

**'Coordination' (Herbert H Clark), 'integration' (Roy Harris)  
and the foundations of communication theory: common  
ground or competing visions?**

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**Published version**

JONES, Peter E (2015). 'Coordination' (Herbert H Clark), 'integration' (Roy Harris) and the foundations of communication theory: common ground or competing visions? *Language Sciences*, 53 (Part A), 31-43.

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## **‘Coordination’ (Herbert H Clark), ‘integration’ (Roy Harris) and the foundations of communication theory: common ground or competing visions?**

*‘Language use is really a form of joint action. A joint action is one that is carried out by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with each other’ (Clark, 1996: 3).*

*‘If we wish to communicate with others, by whatever means, we have to find ways of integrating (albeit partially and temporarily) our activities with theirs and theirs with ours’ (Harris, 1996: 14).*

*For Roy Harris<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

The paper explores the relationship between Herbert H Clark’s conception of language use as ‘coordination’ in joint action and Roy Harris’s view of sign-making as an ‘integration’ of activities.

On the face of it, the two approaches have much in common. Both Clark and Harris have raised fundamental objections to traditional linguistic approaches: Clark has counterposed an ‘action tradition’ to a prevailing ‘product tradition’, while Harris has proposed an ‘integrational’ view in opposition to a prevailing ‘segregational’ approach, both scholars insisting on seeing the production and interpretation of signs as embedded in contexts of activity. However, clear differences between the two approaches revolve around their respective attitudes to common ground in joint action and to the existence of languages as conventionally theorised. The paper explores these differences in relation to the role of intention and shared knowledge in meaning-making and to the status of conventional meaning in linguistic communication. The paper argues that Clark’s approach overall ultimately proves vulnerable to Harris’s critique of the reifying tendencies and ideology of the western language tradition and ends with a brief reflection on the wider socio-political implications of debates over linguistic methodology.

**Keywords:** coordination, integrationism, language use, common ground, sign-making, conventional meaning

### **0. Introduction**

The current focus on language as situated, real-time interaction (‘languaging’ in fashionable parlance)<sup>2</sup> marks a significant break from the 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistic

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Harris passed away on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2015 as I was preparing this paper for publication.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘languaging’ is due to Humberto Maturana (1988) whose own influence on emerging trends in the language sciences is now considerable and still growing (see Kravchenko, 2011, for a cogent summary of Maturana’s position and its relevance for linguistic theory). I can find no reference to the pioneering work of Maturana (1970, 1978) in Clark or Harris. However, the conceptual affinities which some scholars find between Maturana’s biologically based approach and Harris’s integrational semiology would make a comparison of the views of these two scholars both interesting and timely. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for

orthodoxy built on ‘languages’ conceived as systems of invariant form-meaning units underlying actual instances of language use. But what kind of theory of communication – what kind of *semiology* – is required to do justice to the interactional dynamism and creativity of ‘linguaging’ practices that research has begun to reveal? Amongst the many current attempts to address this fundamental re-orientation<sup>3</sup>, I wish to consider here two approaches with substantial claims on this new theoretical territory: the *coordination* approach of Herbert H Clark and the *integrational semiology* of Roy Harris.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Herbert H Clark and Roy Harris

The two eminent principals of my discussion, Herbert H Clark and Roy Harris, have provided us with a remarkable fund of ground-breaking contributions to the study of language and communication.<sup>5</sup> Both have proposed radical perspectives on the relationship between communication and social action under the influence of scholars, in particular Wittgenstein, Austin and Goffman, who have emphasised the instrumentality of language and the role of context in communicative interaction. There is also, on the face of it, a degree of convergence between their respective theoretical positions as set out in their most important works, (Harris, 1996; Clark, 1996), coincidentally published in the same year. And yet, there is, to my knowledge, no history of intellectual engagement between Clark and Harris personally nor, as yet, much in the way of dialogue between advocates of their respective positions. Here, then, I take the opportunity to make an initial and undoubtedly superficial comparison of their views, shaped, inevitably, by my own integrationist leanings. I hope, therefore, that my view of Harris’s view of Clark may be followed by someone else’s view of Clark’s view of Harris.

### *H H Clark*

Herbert H Clark is currently Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. He has published on a broad spectrum of topics in communication theory, linguistics, discourse analysis and the psychology of language since the 1970s. In particular, he has helped to shift analytical interest and attention towards the dynamic social-interactive and socio-cognitive processes involved in linguistic and non linguistic communication (or ‘signaling’). In his most important single work, *Using Language* (1996), the key concepts of ‘joint action’, ‘common ground’ and ‘coordination’ are explored in detail for their relevance to our understanding of signaling generally and language use more particularly. One of the most important aspects of Clark’s work is

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information about the term ‘linguaging’ and for drawing my attention to the relevance and significance of Maturana’s work and its relationship to that of Harris. See also Steffensen (2015) for discussion of Maturana from the perspective of the ‘Distributed Language Approach’.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kravchenko (2003), Hodges and Fowler (2010).

<sup>4</sup> I will not attempt here to discuss possible differences between Harrisian integrationism and the ‘distributed language’ view (Cowley, 2007, 2011; Thibault, 2011; Steffensen, 2015) developed partially under the influence of Harris. For a recent comparison of ‘integrators’ and ‘distributors’, see Orman (2015).

<sup>5</sup> For Clark’s work see the Wikipedia site ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_H.\\_Clark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_H._Clark)) and Clark’s own website (<http://web.stanford.edu/~clark/>). For Harris’s work see the Wikipedia site ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy\\_Harris\\_%28linguist%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Harris_%28linguist%29)) and the website of the International Association for the Integrational Study of Language and Communication (<http://www.integrationists.com>).

that it attempts a unification of the study of language and communication with the study of social activity via the principle of coordination of individual acts into joint actions. While undoubtedly part of what one might loosely call the mainstream in the language sciences these days, Clark's critical relationship to key assumptions in orthodox linguistic theory puts him at the radical cutting edge of that mainstream in some respects, as evidenced by the use of his framework in recent research on the synchronisation and coupling of bodily processes in communicative interaction (e.g., Richardson, Dale and Tomlinson, 2009; Shockley, Richardson and Dale, 2009; Dale, Kirkham and Richardson, 2011).

### *Roy Harris*

Roy Harris was Emeritus Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Oxford and the author of a substantial body of provocative writings on all aspects of communication and language (spoken and written). 'Integrationism', 'integrational semiology' or 'integrationist linguistics' are the terms applied to a current of critical linguistic thinking formulated by Harris and developed initially in collaboration with students and former students and subsequently by a wider scholarly circle (see, for example, Love, 2011; Pablé and Hutton, 2015). The term 'integrational' is designed to emphasise the inseparability of *sign-making* practices and their products from purposeful human activity as against the 'segregationist' view of language as a self-contained system. The rationale for integrationism was elaborated in Harris's early books, notably (1980) (*The Language Makers*) and (1981) (*The Language Myth*) via a root and branch critique of western philosophy of language and linguistic theory and advanced perhaps most cogently in his *Signs, Language and Communication* (1996). In contrast with Clark, Harris was an anti-establishment figure and remained outside the linguistic mainstream although his innovations are attracting increasing attention from many scholars seeking to theorise the interactional or 'distributed' processes of linguistic and nonlinguistic communication in real life contexts (cf., Cowley, 2011; Cowley and Vallée-Tourangeau, 2013; Thibault, 2011; Orman, 2015; Steffensen, 2015).

## **2. Points of convergence**

### 1. The language of real life

In his 'Dogmas of understanding' (1997), Clark casts a wry and critical eye on what he calls 'the science we are pursuing' which, to outsiders, 'must look very odd indeed' (1997: 594). 'It doesn't seem to be about people of flesh and blood', he goes on, 'but about beings unanchored to any situation, without faces, eyes or hands for gesturing, without the ability to pretend, tease, or play. It seems to be about language in a vacuum' (1997: 594). The intellectual root of the problem for Clark lies in what he calls the 'product tradition' in linguistics, in which 'sentences, words, and phonetic segments are treated as linguistic types abstracted away from speakers, times, places, and circumstances in which they might have been produced' (1996: 56).<sup>6</sup> As an alternative, he advocates an 'action tradition' in which 'the focus from the beginning has been on what people do with language' (1996: 57-8), that is on

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<sup>6</sup> For a thorough integrationist critique of the type-token relationship in linguistic theory, see Hutton (1990).

'language use'. Language use, for Clark, is a form of 'joint action' which is 'one that is carried out by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with each other' (1996: 3).

Harris, similarly, has repeatedly attacked 'the dehumanisation of language' which comes from the 'segregationist' practice of 'treating the linguistic system as an independent abstraction' (2012: 116): 'Episodes of communication are episodes in the lives of particular people at particular times and places', he argues (Harris, 2009: 70). Thus, integrationism rejects in principle '[a]ny initial academic strategy which, for theoretical purposes, treats communicational processes or communicational systems as segregated, self-contained structures, and assumes that each must be analyzed exclusively "in its own terms", without any reference whatsoever to neighbouring processes or systems' (1996: 17-18).

Both scholars agree, then, in arguing for a conception of language which is radically *non autonomous* in social or psychological terms. As Clark argues: 'Language fundamentally is used for social purposes ... Languages as we know them wouldn't exist if it weren't for the social activities they are instrumental in' (Clark, 1996: 23). Similarly, Harris: 'Language is an activity which would be meaningless unless the language-users also engaged in other forms of social interaction' (1998b: 6).

## 2. Signs of activity: coordination and integration

Both Clark and Harris have, quite independently, placed notions of action and activity at the heart of their theoretical innovations.<sup>7</sup> While Clark draws most directly and explicitly on the conceptions of coordination and convention in the work of Lewis (1969) and Schelling (1960), Harris has developed his unique theoretical position partly by synthesising the timid and unsystematic threads of linguistic contextualism in the work of Sapir, Malinowski and Firth as well as Wittgenstein<sup>8</sup> and Austin.

For Clark, '[l]anguage arises when people try to do things with each other in joint activities' (2005: 507). Furthermore, '[i]t takes coordination for people to do things together, no matter how simple, and it takes communication to achieve that coordination' (2005: 507). For Clark, communication has to do with the signifying acts ('signals') whereby people solve 'coordination problems' by coordinating their individual acts within a joint action. Drawing on Levinson's concept of 'activity types' (Levinson, 1992; see Clark 1996: 30ff), Clark argues that joint activities (involving more than one participant) are constructed and advanced through 'joint actions' (1996: 59ff). A sales encounter, for example, may proceed via 'opening the transaction, settling on the items wanted, establishing the price, exchanging money, and closing' (1996: 30). Joint actions and their sequencing require coordination of the behaviours of customer and server via a variety of simultaneous and intermeshing signals of various kinds (conventional and nonconventional) adapted to the circumstances of the activity and the progress made towards the goal.<sup>9</sup> From this

<sup>7</sup> See Jones (2011) for discussion of the notion of activity in integrationist work.

<sup>8</sup> For Harris's critical relationship to Wittgenstein see Harris (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Clark distinguishes between coordination of 'content' ('what the participants intend to do') and 'processes' ('the physical and mental systems they recruit in carrying out those intentions' (1996: 30). Such a distinction, crucially involving 'intention' and paralleling the familiar 'form'-'content' distinction in modern linguistics

point of view, signals serve as means to advance a 'joint project' - 'a joint action projected by one of its participants and taken up by the others' (Clark, 1996: 191). Since utterances will also be taken to 'project a joint task' (1996: 191), Clark is also able to present an interesting critique of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992) and its invocation of rules of turn-taking (Clark, 1996, Chapter 7).<sup>10</sup> Clark is able to re-work this treatment by re-interpreting conversation in terms of the differential contributions of participants to projected 'joint projects', thereby unifying the study of linguistic and non-linguistic signalling within a more general theory of communicative coordination.

For Harris, communication can be treated 'as including all processes in which human activities are contextually integrated by means of signs' (1996: 11), a definition which would cover all Clark's cases of coordination. Thus, communication minimally depends on an 'integration of two sequences of activity, the second of which complements the first' (1996: 71), where complementation 'requires that the second contribute to that sequence of events which the first is interpreted as projecting' (1996: 70). Activities 'may be said to be integrated when in combination they produce results which could not have been achieved by any of those single activities independently' (1996); '[i]nterpersonal communication' would therefore involve 'the integration of activities between individuals' (1996). However, Harris would not accept the Gricean distinction between 'natural' and 'non natural' (or 'natural' and 'artificial') meaning upon which Clark bases his own distinction between 'signals' and 'symptoms' (Clark, 1996: 126f; Harris, 1996: 53-58). Though Harris acknowledges the semiological relevance of a difference between interpreting one's own observations and responding to a communicational initiative on the part of someone else (1996: 58), Harris would see the signs involved in both cases as products of the creative sign-making proficiency of the relevant individuals, hence equally 'non natural'.

From their ostensibly convergent positions, both scholars have rejected the strict demarcation, central to modern linguistics, between language and non linguistic signs (or verbal and non verbal communication), emphasising the need for a broader conception of language use which can capture the creative semiological synergies achieved by participants in context. As Clark argues: 'Nods, smiles, gestures – these are all necessary to understanding ordinary *linguistic* communication ... No account of language use can be complete without these signals, the linguistic and nonlinguistic together' (1996: 392). More radically still, Clark's work on 'material signals' (2005) shows how people simply invent signals by pressing features of the ambient environment of interaction (including their own bodies) into communicative service, often in sequence with or alongside verbal acts.

Clark clarifies his own approach by making a distinction between 'signals' and 'methods of signaling' (1996: 156). Saying 'yes' while nodding one's head does not involve two signals - a linguistic signal (the word 'yes') plus a non linguistic signal (the head nod) – but a single 'composite signal' which defies classification as one or the other. Such composite signals for Clark represent 'the artful fusion of two or more methods of signaling', his three methods of signaling being 'describing-as',

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would be problematic for Harris (e.g., Harris, 1980: 155 on 'bi-planarity'). On communicational 'content' generally, see Harris (1996: Chapter 14).

<sup>10</sup> For an integrationist critique of Conversation Analysis see Taylor and Cameron (1987).

‘indicating’, and ‘demonstrating’ (Clark, 1996: 391). These three methods can be related, he argues, to the Peircian classification of signs. Thus ‘describing as a type of thing’ gives us Peirce’s ‘symbol’, demonstrating a thing gives us the ‘icon’ and indicating a thing gives us the ‘index’ (1996: 160). While orthodox linguistics (what he refers to as ‘the standard picture’, 1996: 183) has focussed almost exclusively on ‘describing-as’ (hence, the ‘symbol’), for ‘a realistic picture of language use, we must characterize the three processes and their integration’ (1996: 183).

Harris, similarly, has emphasised ‘the deployment of countless *ad hoc* communicational strategies, both verbal and non-verbal’ in everyday life (1996: 263). As he argues:

‘What we typically experience in face-to-face communication is the temporal development of a single integrated continuum, to which signs of various kinds contribute’ (1996: 105).

However, while Harris has discussed the ‘basic integrational techniques’ (such as are involved in the integrated acts of exhibiting and inspecting of shopkeeper and customer, 1996: 65) based on common sensory modality<sup>11</sup>, he rejects any attempt, including the Peircian, to identify ‘types of sign’ (icon, index, symbol) or types of ‘meaning’ (e.g., iconicity) independent of the communicative situation (1996: Chapter 9). For Harris, signs are always *made* by the participants and that sign-making is the exercise by individuals of their ‘communicational proficiency’ (1998c: 44) (later, ‘integrational proficiency’), that is, their powers, developed throughout their lives, of adapting their whole behaviour to exploit the communicational possibilities or exigencies (as they see it) of particular situations.

Furthermore, the inclusion of ‘non linguistic’ behaviours within the study of language use has more profound implications. Utterances, such as ‘Which finger did you cut?’ or ‘Two tickets please’ (Clark, 1996: 201) ‘often yield non-linguistic responses’ (e.g., showing the affected finger or handing over two tickets). Thus, in Clark’s re-working of the Conversation Analysis notion of ‘adjacency pair’ (or ‘paired action sequence’), the actions paired may just as well be non verbal. Similarly, for Harris, verbal and non verbal acts ‘have to be seen as integrated constituents in an interactive continuum of communication’ (2003: 44). If A asks B to ‘open the door’ and B opens it, then B ‘makes a linguistically appropriate contextual response to A’s utterance’ which in turn implies ‘that B’s actions also are signs, on an equal footing with the signs expressed vocally by A’ (2003: 44). For both scholars, then, *language use* (even, if you like, ‘English’) in such contexts extends to the complete interaction (Clark’s ‘joint project’). This state of affairs is explicitly articulated by Harris as the ‘non compartmentalization’ principle (1981: 165) which, as he puts it, takes on board ‘Sapir’s observation that ‘communication is based on structural correspondences between certain forms of behaviour in a situational context’ (1998b: 13), whatever those forms of behaviour are (‘linguistic’ or ‘non linguistic’).

On this basis, both scholars argue that the traditional concept of ‘language’ is inadequate to capture the experience of live communication. For Clark, the “language” of language use, *language<sub>u</sub>*, is ... not the same as the “language” of

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<sup>11</sup> See Clark’s more detailed treatment of ‘exhibition’ as one type of ‘material signal’ (2005).

language structure, *language<sub>s</sub>*' in the sense of 'the symbols of a language like Japanese, Dakota, or American Sign Language' (1996: 392). 'Language<sub>u</sub>', by contrast, is 'the system of signals, both linguistic and non linguistic, created by all three methods of signaling' (1996: 392), giving us a notion of 'language in its extended sense' (1996: 392). For his part, Harris sees the very idea of 'symbols of a language' as a projection of the language myth and advocates a perspective which 'renounces in advance the possibility of setting up systems of forms and meanings which will "account for" a central core of linguistic behaviour irrespective of the situational and communicational purposes involved' (1981: 165). He concludes: 'If that is equivalent to denying that there is any one identifiable system which is "the language" in question, so be it' (1981: 165-166).

### 3. Communication, meaning and understanding

Both Clark and Harris have subjected orthodox linguistic and pragmatic conceptions of utterance meaning and understanding to sustained critical scrutiny. The eleven 'dogmas of understanding' under Clark's (1997) hammer include literal meaning, the mainstream (Gricean) pragmatic distinction between saying and meaning and the assumption that 'speakers and their addressees rely on a single monolithic lexicon' (Clark, 1997: 580). Thus, Clark argues that the Gricean distinction between 'saying' and 'meaning', based on a notion of 'literal meaning', assumes that 'listeners determine what is said according to one set of principles or procedures, and they "work out" (or *calculate*) what is implicated according to another' (1996: 144). However, as Clark shows, 'listeners often have to calculate parts of what is said' because they may be presented with 'novel word meanings' (e.g., 'Never ask two *China trips* to the same party'). 'What is said', then, cannot be 'well defined for every type of utterance' (1996: 145).

Furthermore, while his opening position on meaning in Clark (1996) is couched in the language of Gricean intentionality, inimical to Harris, his subsequent explorations lead him to weaken these commitments to intentionality. According to the 'classical view', as he puts it: "What the speaker means" is a specific, objective intention of the speaker, and addressees are to identify that intention' (1996: 212). However, having shown that communication may well go on in joint projects without such intention-recognition matches, he consequently revises his position: "what the speaker means" is replaced by "what the speaker is to be taken to mean" (1996: 212). He explains:

'speakers and hearers try to create a joint construal of what the speaker is to be taken to mean. Such a construal represents not what the speaker means per se – which can change in the very process of communicating – but what the participants *mutually take* the speaker as meaning, what they *deem* the speaker to mean (see Grice, 1982)'.

Setting aside the principle of 'joint construal', Clark's revision in effect brings him closer to Harris's position that understanding is not a 'recognition' (or reception) of another's meaning or intention but an independent act of semiological creativity.

Clark has also criticised the 'message model' of communication:



'The *message model* implies that Alan's production, and Barbara's reception, can be studied in isolation. It also implies that messages are encoded strings of symbols in a symbol system (say, Japanese or English), so they can be studied in isolation from the processes by which they are produced and received. If speaking and listening are participatory actions, these two implications no longer follow' (1996: 20, Fn 6).

Consequently, Clark views the 'standard picture' as 'radically incomplete' (1996: 183), although Harris, as we shall see, goes further.

Clark's eleven dogmas are encompassed in Harris's scorched earth treatment of the two components of the 'language myth' embodied in the orthodox language tradition (Harris, 1981). The first component is the idea that languages are fixed codes (invariant form-meaning units) and the second that linguistic communication is a process of 'telementation', referred to as 'the principle of intersubjectivity in Taylor and Cameron (1987: 163), that is, a transmission, transfer, or matching of thoughts, ideas, symbols, meanings etc. between different minds. In combination, these two components supply the ideological and theoretical rationale for 'segregationism' (Clark's 'product tradition'/'message model') with Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign and *langue* as the classic variant of this position. For Harris, meanings are not 'semantic units established in advance by a fixed code' but 'values which arise in context out of particular communication situations. These values are assigned by the participants as part of the integration of activities involved'. Thus, communication 'involves a constant making and re-making of meaning' (1998a: 68). If we accept that signs (and, a fortiori, meanings) cannot be transmitted or conveyed then the only coherent alternative is to see communication between A and B in terms of the independent (though reciprocal) *sign-making acts* of A and B. In other words, signs are not sent and received but *made* on each side as the participants engage and integrate their activities.

Consequently, for Harris, the Gricean distinction between 'what is said' and 'what is meant' is a simple nonstarter because it presupposes telementation ('the principle of intersubjectivity') at the level of putative linguistic units (whether phonemes, morphemes, words and their meaning, syntactic structures etc). This is not to ignore our first-hand experience of and talk of such a distinction in everyday life ('I know what he *said* but I'm not sure what he *meant*') but it is to refuse to see the ability to contextualize communicative behaviour from different angles as the situation allows as warrant for the linguist's notion of 'a language' or 'language structure' independent of communicative purpose. Harris rejects all intention-based models of communication (including Grice's) as involving telementation, albeit with intentions rather than meanings having to match for communication to take place. As Harris puts it: 'Communication is not, in the general run of human affairs, a matter in which those who start the ball rolling necessarily control what subsequently happens' (1996: 65-66). 'That is why', he goes on, 'on the one hand, the intentions of neither party can be taken as a sufficient basis for defining any communicational process in which both are engaged, but, on the other hand, taking the intentions of *both* as this basis may lead to a contradiction' (1996: 66). Rather than pursuing a Clarkian notion of 'joint construal', which would be vulnerable to the same critique, Harris's alternative to intention-based theories is 'to begin by investigating the *restrictions* imposed on participants by the integrational relations obtaining between one

communication process and another' (1996: 43). This is not to deny that people engage in communication with goals and intentions but to recognize that 'neither our choices nor our intentions mark out the communicational space available' to participants (1996: 59). The appeal to 'restrictions' in this sense does not licence a form of social determinism ('society makes us do this or that'), but merely emphasises that sign-making, like all situated *practices*, engages the bodies and minds of real people and, consequently, depends on certain things being in place or coming into being and on things happening or having happened, many of which we have little or no control over.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. The paths diverge

#### 1. Common ground

The idea of 'common ground' is the cornerstone of Clark's approach. Clark discusses in detail the history of this notion in linguistic and pragmatic work and defends the version of it which he adopts ('CG-shared' involving belief in a 'shared basis' for 'propositions', 1996: 96). He argues that coordination of action depends on the communicative exploitation of the participants' common ground - that 'great mass of knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions' which the participants 'believe they share' (1996: 12). As the participants interact, furthering their joint project, their common ground also 'advances' (1996: 43) to include everything they have experienced so far as well as 'what the participants presuppose to be the state of activity at the moment' (1996: 43). The coordinative value of communicative signals depends on their being rooted in common ground which may be established by the exploitation of perceptual salience ('that dog is coming at you') or be based on prior agreement ('Let's meet at 10am') or convention (the traffic light system). Accumulation of common ground in the course of activity allows participants to improve and streamline their collaboration via unique adaptations of communicative practice, for example, in 'efficiency of expression' (1996: 55) and 'conceptual pacts' and 'lexical entrainment' in the interactional emergence of new ways of talking (Brennan and Clark, 1996).

In working with what the participants 'believe they share' (rather than in terms of 'what they share'), Clark is in effect attempting to avoid the difficulties which Taylor and Cameron (1987) identified as attached to communication models based on 'the principle of intersubjectivity'. Thus, Clark recognizes that claims about conceptual 'common ground' problematically imply a vantage point outside the participants' interaction from which the contents of their minds can be inspected and compared. For example, in discussing a situation where he and his son are both examining a conch shell on the beach, Clark argues:

'Only an omniscient being can say: "It is common ground for the two of them that there is a conch shell between them". All my son and I can do, as individuals, is make claims like: "I believe that it is common ground for us that there is a conch shell between us". When he and I act "on the basis of our common ground", we are in fact

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<sup>12</sup> Harris argues that 'the integrational relations between communication processes can be mapped by determining what presupposes what' (1996: 43). Clark addresses similar issues in his discussion of 'action ladders' (1996: 147ff) with his notion of 'Downward evidence' (1996: 148) covering some of the ground that Harris assigns to 'priorities of presupposition' (1996: 43).

acting on our individual beliefs or assumptions about what is in our common ground' (1996: 96).

For, as Clark notes, participants may differ (without knowing it at the time or, indeed, ever) on their assessments of what is common ground between them (1996: 97), although this may not prevent them from coordinating their actions for particular purposes in the present.

For Harris, however, such qualifications significantly weaken the motivation for any cognitively-oriented or belief-based notion of common ground. As he puts it:

'The participants, A and B, are agents whose views of their own activities *vis-à-vis* each other jointly contribute to the character of their reciprocal interaction. But these views may nevertheless be in direct or indirect conflict *within the communication situation to which they pertain*' (1996: 66)

In other words, we cannot coordinate around knowledge 'we believe we share' (but don't) any more than we can buy a house on the money we 'believe we share' (while actually both being broke); coordination is effected, then, by virtue of the participants' contributions to the interaction, whatever beliefs may be behind them.<sup>13</sup> And while Harris, too, paints a similarly dynamic picture of communicative interaction in which 'communication creates contexts', contexts which are 'unique' and 'constantly developing as the communication process itself develops' (1996, 153), he rejects the attempt to frame the enabling conditions of communicative interaction in terms of participants sharing conceptual or perceptual content. As he explains:

'Integrationism ... resists the tendency that is virtually endemic in the Western tradition to treat identity (sameness) as a bottom-line explanation where communication is concerned .... For this notion that A and B have something in common is a form of identity statement. Any explanation of communication that resorts to elements allegedly "shared" or "common" as between individuals or contexts tacitly presupposes the validity of some external viewpoint [cf Clark's 'omniscient being', PEJ] which guarantees the underlying sameness in question' (1997: 287).

For Harris, 'context is not reducible to any "sharing" that can be defined in biomechanical, macro social or circumstantial terms. Nor is such a sharing a prerequisite for communication. In order that A and B be in communication with each other, there does not necessarily have to be any set of conditions that are equally binding on both, or any information to which both have equal access' (1997: 286).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Clark's further exploration of the notion of common ground takes him to the conclusion that common ground is a form of 'reflexive self-awareness' (1996: 120) which, once more, seems to take him away from conventional pragmatics and towards Harris for whom 'the experience of self-communication ... shapes and informs our understanding of interpersonal communication, and not vice versa' (Harris, 1996: 183; see also Jones, 2009, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Harris treats the context of communication, i.e the 'communicational infrastructure' presupposed by any act of communication, in terms of three factors: 'biomechanical', 'macrosocial' and 'circumstantial'. As he puts it: 'The integration that is typically required in human communication depends on the possibility of co-ordinating sequences of activity involving factors of all three kinds' (1996: 28).

This is not to deny that tennis players A and B 'are playing with the same ball and on the same court. There are not two balls and two courts, one for each player' (1997: 285); both players must 'recognize that they are playing with the same ball on the same court and act accordingly'. However, Harris, argues 'that recognition, integrally constructed and articulated, is not something external to the playing, but a contextualized feature of the playing itself' (1997: 285). By 'recognition of the same X' here, Harris appears to have in mind neither the analyst's judgement on the contents of the participants' minds, nor the participants' own knowledge or beliefs as such but the de facto deployment by each participant of their communicational proficiencies in such a way as *to successfully integrate their sending and receiving activities*. As long as they do this, it doesn't matter what they each believe about the ball and the court or about the beliefs of their opponent. On the same grounds, Harris emphasises the key role in communication of 'local convergence of purposes between the participants' which, he adds, 'is far from being the same thing as community of intentions or identity of understanding' (1996: 263).

Harris's point, I think, is that what is communicatively fundamental is not 'common ground' in the sense of intersubjectivity (i.e., telementation), or belief in such, but the *complementarity and interdependence (or reciprocity)* of their sign-making acts which participants must establish, and which they then may hone and develop, to enable their mutual engagement in action. If 'local convergence of purposes' is to be achieved this can only happen through a reciprocally enacted *differentiation in the integrally-relevant roles, experiences, skills, knowledge and beliefs of each participant with respect to the other*. *Sameness*, he appears to say, cannot of itself explain or ground interaction; 'sames' cannot integrate (or coordinate). A joint action, then, is precisely a dynamically and situationally achieved complementarity or interlocking of 'differents'. For that reason, communication generally, including linguistic communication, neither presupposes a shared system of signs nor occurs through sharing signs, meanings or beliefs; it occurs through the reciprocally interlocking integration of complementary creative sign-making practices; sign-making is not the differential use or transfer of *sames* but the contextualized creation of integrated *complementaries*. What Clark sees as common ground and the accumulation of common ground is best understood, for Harris, in terms of the complementary integrational proficiencies of the individual participants in interaction.<sup>15</sup> From that point of view, what the participants have in common is simply the 'joint action' itself, that is, the emerging result and product of their combined activities. This divergence over common ground penetrates to the very definitions of 'signal' and 'sign' in Clark and Harris. While Clark posits a shared semiological basis for communication between A and B in joint construal of a single *signal* produced by A, Harris has two different *signs* in play as the result of the interlocking sign-making practices of each agent.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a novel attempt to reconcile Clarkian common ground with the complementarity of participant roles and contributions, see Rączaszek-Leonardi, Dębska and Sochanowicz (2014).

<sup>16</sup> At this point we might also note that Clark's conception of common ground couched in terms of intentions and beliefs appears to chime with a currently very pronounced mentalist orientation in language research built around 'theory of mind' and a conception of communication as 'mind reading' (e.g., Tomasello, 2010; Enfield and Levinson, 2006). Harris, on the other hand, views all such approaches as telementational and traces the origins of the individual's communicational proficiencies to the situated exercise and development of 'biomechanical capacities' (1996: 28ff) as the primary means of integrational engagement with the world and other people.

## 2. Languages

We have noted that Clark has challenged many of the key assumptions of the 'standard picture', in particular the 'product tradition' viewpoint and its associated 'message model' of communication'. Nevertheless, Clark maintains a commitment to the existence of 'conventional languages like English, Dakota, Japanese or American Sign Language' along with 'the phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and semantic rules of a language - its grammar' (1996: 77), that is, to what he calls 'language<sub>s</sub>' in contrast with 'language<sub>u</sub>'. In order to square this circle, Clark attempts to protect and preserve the fundamental metalinguistic construct of the 'product tradition' by re-casting it in coordination terms. 'Languages like English', he argues (following Lewis) 'are conventional signaling systems *par excellence*' (1996: 75). But what 'coordination problem' are such conventional signals employed to solve? Clark explains:

'Most English speakers ... have contingency plans that include this pairing of conditionals, which I will call a *signaling doublet*.

*Speaker*: If you intend to denote the cipher naught, you can utter the word *zero*.

*Addressee*: If a speaker utters the word *zero*, he or she can be denoting the cipher naught' (1996: 75).

Thus the word *zero* 'is a coordination device for a recurrent coordination problem - speakers wanting to denote naught and their addressees wanting to recognize this' (1996: 75). As Clark himself acknowledges without discomfort: 'In de Saussure's classic *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), he called such a doublet a *linguistic sign*' (1996: 75).

But I would argue that this step, far from advancing his general case for a semiology of coordination, stretches it beyond breaking point. Despite his avowed commitment to the study of *language use within social activity*, Clark now advances a conception of a conventional language as a context-independent system of self-solving semiological problems: in effect a word is a solution to the 'coordination problem' of how to say a word that means what we want it to mean. Furthermore, the 'common ground' required of participants is now clearly stated in terms of a speaker 'intending to denote x' and a hearer 'wanting to recognize' this intention, despite Clark's criticisms of intention-matching noted above.

In Harris's terms, Clark's treatment of linguistic signals involves capitulation to both elements of the language myth: his 'doublets' are elements of a fixed code ('zero' encodes 'naught') and communication depends on the transfer of invariant verbal meanings between A and B (via intention and intention recognition). Indeed, as Clark makes clear without any hint of discomfort, his approach is simply a terminological re-working of Saussure's 'circuit de parole'.

But how can we explain 'language use', with its continuous semiological creativity and adaptability, by appeal to invariant verbal units and fixed code semantics? Clark

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is aware of this issue which he attempts to address by proposing a distinction between 'potential use' and 'actual use' of linguistic elements (derived from Lewis's distinction between 'possible' and 'actual' languages, 1969: 161ff)<sup>17</sup>:

'The conventions of English are hardly enough to make communication work. They specify only the potential uses of a word or construction – and only some of these. They never specify the actual uses. The doublet for zero says how the word can be used. It doesn't say how it actually is used on some particular occasion. Every use of language raises non-conventional coordination problems, which depend for their solution on joint salience, solvability and sufficiency' (1996: 77).

Clark argues that actual senses of a word, including novel meanings, must be 'derived from' or 'built around' 'a conventional meaning' of the word (1996: 77). In illustration, he presents the case of a woman who called directory enquiries to ask about toll charges (1996: 78). She was told by the operator, "I don't know - you'll have to ask a zero". What did the operator mean by 'zero' in this case?

'Suppose', Clark argues, 'zero has four conventional senses – "cipher naught", "nil", "freezing temperature", and "nonentity"'. Then:

'If the caller had selected one of the conventional senses for zero, she might have chosen "nonentity" ("I don't know – you'll have to ask a nonentity"). Yet she reportedly interpreted the operator as meaning "person one can reach on a telephone by dialing the cipher naught". The operator used zero with a novel, non-conventional interpretation, and the caller interpreted it on the spot. How did they manage? The operator created a participant coordination problem that they solved on the basis of solvability, sufficiency, immediacy, and joint salience' (1996: 78).

In this case, '[t]he operator's use of zero was built around "naught"' (1996: 78).

From an integrationist perspective, this is a strange, and strained, argument. There is an initial assumption, based on the fixed-code myth, that there is a conventional entity called 'English' which consists of determinate and denumerable units with determinate and denumerable meanings. In a further move, a distinction is drawn between convention and instance in a way which confirms the initial assumption: the fixed code exists as a potential to be *used* in various ways in real communication. In a sense, Clark has simply rephrased the pragmatic distinction between saying and meaning as a distinction between potential and actual use of words. By the same token, the 'message model' (telementation) is revived, if not for actual use in all its concreteness then for the transmission and matching of 'signaling doublets' underlying actual use.

But, taking Clark's example a bit further, one might prefer to say that the operator used 'zero' in a way that was quite conventional for the local community of San Francisco telephone operators in the 1980s although quite unconventional for the caller (what Clark calls a 'communal lexicon', 1997: 580). The point being that we

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, Lewis's distinction is born of his own firm allegiance to the 'product tradition': 'we shall consider what a *possible* language is, in abstraction from any users it might happen to have, and in abstraction even from the question of how it *would* be used if it had users' (1969: 161-2).

cannot find, and nor should we expect, a common set of conventions that we can appeal to as a basis for understanding language use. But if there is no common system then there is no such thing as 'English' as Clark appears to see it. If you use a word I'm not familiar with, it doesn't help to insist that this is a word of English used in its conventional meaning (unless you're playing *Scrabble*). Conversely, if I am familiar with the word (or can guess its meaning at that point) then it doesn't matter for present communicational purposes whether it is conventional or not in any wider social sense. It would be quite wrong, then, to attribute communicational success in a particular linguistic interaction to some putative general social contract concerning the signs in play - to the 'sign system of English' - since it is the prior communicative experience of particular individuals and their powers or inclination to exploit such experience which constitute the only relevant factors to them as participants.

And so while Clark must acknowledge that communication works by *actual use* not *potential use*, he appears to overlook the problem of reconciling actual use with the notion of a 'conventional signaling system'. For, as he shows elsewhere (Brennan and Clark, 1996) novel *actual* uses of words are immediately picked up on by other participants and 'conventionalized' in local contexts. As Duncker argues: 'Conventionalization is an ongoing process, and conventions, therefore, are inherently open-ended and in-the-(re)-making' (2012: 417). Whatever 'English' might be, then, it is changing from moment to moment in real time interaction; there simply is no identifiable 'system' that can be pinned down. As Harris puts it:

'When we come across words we do not know, words which apparently did not exist a few years ago, it is difficult to resist two conclusions. One is that if there are verbal "codes", they cannot be fixed: on the contrary, they must be changing all the time. The other conclusion is that if there are such codes, different people use different ones, and these too change. Until yesterday, mine did not include the word moshpit: today it does. But if the code has the kind of instability evidenced by the sudden emergence of new words and meanings, what guarantee of stability is there for "old" words and meanings? The integrationist sees none' (Harris, 1998a: 79).

Our prior experience, as Duncker (2012) notes, may equip us with certain strong expectations about what our interlocutors may know and understand (as speakers of 'English') but such expectations (which will inevitably differ as between participants) can only be met (or not) and validated (or not) by means of the exercise of the participants' communicational proficiencies on a particular occasion. From this perspective, any continuity and stability in communicative practice (in 'English') as the participants may experience it is not the result of the use of abstract, invariant conventional signals, but an achievement of their own in producing behaviours which, for their specific purposes, are recognisable or intelligible. In Harris's terms:

'It is this interaction which confers relevance upon the participants' past experience with words, and not, as orthodox linguistics would have us believe, past experience (that is to say, mastery of "the language") which determines the communicational possibilities of their present interaction' (Harris, 1981: 166).

At least on this matter, then, Clark's approach sits squarely within the orthodox linguistic tradition which 'starts from an assumption about languages as fixed codes *already* common to a linguistic community' (1998a: 125). Harris advances a different

point of departure, namely ‘recognition of the *individuality of linguistic experience*’ (1998a: 125). He goes on:

‘If linguistic experience inevitably differs from one individual to another, what is the relationship between *A*’s “language”, *B*’s “language” and that communal “language” which (let us suppose) *A* and *B* both regard themselves (and each other) as speaking?’ (1998a: 125).

To which he answers: ‘this will vary according to the way in which, on particular occasions, *A* and/or *B* contextualize their own discourse in relation to an abstraction which they posit as a social norm’ (1998a: 125).

Furthermore, to claim that the caller’s interpretation of the operator’s ‘zero’ was ‘built around a conventional use’ is stretching it a bit. Perhaps we can concede that the woman in question heard (rightly or wrongly from the operator’s perspective) what she took to be a familiar word (‘zero’) in trying to make out what the operator was saying. But such a process cannot bear the weight of linguistic orthodoxy that Clark wants to load onto it. A striking and rather entertaining piece of verbal sleight of hand might illustrate the point. A ‘legal problem’ is presented to willing and unsuspecting participants along the following lines:

‘If a plane crashed on the border between the U.S. and Canada in which country would you bury the survivors?’<sup>18</sup>  
(For readers who are unfamiliar with the case I leave the penny to drop...).

As my own personal experience can attest, many participants show a keenness to engage helpfully with the problem:

‘If a plane crashed along the Canadian/US border, neither country would bare (sic) a responsibility to bury any survivors; though, both countries as while as the airline owning the downed plane would likely offer assistance to victims and their families in any number of ways- the minimum being grief counseling.’

‘Silly question. You would send them to their home towns. And a border is a line. You would be on one side or the other.’

‘let them lay there, and whatever government gets tired of the stink first will do the deed.’

The interesting question for the Clarkian would be: which one of the ‘conventional’ meanings of the word *survivor* are these responses ‘built around’? One might argue that, in their eagerness to contribute to what they take at face value to be the relevant ‘joint project’, participants have not so much ‘built around’ a conventional meaning but demolished it ... Can the actual use of *survivor* in this sense (‘one who doesn’t survive’) be explained by the potential use of the word (‘one who survives’)? Although this verbal trick may possibly appear to be an anomaly in terms of language use as Clark understands it, for Harris it would demonstrate the co-

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<sup>18</sup> The question, and the helpful responses, are taken from  
<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090606175215AARf2li>



operative exercise of creative communicational intelligence at work in all linguistic interaction. As he argues, 'the general thesis that linguistic communication requires agreement in definitions and in judgements may be seriously misleading' (1988: 120). A 'preferable point of departure for any general enquiry into language', he goes on, may be 'that linguistic communication *is* the reaching of agreement by means of verbal signs in particular interactional episodes' (1988: 120). When people are co-operating, there is 'no prior set of rules they have to conform to ... They are free to use verbal signs in any way which will further that co-operation and get the job done' (1988: 119-120). In other words, if we assume that the 'conventional meaning' of *survivor* ('one who survives') in 'English' is a common point of departure for the participants then we will never understand these responses.

Ultimately, then, Clark's assumptions about languages as 'conventional signaling systems' lead him to reproduce the 'standard picture' which he is otherwise so critical of, as we see so clearly here:

'It is impossible for Alan and Barbara to coordinate meaning and understanding without reference to their common ground. When Alan says, "Did you see my dog run by here?" Barbara is to consult the meanings of the words *did*, *you*, *see*, etc., and their composition in English sentence constructions. These meanings and constructions are part of Alan and Barbara's common ground because Alan and Barbara are both members of the community of English speakers' (Clark, 1996: 13).

Or here:

'For you to understand "She's going outside," we must each take as common ground the linguistic conventions on which this utterance is based - the meanings of *she*, *go*, and *outside*, the syntax of intransitive verbs, the semantics of progressive aspect' (1996: 114).

What Clark cannot see is that this conventional descriptive metalanguage presupposes the 'omniscient' perspective (intersubjectivity) on common ground to which he drew critical attention. Of course, such a perspective (reflecting specific cultural traditions and ideologies) is inscribed in the very practice of transcription of utterances and other communicative acts, adopted uncritically by Clark, whereby a single, determinate graphic artefact is offered as a representation of (or analysis of) the common linguistic knowledge, behaviour or experience of speaker and listener (indeed, of all 'English speakers'). But this is like offering the written score of an orchestral work as a representation of the 'shared' musical experience of instrumental performers and listeners.

Clarkian theorists might object that they at least are trying to link the particular interaction under examination with the broader linguistic and social context. As Clark puts it, 'the rules of a language ... describe regularities of behavior - what English speakers regularly do, and expect others to do, to achieve part of what they intend to do in using sounds, words, constructions, and sentences for communication' (1996: 77). To which Harrisians may in turn respond by arguing that it is impossible to do justice either to the social or the personal significance of a communicative episode by assuming in advance that the communicating agents are 'doing what English speakers regularly do', in itself a highly loaded (socially, culturally, and ethnically)

way of speaking. Harris addresses this issue directly in his discussion of a case of misunderstanding in which a female pupil took her teacher's utterance 'sit here for the present' to mean 'sit here to receive a present' rather than 'sit here for now'. Harris comments:

'Given prevalent patterns of behaviour in British schools, the intended interpretation of the words "sit there for the present" as an instruction to the addressee to sit in a certain place for the time being may be seen as considerably more probable than the alternative. But this is a probability that depends on looking at communicational patterns over the linguistic community as a whole; for it is only at that level that it becomes meaningful to assign weightings to different interpretations on the basis of generally relevant contextual factors. In any individual instance, however, the general relevance of the contextual factors in question may easily be overridden by some special circumstance. In language as in all else, probabilities are only probabilities, and no more. What makes no sense whatever is to introduce concepts derived from an analysis of linguistic-behaviour-in-the-mass into the explanation of an individual misunderstanding, where it is the viewpoint of the participants that alone determines the outcome' (1998c: 42).<sup>19</sup>

From Harris's perspective, it is significant that Clark must acknowledge that conventional signals 'require non-conventional coordination for their interpretation' (1996: 78), as in the case of 'zero' above. What this means is that the *creation* of signals (i.e., 'non-conventional coordination') must be the primary and fundamental communicative process, one taking place both in the absence of any 'conventional coordination' (as with 'material signals') and as the enabling process for the use of conventional (familiar) signs. This is exactly the point which Harris argues in his own discussion of the role of consensus and convention in communication:

'a communicational code or rule, *however it is laid down*, can be neither followed nor infringed except through some integrated sequence(s) of activities by the participants involved. It is in this sense that there is *no communication without integration*' (1996: 258).

In fact, as Harris shows, Clark's attempt to provide a 'coordination' underpinning for his segregationist treatment of 'conventional language' falls into a long tradition of segregationist 'fixed code' theorising in linguistics: 'The segregationist mistake as regards language is one which consists in assuming language to be – or to be based on – a vast network of regulative tradition' (1996: 251).<sup>20</sup> However, Harris argues, the

<sup>19</sup> Whether Harris's distinction here between 'linguistic-behaviour-in-the-mass' and a particular communicative act (or the distinction between 'macrosocial proficiency' and 'macrosocial conformity', 1996: 29) is compatible with the distinction between 'first-order languaging' and 'second-order language patterns' in Thibault's (2011) exposition of the 'distributed language' view is a question I will leave for subsequent exploration. In particular, one might wonder whether Thibault's application of the metalinguistic framework of Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar to particular interactions is not simply a way in which a segregationist construct is re-presented and re-modelled in terms of 'normative cultural patterns' (2011: 236). (On linguistic regularities and normativity see Taylor, 1997; Jones, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Thibault's notion of 'second-order' language would appear to be similarly vulnerable to Harris's critique: 'Second-order language patterns are the emergent historical-cultural products of the conventionalized solutions devised by collectivities of interacting agents to the numerous problems of coordination that they are called upon to solve in the many different kinds of social activities with which language is integrated' (Thibault, 2011: 219).

scope of such highly regulated practices is limited: 'Large areas of human thought and action are simply beyond the scope of regulative practice, and always will be' (1996: 254). And if '[t]here is no practical possibility of anchoring *all* linguistic usage to specific regulative practices' (1996: 253) then the only way to reconcile the notion of 'a language' with a 'coordination' theory of language use is, as we have seen in Clark, to partition linguistic communication into 'language<sub>s</sub>' and 'language<sub>u</sub>' with the former conceived, as in the 'product tradition', as a decontextualised and idealized semiological circularity.

#### 4. Balance sheet: common ground or conflicting agendas?

In comparing Clark's *coordination* approach with Harris's *integrationism*, we have noted a partial convergence of purpose in prioritising the knowledge, skills and experiences involved in actual instances of communication over the metalinguistic abstractions and methods of linguistic orthodoxy. Towards this end, both scholars have each developed quite independently a substantial body of work devoted to the exploration of contextualized meaning-making in which we find many specific points of compatibility or agreement. The terms 'coordination' and 'integration' in themselves, if we take them as having to do with the communicational processes by which people connect and concert their behaviours towards a particular outcome, are pretty much interchangeable.

At the same time, however, there are radical differences on fundamental issues of communicational philosophy between Clark and Harris which ultimately render their respective intellectual projects incompatible. These differences, as we have seen, are evident in their respective attitudes towards 'common ground' and towards the orthodox notion of conventional languages.

From Harris's perspective, Clark's approach is a form of what he calls 'weak segregationalism' (1996: 147) in that it accepts the basic assumptions and methods of linguistic orthodoxy while adding additional principles to account for real communication in context. One way to do this, as in Clark, is to posit the abstract and invariant linguistic system ('langue') as a 'potential' which is to be 'used' in actual utterances, an approach Harris refers to as a 'fixed-code-plus semantics' (1998a: 80). Their conflicting positions on this are quite evident in the titles of two of their most important works: *Using Language* (Clark, 1996) and *The Language Makers* (Harris, 1980). For Harris, Clark's model of 'language use' fits into a long-established *instrumental* tradition, which he calls 'a naïve and widespread way of thinking of signs as tools or instruments' (1996: 32): 'signs are ... conceptualized as being, like the chopper and the mower, instruments already in existence "before" the activity they make possible' (1996: 32). In this tradition, it 'is taken for granted that the sign is one thing and how people use it or respond to it is another' (1996: 33). Harris's integrational approach, on the other hand, rejects the instrumental view:

'It calls in question the coherence of supposing that signs can exist independently of their users. It also questions whether mere familiarity with a common set of signs can in any case explain what A and B have to do in order to communicate. For the integrationist, there is no sign without a context, and contexts are not given in

advance. Signs, in short, are not waiting to be “used”: they are created in and by the act of communication’ (1996: 6-7).

Underlying what might appear to be technical disputes over linguistic description, however, are deeper and more far-reaching issues of communicational philosophy. For Harris, and, as we have seen, for Clark to some extent, the long-enduring segregationist approach to language is based on a reification and de-humanising of communicative practice. As particular utterances are seen as mere tokens of (‘uses of’) pre-existing sentence types, so particular individuals become mere mouthpieces for ‘society’; the very ability of individuals to communicate with one another is *explained* in terms of the formal and semantic properties of a pre-established system of signs. In contrast, integrationism allows us to see that collective actions and society-wide patterns of activity do not presuppose a common language, shared knowledge or even common values, but are produced in and through the constantly renewed achievement of communicative complementarity and interdependence between flesh-and-blood individuals whose respective purposes have locally converged (whether consensually or by coercion). On this perspective, the apparent regularity and predictability of linguistic behaviour has nothing to do with underlying abstract systems, but has its source in ‘the location of the voluntary acts of individual linguistic agents within the coercive moral context of everyday life’ (Taylor, 1997: 156).

Thus, Harris’s integrationist programme is an invitation to work out, uncompromisingly, the implications of taking real people, warts and all, as the agents of communication. Clark goes part of the way with Harris but stops short at that crucial point where linguistic orthodoxy is most threatened, where the weight of linguistic tradition bears down most heavily. The outcome, from Harris’s perspective, is an awkward and theoretically inconsistent compromise which is able to develop important insights into some aspects of real time communicative interaction but falls back on the product tradition, with its *atemporal* units and structures, when it comes to language use.

Such is not the integrationist way. While acknowledging the utility, in certain contexts, of traditional grammatical metalanguage as well as of written transcription, integrationists would insist on taking such practices not as based on – still less *revealing* – supposed intersubjective units of linguistic communication, but as particular communicative practices in themselves in which aspects of first order linguistic behaviour are re-contextualized in line with particular theoretical or professional goals. Such methodological orientations have social and political import and consequences of their own, as Harris has continually emphasised. Indeed, it is rather ironic that linguists deploy tools from linguistics in their critical discussions of social and political ideology but rarely examine the ideological assumptions behind the linguistic frameworks deployed.<sup>21</sup>

In rescuing language from the clutches of reification and according it its rightful place as a creative human power, integrationism thereby also restores the political, ethical and aesthetic charge of languaging: if we are the *makers* of language, rather than mere *users* of some conventional system come from who knows where, then we are

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<sup>21</sup> For further discussion of the social and political implications of integrationism, see Jones and Collins (2006), Jones (2007).

responsible and, at least in principle, accountable for what we make; we are duty bound to critically challenge the 'coercive moral context of everyday life' for its curtailment of communicative potential as well as its effects on our self-understanding and to question the rationale and the benefits of those local convergences of purpose to which we are subject and to which we contribute. Ultimately, perhaps, Roy Harris's most important contribution was to encourage us to see the damage we inflict on ourselves, and, therefore, on our vision of possible human futures, by obscuring or denying the humanity of language.

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