

INCLUSION AND DIVISIVENESS THROUGH LANGUAGE

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Introduction

In addressing the theme of this conference, namely how language and culture help to create and foster global communities, this paper looks at two areas in which language and culture interact: performatives (also referred to as speech acts), and narrative. In particular, it looks at the impact of these two topics on social inclusion and divisiveness and argues that performatives and narratives can be seen as complementary with regard to their potential for divisiveness. Whereas performatives are culturally specific and likely to give rise to cross-cultural misunderstandings, transgressions are readily forgiven once the intended meaning is elucidated. Conversely, the framing function and emotional appeal of narrative tends to create cohesion and promote allegiance, yet nothing is more divisive than conflicting narratives. In both cases, a heightened awareness of how language and culture interact is likely to facilitate conciliation and to secure mutual understanding.

Conflict and conciliation, two of the driving forces of human history, are generally analysed through a socio-political rather than a linguistic perspective, and yet language is not irrelevant to the shaping of perception, action or indeed, history.¹ In looking at inclusion and divisiveness *through* language, I consider not only how language serves as a mode of expression for conflict and conciliation, but also as a possible trigger and enhancer or exacerbator, since language constructs as well as reflecting our world.

1. Performatives and Speech Act Theory

Performatives refer to the use of language in order to perform actions – to request, reject, apologise, warn, assure, agree, deny and so on.² According to Austin (1980:109), we should distinguish between the performance of an act *of* saying something (referred to as the ‘locution’), the performance of an act *in* saying something (the illocution) and what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something (the perlocution). Thus, in the expression ‘Stop or I’ll shoot!’ the utterance itself represents the act *of* saying something, a warning and threat are intended *in* saying these words, and should the interlocutor heed them and stop whatever it is he is doing, the speaker will have achieved her intention *by means of* these words.

Whereas many performatives are signaled by set expressions (‘I hereby...’), or by flags (‘I warn you’, ‘I demand that’ ‘I promise to’), a characteristic of indirect speech acts is that the intention of the speaker is not explicit but needs to be inferred. Thus the

¹ See publications in the Rhetoric and Public Affairs series, Martin J. Medhurst series editor, Michigan State University Press

² Austin J. L. (1962/1980 edition) *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Searle, John (1969) *Speech Acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

expression 'It is warm in here' may be a simple statement of fact, uttered to inform others of the temperature, but it may also be interpreted as a request (to open the window), a reassurance or promise (given to somebody seeking to escape the cold), a warning (by a food inspector in a kitchen), or a caution (by a chairperson referring to the temperature of the debate). Just as a single expression can perform different functions, depending on the context, so a single intention can be expressed in a variety of different ways. Thus, disagreement may be voiced overtly by means of locutions such as 'I couldn't disagree more', but could equally well be communicated by 'I'll think about it' (an expression which in many cultures signals rejection and the end of discussion), or by a rhetorical question ('Is that so?'), or even by a locution which on the surface appears to express anything but disagreement, such as 'Yes indeed, how interesting!'.

Cultural Conventions

The process of inference to which we resort in order to apprehend a speaker's intended meaning is to a large extent guided by cultural conventions. Where these conventions differ, misunderstandings may arise. The English boss who says to his German employee "I thought perhaps we might consider looking into the possibility that..." believes that he has made a clear request for further investigation, whereas to his employee, nothing in the many hedges used remotely signals a request for action.

Examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding at the level of indirect speech acts abound both anecdotally and in the literature on cross cultural communication. The following witticism capitalizes both on the ambiguities and on the social judgment associated with indirect speech acts: What is the difference between a diplomat and a lady? When a diplomat says 'yes', he means 'maybe', when he says 'maybe', he means 'no', and should he ever say 'no', he is no diplomat. When a lady says 'no', she means 'maybe', when she says 'maybe', she means 'yes', and should she ever say 'yes', she is no lady!

Whereas our understanding of this joke depends on our knowledge of the appropriate professional and gender cultures (or prejudiced views of them), an illustration of national cultures is provided by those communities where it is considered rude to negate a proposition or to deny one's interlocutor. The answer to the question 'Are you free tomorrow?' will not be 'No', but will involve some circumlocution, possibly along the lines: 'Perhaps after tomorrow would be better?'. Without the relevant cultural awareness, the absence of a 'simple' answer to a seemingly simple question may appear evasive and tricky, leading to prejudicial stereotypes. Yet as soon as one is provided with the necessary insight – that overt negation is not a discourse option – the illocutionary force of the circumlocution quickly becomes transparent.

The risk of misunderstanding can best be avoided if we become aware of the relationship between performatives and the broader cultural context and conventions in which they occur. Any such statement immediately begs two questions: how might such awareness be acquired, and what exactly is the scope of this cultural context? With regard to the latter, conventions are coterminous with cultural groups, and these range across the board from friends to families, villages to global communities, from genders to professional circles, not to mention national and ethnic groups. Since what is meant by what is said is not only likely to differ between cultures, but even within cultures depending on

individual contexts, one must always remain alert to possible meanings and attuned to changing conventions.

With regard to awareness, we are all familiar if not with the theory, then with the practice of performatives, as is suggested by the musing question 'I wonder what they meant by what they said'. We are also all familiar with expressions of politeness, many of which involve indirect speech acts. In addition to circumlocutions for 'yes' and 'no' seen above, these include the use of various distancing or softening devices in order to decrease any imposition on one's interlocutor, such as the use of the past tense rather than the present ('were you thinking of going out tonight?', 'did you want some more?'), the use of counterfactuals ('were you to go' or 'if you could go, that would be wonderful'), modals ('would you like some more?'), and of diminutive and tentative expressions (a 'moment', a 'sip', a 'bite', and the 'tentative' aspect in Chinese). These and other examples of the language of politeness, which exists with variations in all languages, illustrate the desire to minimize imposition.³ But because, on the one hand, polite expressions may lose force through habitual usage, and because, on the other, excessive politeness may sound forced and insincere, we are often confronted with a fine juggling act when it comes to pitching politeness optimally. The resulting insecurity increases our sensitivity to the potential discrepancy between intention and expression. All that linguistic theory needs do is to bring to our consciousness a practice which we are very familiar with, whether we are overtly aware of it or not.

Our familiarity with the conventions of politeness, and with the non-isomorphic relationship between utterance and intended meaning, makes us more willing to recognize cultural differences when alerted to them, and to revise judgment accordingly. Indeed there is good evidence, in the form of HSBC advertisements for instance, that we are curious about and drawn to 'local meanings', or the possibility of divergent meanings for a single signifier.⁴ This kind of awareness, heightened by the central insight of Speech Act theory concerning the function of language as a medium for action, prevents us from lapsing into the complacency and prejudice so often borne of cultural solipsism.

Body Language

This discussion of performatives has focused on the spoken language, but since we need to be sensitive to the intended meaning of gestures as well as of words, a study of inclusion and divisiveness through language must include body language, not only utterances. In diplomacy, etiquette represents an attempt to codify the meaning of gestures in order to avoid inadvertent cross-cultural misunderstanding. The flouting of etiquette, which is usually used as a way of signaling dissent or disapproval, is therefore closely analysed for the intentions communicated.

When Chancellor Willy Brandt fell on his knees in front of the memorial to the victims of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, his action was universally recognised as a gesture of

³ Watts, Ricahrd J. (2003) *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ For a selection of HSBC campaigns with the official justifications, see <http://www.yourpointofview.com/>

apology.⁵ When Nikita Khrushchev banged his shoe on the lectern at the UN, it was clear enough that he was emphasizing his objection.⁶ But such behaviour is so in breach of etiquette that it prompted Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to turn to an interpreter and ask ‘Could I have that translated, please.’ The illocutionary force of Macmillan’s utterance may itself be interpreted as a simple request for clarification, or also as an ironical condemnation of behaviour deemed so barbaric as to be incomprehensible to a civilized audience. When the Iraqi journalist Muntadar al-Zaidi threw his shoes at President Bush in December 2008 shouting ‘this is a goodbye kiss from the Iraqi people, dog,’ our understanding of this evident act of hostility has to be supplemented with a recognition of the particular significance of showing the soles of shoes in Arab cultures.⁷ President Bush’s quip about the size of the shoe thrown was intended both to make light of the gravity of the insult just endured and also to affirm solidarity with the press corps (often an adversarial body) at the expense of the offender.

In each of these examples the actors align themselves, whether overtly or covertly, in relation to a relevant in-group, and signal the significance of their affiliation. Brandt displays the humility associated with regret and offers a silent apology to the victims. McMillan creates a category of those too civilized to understand brute gestures, thus introducing an ‘us versus them’ divide, and Bush, through the inclusive power of humour, attempts to win the sympathy of his audience. The way in which we situate ourselves in relation to social groups, and the effect of such maneuvers on inclusion and divisiveness, is discussed below.

In conclusion, cross-cultural misunderstandings occur most frequently at the level of indirect speech acts, where one party misinterprets the intended meaning implied in the other party’s words or gestures. A heightened awareness of the prevalence of performatives in communication, and of the way in which cultural conventions mediate between what one says and what one means by what one has said, is likely to dispel such misunderstanding.

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2. Narratives

Whereas performatives are potentially divisive but readily reanalyzed in the light of cultural information, narratives have a strongly cohesive force to all those who subscribe to them. However, where conflicting narratives arise, divisions occur between rival adherents, potentially turning an inclusive force into an irreconcilably divisive one. ‘Narrative’ is used broadly here to include connotations and metaphors as well as stories concerning myth, religion, history and national identity.

⁵ This incident, which has come to be known as the Warschauer Kniefall, occurred on 7 December 1970. The following account is from the Willy Brandt website: http://www.willy-brandt.org/bwbs_biografie/Kniefall_in_Warschau_B172.html

⁶ The Khrushchev shoe banging incident occurred during the 902nd Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly, in New York on 12 October 1960. For an account by his granddaughter, see the New Statesman, 2 October 2000: <http://www.newstatesman.com/200010020025>

⁷ See for instance the text and footage in the BBC news report on the event ‘Shoes thrown at Bush on Iraq trip’, 15 December 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7782422.stm>.

Connotations

How might connotations and metaphors possibly count as narratives? Both may be considered as a form of narrative in a capsule. In the case of connotations, this is apparent in paired terms such as: terrorist and freedom fighter; apartheid wall and security fence; honour killing and misogynist murder; ethnic cleansing and genocide; law of the jungle and fair play; common sense and utter madness. The referent of each of these signifiers is the same, but the moral, ideological and narrative framework associated with them is substantially different.

Since a whole story can be told to justify the connotations of each of these paired terms, speakers reveal much about their own beliefs through the terms they use. Where these speakers are politicians and policy makers, they do not merely reflect their own views, but often shape the views of others through the use of such connotations. This is evident in the alternative appellations of the Israeli West Bank barrier. In the Israelis term 'security fence', 'security' conjures an existing and active danger, in this case from a hostile out-group which would cause the in-group harm if not fended (or literally fenced) off. The term 'fence' connotes a smaller divider than 'wall', and therefore suggests that relatively modest measures are being taken. Given that the 'fence' in question is up to eight meters high, made of solid blocks of cement and surrounded by a sixty meter exclusion zone, the term may be considered a misnomer since the edifice, by all consensual linguistic criteria, is a wall. However the connotations of 'fence' serve political and propagandist objectives better than those of 'wall', with its negative political connotations of the Berlin wall and daunting scale connotations of the Great Wall of China. The term 'security fence' can thus be seen to encapsulate a relatively complex story of active danger from threatening out-groups (which in turn tap into primeval fears of invading barbarian hordes), and of the supposedly constrained and civilised measures adopted to provide a minimum of security in response to this threat.

Conversely to this 'big-threat, modest-response' scenario, the term 'apartheid wall' tells a story of racial and ethnic discrimination and victimization by the dominant group against a disempowered people. The analogy with the much maligned former regime in South Africa is foregrounded through the word 'apartheid', but in the case of the Palestinians, social marginalization is exacerbated by the constraint of a physical barrier (and a wall is so much more insurmountable than a fence).

Since it takes a small shift in perspective, especially in a limited geographical zone, to reverse the relationship between who is on the inside and who is on the outside of a barrier, Gaza has acquired the unenviable accolade of 'the world's largest open-air prison.' Given the current difficulty – if not impossibility – of leaving Gaza by land, sea, air or dug-out tunnel, the connotations of a 'security fence' reveal the bias of its users. It also reveals their relative power. This is because the choice of terms is often determined not so much by linguistic consensus but by political might. By promoting the term 'security fence', the government of Israel gives currency to its own version of a story which could equally plausibly be narrated in a very different way.

The connotations associated with less binary terms can similarly be understood in the light of the discourse - or supporting narrative - in which they occur. Thus the 'greenhouse effect' proved to be an opaque and rather misleading metaphor which was

replaced by ‘global warming’, a term which unfortunately sounded like more of a promise than a threat to many northern European nationals for whom it spoke of warm dry summers – an eminently welcome prospect. This in turn was (or *is being* replaced) by ‘climate change’, which, in failing to inject either responsibility or urgency, is increasingly giving way to ‘climate security’. But this last term is itself ambiguous: are we securing the climate against us, or securing us against the climate? Both readings are possible and indeed each coincides with a distinct policy – mitigation (in which we aim to diminish the harm done to the planet by fuel emissions) versus adaptation (in which we try to secure the survival and wellbeing of the planet in the face of irreversibly detrimental climatic trends). Connotations, it can thus be seen, are instrumental in telling a story since they encapsulate the speaker’s beliefs and biases, and the stories told by politicians help to justify their policies.

Metaphors

Metaphors work in a similar way, both reflecting and further reinforcing our ‘take’ on the world.⁸ Thus whether we see the human body as a fortress which needs to be defended against viral and bacterial invasion, or whether we see the body as a time bomb with a built-in auto-destruct programme, determines our health management. These metaphors also impact upon other areas of life. The containment or fortress metaphor enjoys considerable influence in the political domain. During the Cold war for instance, the USA saw itself as a fortress under attack by the disease of Communism, and as a body afflicted by the cancer of Communism.⁹ In both cases, the affliction must be contained, and where the patient is dying, extreme measures are justified. Edwin Black, in his analysis of the guiding metaphor of right wing US parties concerning communism, extrapolates the following narrative:¹⁰

And what organ of this afflicted body need be spared amputation? The country is deathly ill. Its politics are cowardly; its spokesmen are treasonous; its cities are anarchical; its discipline is flaccid.... – The patient is *in extremis*. It is in this light that risks must be calculated, and in this light that the prospect of nuclear war becomes thinkable. Why not chance it, after all? What alternative is there? The patient is dying; is it not time for ultimate surgery?

⁸ Beer, Francis A. and Christ'l De Landtsheer (eds) (2004) *Metaphorical World Politics*. Michigan: Michigan State University.

Lakoff, George (1991) 'Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf' http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Texts/Scholarly/Lakoff_Gulf_Metaphor_1.html

Lakoff, George (2003) 'Metaphor and War, Again.' <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=15414>

Mio, Jeffery Scott and Albert N. Katz (eds) (1996) *Metaphor: Implications and Applications*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. New Jersey.

Sontag, Susan (1991) *Illness as Metaphor; AIDS and its Metaphors* London: Penguin

⁹ Gregg, Richard B. 'Embodied Meaning in American Public Discourse during the Cold War' in Beer and Landtsheer (2004) *Metaphorical World Politics* pp59-73.

¹⁰ Black, Edwin (1995) 'The Second Personna' in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, State College, Penn.: Strata Publishing, pp194-5.

Nuclear war is of course the ultimate surgery, and in this build up we see how a 'mere' metaphor has the power to make us advocate nuclear detonation as a 'cure' rather than the evident death-sentence we know it to be.

What is the relevance of metaphors to the theme of this paper: inclusion and divisiveness? Beer and De Landtsheer, in their book *Metaphorical World Politics* (2004:30), argue that 'Political leaders use metaphors self-consciously to create, maintain and dissolve political coalitions'. The following forceful terms express the importance they attribute to metaphors in world politics:¹¹

Metaphors prime audiences and frame issues; they organize communities and cooperation; they stimulate division and conflict; they mobilize support and opposition. Domestic and international leadership and power are the subjects and the stakes in the struggle for meaning embedded in metaphorical world politics.

In-groups and Out-groups

Examples of in-groups and out-groups abound in political rhetoric. The 'us versus them' divide which characterized much of the language of the Cold War was revived in the immediate response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and epitomized by President Bush's call 'You are either with us or against us.'¹² Typical of this kind of divisive discourse is a demonization of the other. The National Security Council document 68 presented to President Truman in April 1950 illustrates this line of approach:¹³

Our free society finds itself mortally challenged by the Soviet system. No other value system is so wholly irreconcilable with ours, so implacable in its purpose to destroy ours, so capable of turning to its own uses the most dangerous and divisive trends in our own society, no other so skillfully and powerfully evokes elements of irrationality in human nature everywhere, and no other has the support of a great and growing centre of military power.

The use of repeated superlatives helps to position the other camp at the opposite extreme from the home camp and pits one against the other in a battle for survival.

Bush's rhetoric against the terrorist threat resembles anti-communist demonization and 'to-the-death' hostility. At the same press interview with French President Chirac in which Bush made his 'with us or against us' appeal, he said of Bin Laden: 'This is an evil man that we're dealing with, and I wouldn't put it past him to develop evil weapons to try to harm civilization as we know it. And that's why we must prevail, and that's why we must win.' In another statement Bush compares the terrorist threat to the fascist and communist threats 'Today, our freedom is threatened once again' and draws explicit comparisons between the Taliban and those historical enemies: 'We hunt an enemy that

¹¹ Beer and Landtsheer (2004) *Metaphorical World Politics* px

¹² Press conference given with President Chirac on 6 November 2001, cited by CNN on: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>

¹³ Ernest R. May, ed., (1993) *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* New York: St. Martin's Press, p 29, cited in Richard B. Gregg 'Embodied Meaning in American Public Discourse during the Cold War' in Beer and Landtsheer *Metaphorical World Politics* p71.

hides in shadows and caves'. The Taliban 'try and impose their radical views through threats and violence. We see the same intolerance of dissent, the same mad global ambitions, the same brutal determination to control every life and all of life.'¹⁴

Not all rhetoric need be so extreme in order to effectively mobilize opinion and action however, since the emphasis may be placed on collaboration rather than competition. Thus football and other team games provide a popular source metaphor for politicians, and have been used successfully by Silvio Berlusconi among others.¹⁵ It is worth noting however that wherever competition arises, as it inevitably does in team games, the tendency is towards a polarization into an 'us versus them' mentality. The manifestation of this mentality, and the often cynical manipulation of divisiveness for political and economic gain, is illustrated by Franklin Foer in his book on how understanding soccer helps us to understand social, political and economic forces around the globe.¹⁶

The Power and Perils of Metaphors

Is divisiveness inevitable then? It is no more inevitable than inclusion, since the two are complementary. Nor can one eliminate divisiveness without similarly undermining inclusion. The challenge is not to create and foster global communities which dispense with local differences, but to encourage communities which *embrace* difference. How might this be done linguistically?

In appreciating a metaphor (and I use the term broadly here to include analogies), we need to recognize what has been said, what has not been said, and what else might be said. Thus a metaphor invariably foregrounds some elements and backgrounds others – in the case of the body fortress for instance, the emphasis is on eliminating the external enemy and building up a stronger defence system. The fact that humans, unlike fortresses, are mobile and adaptable, is backgrounded. The possibility of the enemy being within the walls is omitted altogether. In the case of the 'roadmap' to peace, the emphasis is on the choice of route, the time frame, the surmounting of obstacles along the way and the eventual attainment of one one's destination. The fact that a map is made of paper is backgrounded as irrelevant. The possibility of using other means of transport (air, sea, rail or even foot) is omitted, and the fact that a destination called 'peace' might not exist, but might have to be constructed, is not even considered, since such a prospect falls outside the entailments of this particular metaphor.

It seems essential to remember, whenever one is faced with metaphors that are divisive in their thrust, that one can either foreground a set of hitherto overlooked entailments in order to shift attention from what is divisive to what might prove more inclusive, or one can introduce an alternative metaphor with an entirely different set of entailments. Thus in the case of football, the emphasis may be placed on the need for cohesion and collaboration within a team, or within the broader remit of the game as a whole, where

¹⁴ Satellite address to East European leaders at an Antiterrorist summit in Warsaw, cited by CNN on: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/ret.bush.coalition/index.html>

¹⁵ Semjno, E., & Masci, M. (1996) 'Politics is football: Metaphor in the discourse of Silvio Berlusconi'. *Discourse & Society* 7(2), 243-269.

¹⁶ Foer, Franklin (2004) *How Soccer Explains the World*. Harper Collins.

good sportsmanship rather than victory is paramount. Alternatively, one may dispense with the metaphor of competitive games altogether and resort to a source domain of families or orchestras or any other construct which is prototypically defined by inclusion rather than competitiveness and divisiveness.

This is how President Vaclav Havel sought to defuse the tension between the old totalitarian regime and the new Czech republic he hoped to build in his 1990 New Year's address 'The Contaminated Moral Environment'.¹⁷ This speech is rife with metaphors, from the moral sickness referred to in the title, to the dehumanizing cogs that the Communist system had reduced its citizens to. Rather than resort to the divisive language of polarization and demonization, Havel insists on collective responsibility:

We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all—though naturally to differing extents—responsible for the operation of the totalitarian machinery. None of us is just its victim. We are all also its co-creators.

By insisting on collective responsibility, Havel eschews the divisive and counterproductive dynamics of blaming others and pitying oneself:

Why do I say this? It would be very unreasonable to understand the sad legacy of the last forty years as something alien, which some distant relative bequeathed to us. On the contrary, we have to accept this legacy as a sin we committed against ourselves. If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and up to us alone to do something about it. We cannot blame the previous rulers for everything, not only because it would be untrue, but also because it would blunt the duty that each of us faces today: namely, the obligation to act independently, freely, reasonably and quickly.

Havel's advocacy of an inclusive approach can be found elsewhere under various guises: strength in numbers, shared interests, collective responsibility, the 'expanding circle'.¹⁸ Significantly, this kind of rhetoric characterizes the discourse of many religions. It also characterizes political responses to times of crisis, particularly natural disasters and other 'acts of God' (including, some might observe rather cynically, calls for the pooling of common resources in order to enhance the chances of a collective recovery from the financial crisis of 2008-9, despite the fact that this was a man-made disaster).¹⁹ However, as soon as the crisis is perceived to have been brought about not by a divine agent or *force majeure*, but by a group of people, these are likely to be demonized and discriminated against.

¹⁷ Available in Havel, Vaclav (1997) *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice*. Knopf. Also available online at: http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1990/0101_uk.html

¹⁸ W E H Lecky, *A History of European Morals*, 1869, cited in Peter Singer 'The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle', *The New Internationalist*, April 1997. Also available online: <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/199704--.htm>

¹⁹ See for instance: Brown, Gordon address to the US Congress, 4 march 2009, cited in The Guardian 'Now more than ever the world wants to work with you', available online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/04/gordon-brown-congress-speech-obama>, and the call to set aside differences and work together in Brown and Obama's address to the 2009 summit, available as footage on: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2009/apr/01/g20-barack-obama-gordon-brown>

Towards a Peaceful Co-existence

Selecting and emphasizing metaphors of inclusion and collaboration is therefore one way of fostering ever expanding communities. The European Union is an example, embracing as it does very different nations with their own distinct historical, political, social, cultural and linguistic profiles. Another way is to emphasise a metaphor of networks rather than unions. Where the differences between groups are such that they cannot plausibly be subsumed into a common set, the intersection between two sets offers the only scope for conciliation. We might therefore benefit from envisaging global communities as being made up of many intersecting subsets, rather than forcing them all into the same mold. Once again, the EU provides an example. The Union at the heart of the EU is as yet an aspiration, not a *fait accompli*. As Timothy Garton-Ash argues:²⁰

Western Europe would never have got this far without the utopian goal or *telos* of ‘unity’. Only by resolutely embracing the objective of ‘ever closer union’ have we reached this more modest degree of permanent institutional cooperation, with important elements of economic and legal integration. Yet as a paradigm for European policy in our time the notion of ‘unification’ is fundamentally flawed.

Having analysed the flaws he suggests an alternative way for us to ‘think Europe’, namely the ‘Liberal Order’ which emphasizes peaceful coexistence rather than reconciliation and assimilation. As such, Garton-Ash’s liberal order ‘draws on Isaiah Berlin’s central liberal insight that people pursue different ends that cannot be reconciled but may peacefully coexist.’ This accommodation of potentially conflicting values, allegiances and belief systems is achieved by recognising and respecting differences rather than attempting to either reduce or polarise them.

It seems to me that in creating and fostering peaceful communities we have a choice between advocating union or advocating networks. A union is appealing as an objective or ideal, but is often coercive at ground level where accord is often imposed. Coercion breeds disaffection and divisiveness which risks undermining the union while it lasts, and risks erupting when its hegemony has been removed. This was the case in Yugoslavia under Tito who imposed unity when he created Yugoslavia. After his death, suppressed tensions were encouraged and enflamed by leaders who saw their interest in division rather than unity. Networks, in contrast, are appealing in that they emphasise pockets of common ground, interstices of shared interests, all of which can be activated as need arises but which may otherwise act with a certain degree of autonomy.

These metaphors of ‘networks’ and ‘unions’ illustrate three important points I wish to make here. First, they offer us schemas and entailments through which to understand and organise the material under discussion. Second, they illustrate the way in which metaphorical thinking taps into underlying cognitive processes. The tendency to polarise people into in- and out-groups for instance, may be seen as part of a larger cognitive process of categorisation by means of comparison and contrast.²¹ When distinguishing

²⁰ Garton-Ash, T (1999) *History of the Present* Allen Lane; Penguin Press p328

²¹ For a study of the human propensity to divide into in-groups and out-groups, see Henri Tajfel (1982) *Social identity and intergroup behavior*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. For an elaboration of the approach expressed here, see Biljana Scott ‘Skills of the Public Diplomat: language,

between ‘unions’ and ‘networks’, my own rhetoric illustrates the same tendency towards binary contrasts, with ‘unions’ referring to a more homogeneous notion in which societies seek to reduce internal differences and accentuate commonalities, and ‘networks’ referring to singularly individuated societies which more readily accommodate differences between and within themselves. Yet it is very possible for both these models to work simultaneously, or to advocate elements of both, rather than to create a binary distinction followed by a strongly argued choice of one over the other. Third, metaphors remind us that we should never allow any single narrative to calcify into a single take on reality – there is always scope for an alternative way of seeing the world, and it is best to remain open to the insights offered by such alternatives.

National Myths

The dangers of reductive narratives which allow for no alternative accounts are evident in national myths. In an article in *Newsweek* entitled ‘The History Wars: the Kremlin is trying to promote national myths – at the expense of the truth,’ Owen Matthews argues that President Medvedev is preventing the writing of Soviet history which does not accord with the official line.²² To that end, he has set up a Commission charged with ‘counteracting attempts to falsify history that are to the detriment of the interests of Russia,’ and in May 2009, he made it a criminal offence, punishable by a large fine or three months of imprisonment, to question the Soviet victory in WWII. He also ordered, in the run up to the May 9th Victory Day celebrations, that local authorities mount patriotic poster campaigns using Soviet-era posters. What Medvedev is doing here is to mythologise Soviet achievements in WWII in order to arouse patriotic feelings among modern day Russians. An essential part of this mythologizing is a foregrounding of select elements and a backgrounding or even censorship of others.

A similar scenario is evident in the Serb as opposed to the Albanian versions of the myth of Kosovo. Having outlined the various polarizing forces that pitted Serbs against Albanians in the 19th Century, Noel Malcolm in his book *Kosovo: A Short History* outlines the two different ethnic perspectives on the events of 1912. The Albanians saw the imposition of Serbian-Montenegrin (and later Yugoslav) rule as an instance of the conquest and colonization. The Serbs saw it as ‘a war of liberation to release a captive population (the Serbs of Kosovo) from an alien imperial power (the Turks).’ Malcolm goes on to say:

The trouble with Kosovo, however, was that both of these conflicting conceptual models – the colonialist one, which made sense to the Albanians, and the liberationist one, which made sense to the Serbs – were simultaneously true.²³

We might measure one truth as greater than the other on the grounds of how many people believe it, or how close it comes to one’s own interpretation of events, but this does not warrant the denial of the ‘alternative truth.’

Narrative and Allegiance’ in Ali Fisher and Scott Lucas (2009) *Trials of Public Diplomacy*. Brill Publishers.

²² Matthews, Owen *Newsweek* July 20th 2009. ‘The History Wars: the Kremlin is trying to promote national myths – at the expense of the truth,’ pp66-8

²³ Malcolm, Noel (1998) *Kosovo: A Short History* Papermac, Macmillan ppxxx-xxxi

As in the case of the paired terms we discussed above with regard to their connotations, and the entailments of particular metaphors, national myths tend to promote one narrative to the exclusion of others. The challenge, it seems to me, is not to identify and promote a single truth, but to recognize the potential co-existence of multiple narratives, each plausible in some essential ways, but none ultimately definitive. This conclusion accords with Richard Rorty's belief in conflicting narratives and the absence of any final vocabulary.²⁴ My appeal is that we should listen carefully to indicators in language, such as connotations, metaphors and myths, in order to recognize tell-tale signs of divisiveness, and counter these with alternative takes where appropriate, since I believe that the best chance of creating and fostering harmonious communities through language arises from accommodating narratives and not reducing them to a single definitive (and therefore coercive) take.

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Conclusion

What this paper has hoped to show is that if we put our ear close to the ground of language, we can hear the rumblings of potential inclusion and imminent division. Of the many resources of language, I have concentrated on two: performatives, through which we conduct so much of the business of human interaction (promises, apologies, agreement, denial, refusal etc), and narrative, through which we appeal to hearts and minds, securing allegiance and shaping beliefs. Both performatives and narratives allow for a single referent to be interpreted in several different ways. Thus a given utterance may be interpreted as a promise or a threat, as an apology or a complaint. Similarly, a given sequence of events may be interpreted in several different ways, as colonization or liberation, as necessary self-defence or unjustified aggression. It is precisely this scope for divergent interpretations which introduces inclusion and divisiveness into the dynamics. In the case of performatives, the knowledge of those cultural conventions relevant to the most plausible interpretation of a locution affirms in-group inclusion and solidarity, whereas ignorance creates a potential divide between speaker and listener. In the case of narrative, sharing a perspective enhances in-group solidarity, whereas pitting one story against another gives rise to the polarization of positions and the denigration of the other.

In conclusion, whereas the dynamics of inclusion and divisiveness operate at a socio-psychological level, social positioning is not only reflected but created and accentuated by the language we use. The insights provided here on the relevance of performatives and narratives to the dynamics of divisiveness will, it is hoped, contribute to our understanding of how language and culture may help to create and foster global communities, and how it may divide and destroy them, depending on the aims and influence of its speakers.

²⁴ Rorty, Richard (1989) *Irony, Contingency and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.