Brian Boyd[1]

SOME COMMENTS INSPIRED BY VALTER LANG'S "ARCHAEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE"

There are a number of different ways in which the relationship between archaeology and language may be considered. Sone archaeologists are keen to locate the origins of verbal communication amongst early hominid groups. Others emphasise the role of language as the key adaptive and cultural trait which ultimately resulted in *Homo Sapiens sapiens* becoming the world's dominant social animal, while recent years have witnessed a concern with tracing the spread of particular language groups and their ethnic affiliations. For many archaeologists in the English-speaking world, however, language became a pertinent area of enquiry through the discipline's encounter with structuralism and semiotics. This encounter has a fairly long history, with pioneering researchers such as André Leroi-Gourhan employing textual and linguistic metaphor in interpretations of upper palaeolithic cave paintings, but it is now perhaps most frequently associated with the work of Ian Hodder (amongst others) and the advent of postprocessual archaeology in the early 1980s. This "symbolic and structural archaeology", as it was initially termed, helped facilitate the importation of ideas from structural linguistics - particularly those of Saussure on the relationship between signifier, signified and referent - resulting in the kinds of perspectives which may be characterised as regarding "material culture as text".

Perhaps more important than this epistemological position - by no means accepted by all archaeologists working within the broad remit of post-processualism - is the promotion of self-critical, reflexive, approach to archaeological practice. This may involve critical evaluation of our own assumptions and prejudices in producing historical narratives, but equally it may involve, for example, interrogation of the methodologies used as part of the excavation process (e.g. sampling strategies, the format of context sheets) or of the working relationships between different types of practitioner (e.g. field directors and excavators, lecturers and students), and so on. In other words, the reflexive monitoring of the routine procedures used in the production of archaeological knowledge sits alongside that knowledge - our representations of the past - as part of the everyday practice of "doing archaeology".

At the heart of this reflexivity must lie our critical use of language. This seemingly straightforward statement requires some elaboration. A principal human desire is to make oneself *understood* by others. In this way, desired, wishes and interests can be expressed and experiences shared. This understanding is communicated primarily through our effective use of language and thus, arguably, language mediates everything we do as human agents. Of course, under some social and political circumstances certain languages, or types of language, may come to be regarded as dominant. A basic example of this is the way in which discussions of gender or race are sometimes labelled "fashionable" or "politically correct" in the interests of certain groups. Similarly, the insidious languages of colonialism - and neo-colonialism - have long operated to maintain the subordination and marginalisation of "other" languages. It is with this point that we can turn to the concerns of Val-

1 Department of Archaeology, University of Wales Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7ED, Wales, U.K.
E-mail: b.boyd@lamp.ac.uk

ter Lang in his article on archaeology and language.

To place my remarks into some kind of perspective, but not wishing to claim any particular credentials, I am myself Scottish but work in Wales, both countries' languages having a dominant / subordinate relationship with English. My archaeological research normally takes place in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, which have political, historical and linguistic relationships not only with each other, but also with the languages of European, particularly British, colonialism. Finally, at the time of writing, I am working in Madagascar, the scientific communities of which are involved in debates surrounding the linguistic domination of the French colonial legacy. And, of course, I am writing in English for a Finnish journal!

Turning to Valter Lang's stimulating paper, while acknowledging the useful statistical information on the "linguistic environments" of different countries' archaeologies, I shall reserve my comments to Lang's central observation that the "decisions to prefer any one language as the language of science is political by its nature". This statement underlies the kinds of concerns raised above, and allows us to identify two inter-related questions:

1. Who has the political authority to make decisions regarding the use of language in academic (whether in science of arts / humanities) contexts?
2. How may the political use of dominant languages be challenged?

In addressing these questions, we can consider Lang's distinction between two pertinent factors: scientific colonialism and, what he calls, a "national inferioty complex", the latter being causally related to the former. In making this distinction, Lang places responsibility for the adoption and use of a dominant language on both the coloniser *and* the colonised and, in so doing, highlights the fact that language - *as a system of knowledge* - is not something which is necessarily unilaterally imposed on one group of people by another. Rather, a relationship - a discourse - must be established between the two for the desires of one to be acknowledged and gratified by the other. This is, of course, not the case in certain political contexts, such as those created by oppressive régimes, where the imposition of a dominant language is often part and parcel of explicit coercive agency. Even in such cases, however, there are always alternatives, challenges and oppositions.

In scientific colonialism, these alternatives are not always apparent. Such is the nature of academic discourse, that the relationship between dominant scientific languages and other languages may seem implicit, but deliberate social and political strategies are nonetheless involved. David Bloor has argued that the effectiveness of any system of knowledge - in this case, a dominant language - comes from the collective decisions of those who create and use that system. This involves the active protection of parts of the network, and the requirement that certain laws and classifications be kept intact and all adjustments carried out elsewhere: "The rest of the network then becomes a field of resources to be exploited to achieve this end - a place where thresholds can be moved with relative ease; where complexity or blame can be conveniently located, or troublesome cases relegated" (Bloor 1982: 280). In this way, certain laws are protected and rendered stable because of their assumed utility for purposes of justification, legitimation and social persuasion.

In archaeological discourse, dominant scientific languages subordinate other languages often through accusations of linguistic incomprehension. Nowhere is this clearer than in the criticisms levelled in the 1960s and 1970s at the "new archaeology" and, from the 1980s onwards, at "postprocessual" approaches. Probably the most common criticism of both is that the language is difficult to understand, there is too much jargon, why can't they say in plain language? The most common reply is that to think in new ways, in different ways, we must use new and different ways of speaking and writing. This may be a reasonable enough justification, but it clouds the real issue: by dismissing the form of language used, the academic authority of the ideas expressed through that language are themselves dismissed. A recent example: once the initial optimism within postprocessual archaeology changed to a realisation that the theory / data, or theory / technique, divide was not being effectively challenged, and that mainstream opinion was, to all intents and purposes, denying the academic validity of the interpretive approaches advocated by postprocessualism, then it became possible for perspectives firmly rooted in the scientific tradition of processualism

to establish themselves as the "new orthodoxy". The resulting hybrid, drawing upon the cognitive, mathematical and computer sciences, and labelled "cognitive processualism", has as its primary aim the elucidation of the "ancient mind". The form of language used by some advocates of this "new synthesis" (Renfrew & Bahn 1991) has partly contributed to the disenfranchisement of postprocessual archaeology. Aspects of postprocessualism which are deemed palatable, such as the concern with symbolism, have been incorporated into cognitive processualism while, to paraphrase Bloor, other more "fringe" or troublesome concerns have been conveniently relegated. This is precisely how dominant languages operate. As Grillo (1989: 228) has argued, "Subordinate languages may be powerful in their own domains, and indeed may create "no-go" areas for the dominant culture. They may even, as with counter-cultures and anti-languages, offer satisfying alternative versions of reality and thus have an appearance of autonomy. But it is an autonomy of a limited kind. Reserved areas of language may be tolerated, not everyone need be incorporated." To underline this, in their textbook Archaeology: theories, methods and practice (1991), Renfrew and Bahn refer to postprocessualism in the part tense, as if "it" no longer existed. I was made aware of the effectiveness of such language use when an undergraduate student asked recently, "what *was* postprocessual archaeology?".

In the context of Lang's discussion, these issues are highly pertinent. Dominant scientific languages must be exposed as "ideological". As "free citizens" of the academic world, our aim in so doing is to acknowledge, indeed gratify, the interests of other languages and other understandings (while avoiding "superiority postures" and bearing in mind issues of, what Bauman terms "moral relativism"). As Lang points out, we live in a world of linguistic divergence and cultural difference. To deny these different forms of language and different forms of understanding is to deny basic human rights.

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