of a lost social order without distinctions of class. The notion of citizen’s education is not the way forward. What is required in the current revolutionary situation is the recognition of the ‘political people’ (*politisches Volk*). This political people or folk is not a natural entity, nor is it merely a simple community of the like-minded (1934: 9). The concept of leaders and followers is central to it, and these leaders must be able to deal with the historical challenges that arise for the people.

Freyer’s political concept of nation and peoplehood is at the heart of the creation of the new social order, one in which the state is the superordinate power and in which political struggle and political activity are fundamental. This political will has been reawakened in the German people, and a new Reich is being built, one based on the concept of Führer and National Socialism. Into the place of the static concept of citizenship steps the dynamic concept of the political person; ‘citizens’ education’ should be replaced by ‘political training’ (1934: 10). This training is to involve concrete tasks and a new work ethic, including military service. The political service of the state demands the complete commitment of the whole individual, and takes in all aspects of education. The individual will fulfil his own personality in virtue of his sacrifice of it. Humanism has no role to play, unless a new humanism can be developed, a humanism of the political person. Pedagogy cannot hide behind a false autonomy (1934: 11): ‘This doctrine has always been false. Today this is doubly the case. That which educates is the objective reality of the state itself.’ Should this state be in the process of constructing itself, then it has the right to form the people within it according to its future model. This pedagogical mission is an absolute or unlimited right of the state (1934: 12).

Litt’s essay in the same volume of *Die Erziehung*²⁰ asks what role the disciplines of the humanities, the *Geisteswissenschaften*, have to play in the National Socialist state. The ideals of National Socialism impinge directly on areas of concern to the humanities, in particular in the tension between the poles of ‘myth’ and ‘academic inquiry’, (*Mythos* and *Wissenschaft*). Litt suggests that the new state will not be best served if it allocates to the humanities the role of simply supporting or confirming a predetermined world view (1934: 15). The German state need be in no doubt as to the ability of academic inquiry (*Wissenschaft*) to give it what it needs, but this