characteristic feature of our recent intellectual history was the conjunction of a universal valorization of theoretical discourse in an array of disciplines ranging from the so-called “human” sciences to poetics and psychoanalysis and the simultaneous elevation of linguistics to the status of model for the construction of theories and methodologies in these disciplines. Linguists, so often the very type of Carlyle’s Dr. Darcy the scholar, embodiment of an obscure and irrelevant learning, had, as a consequence, briefly and with some bewilderment, found themselves, starting in the mid-1960s, intellectual cult figures, rubbing shoulders with artists, writers, and actors in the fashionable salons. One could invoke Chomsky descending the stage of the Beverly Hilton in 1971 in the company of Jane Fonda and other anti-war activists, commenting, in the face of a dozen news photographers, “It’s just like La Dolce Vita.” Or Jakobson flying the Concorde (in a plane also carrying Princess Grace) to lecture at the College de France before an audience whose size was only equalled—or so a janitor told him—by Bergson’s. The period when the elaboration of theories outside science itself was on the agenda and linguistics furnished the model for that project is now past. Once more, linguists find themselves consigned to the fate of Proust’s “professor at the Sorbonne,” Brichot, etymologizing in Mme Verdurin’s salon, ludicrous, “too pedantic,” their discourse grown boring; like him, their “words no longer carried, having to overcome a hostile silence or disagreeable echoes; what had altered was not the things...said but the acoustics of the room and the attitude of the audience...difference of opinion, or of system” making them “appear to other people absurd or old-fashioned.”


2. See also, for example, Chomsky’s name mentioned in Woody Allen’s Manhattan and in his New Yorker short story “The Whore of Mensa” or in Norman Mailer’s The Armies of the Night.

To linguists, the pronouncements of these other disciplines, analogizing from linguistics, had seemed, in turn, equally puzzling. What a structural anthropology and a structuralist poetics, a semiology and a Lacanian psychoanalysis claimed to take from linguistics was largely unrecognizable to the linguist. The relation between linguist and non-linguist was asymmetrical, nonreciprocal. The linguist as such had no need for these other disciplines; the goals of linguistics were sufficient and self-contained. In the 1960s and 1970s, the real discoveries and successes of the various linguistic paradigms—and most notably and recently, of transformational grammar—the productivity of their arguments provided linguists with intellectual projects, an intellectual labor, generating excitement and the promise of significant breakthroughs. Linguistics had not reached any impasse leading it to look beyond itself for indications as to how to proceed. (That individual linguists may have is irrelevant.) To add to this asymmetry, structural linguistics, particularly American structural linguistics—focused as it was on the study of languages such as American Indian languages, for which there were no written texts—and after it, transformational grammar, particularly in the United States, had largely severed their ties with belles lettres. The nineteenth-century philologist, trained in various largely Indo-European and Semitic languages, both ancient and modern, was perforce familiar with literary and historical texts and the scholarship surrounding them; the contemporary linguist might be more likely to be trained in field work in anthropology or in symbolic logic, and hence to be little inclined to take an interest in those disciplines looking to linguistics for a model, structural anthropology excepted.

The linguist and the non-linguist interested by linguistics thus could hardly be said to meet as equal partners in an exchange—that dream of an interdisciplinarity. Indeed, the self-sufficiency of linguists, the non-reciprocity of their relation to literary theory, semiology and psychoanalysis, made them briefly the envy of these other disciplines. It was a kind of unrequited love of which linguistics was the object, a linguistics, moreover, which often—at least from the linguist’s point of view—seemed to have little to do with the linguistics of linguists. Perhaps the most extreme version of this non-meeting was that between Chomskyan transformational grammar, that most formal of linguistics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the most enigmatic celebration of the linguistic model, and its dramatic enactment took the form of a dinner which brought together Chomsky and Lacan, arranged by the mediator Jakobson, with Lacan as suitor.

The truth is that the discourse of linguistics had never been anything but perplexing and finally came to seem to the non-linguist irrelevant, irritating, boring. The death of linguistics was hence repeatedly proclaimed, for now that non-linguists

---

4. See, for instance, Ian Robinson’s *The New Grammarians’ Funeral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Claude Hagege’s *La Grammaire Générale: Réflexions Critiques* (Paris: PUF, 1976), and Geoffrey Sampson’s *Making Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). The hysterical edge of many of these pronouncements as to the death of linguistics, particularly of generative grammar, is striking. The jacket of Sampson’s book, for example,
had ceased to think about linguistics, how could its continued existence be anything but an anachronism? Yet it persisted, apparently impervious to the demands or wishes of other disciplines that it concern itself with something other than it is. From seeming the keystone supporting a period’s characteristic thinking, the linguistic model has become the gravestone marking a discarded set of assumptions. The question that arises in the aftermath is: which is now rendered more strange by the changeableness of intellectual fashion—that linguistics should have ever had an appeal to any but the few, or that it should remain ultimately so little understood?

The course of linguistics in this post-linguistic world is tied to that of language itself. It was the universal recognition of the centrality of language which supposedly explained the elevation of the linguistic model. Herein lies the original source of misunderstanding between linguist and non-linguist, in the referent of that term “language.” It was not “as a language” that linguistics was asked to approach language, but as something else—a system of signs, a system of communication, an image or mask of thought.

For this reason, it was not a love of language per se which led these other disciplines to question linguistics. Yet it is precisely English or French or Arabic as a language that interests linguistics. The object of linguistics was then not what non-linguists thought or wished it to be, the universal key to knowledge. A passion that once united a generation now divided it. Had linguistics turned out to be nothing but the hated grammar of the school, refusing to make language the servant of man, the tool of communication, to make it conform to the needs and expectations of semioticians, literary critics, ethnologists, but instead making students of language, like the schoolchild, serve language? In that case, was the universal boredom with the subject of linguistics the final comment on the project which had based itself on the science of language? If the scientific model had failed to be extended to other domains, did that reflect on the scientific status of linguistics itself? Had linguistics finally made no contribution that could be comprehensible or meaningful to any but a linguist? Was the linguist possessed of a knowledge misunderstood and unappreciated by those who had outgrown an infatuation with linguistics and, by ex-

comments: "Making Sense shows the discipline of theoretical linguistics as a self-created, self-governing-self-directed, self-justifying-though possibly unconscious-academic hoax. In simple language it shows how modern linguists have dressed up unsurprising observations with complex structural paraphernalia and pseudo-scientific gobbledegook. It will be read with pleasure by all who fear that man’s humanity is threatened by the importunate advances of an over-acquisitive scientism. Without judging a book by its cover, one cannot help but think, in the face of such statements, of what Milner says of linguistics’ threat to man’s narcissism (see later, 111). For linguistics does importune, and not the least of the ways it does is in the difficulty of its content.

5. I am inspired here by the only apparent redundancy of the course title, "English as a Language," used by Julian Boyd at the University of California, Berkeley.
tension, with language itself, yet unable to communicate that knowledge to anyone who does not become—as is not the case for every discipline—likewise a linguist?

Go, dumb-born book

"Boredom," Roland Barthes tells us, "is not simple." "Boredom is not far from bliss; it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure," he explains from a vantage point in time when his enthusiasm for linguistics had receded to that distant shore of a former passion."

The fact that boredom with something is only the state of having fallen out of love with it makes it no less difficult to comprehend the former state, as we know from Proust. But when it is a case of being left stranded on that other shore and wishing to convey a still felt excitement shared by few or none, the impossible task of communicating that excitement to the bored, of explaining what it is that linguists are after to those with completely different expectations of the goals of linguistics, takes on the dimensions of a self-justification on the part of one condemned to the modern equivalent of a heresy trial: condemned to being ignored and passed over in silence.

It is this little book which audaciously, flying in the face of the real difference between linguistics and its erstwhile suitors, is sent to bring into contact what nevertheless remains distinct and different, two different conceptions of language, the linguistic and the non-linguistic, like Proust’s little wasp “transversally” fertilizing the otherwise non-communicating flowers of the Duchesse de Guermantes’ orchid and causing “the partitioned sexes to communicate,” “a communication resulting... from what does not communicate.” And it does so in the name of two approaches to language which could be no further apart: Chomskyan transformational grammar and Lacanian psychoanalysis. For like Tiresias, this book encapsulates a heterologia; it speaks from two experiences, from the subjective possession of two knowledges normally not residing in the same individual. The fortuitous meeting of these two alien knowledges (the un-English plural is required to express their discreteness) within the pages of For the Love of Language is uniquely determined by the intellectual biography of its author; Chomskyan linguist trained as well in the ancient languages of the comparative grammarian, Milner was also associated with the École Freudienne."

8. As an editor of the Cahiers Pour l’Analyse, the journal of the Epistemological Circle of the École Normale Supérieure, Milner contributed toward making Lacan known to a wider audience. Milner was one of several French-speaking linguists—Nicolas Ruwet was an-
It is the coexistence of two discontinuous domains of knowledge which have not been assimilated one to the other that can be read in Jean-Claude Milner’s bibliography as the most apparent and constant principle in what, since the publication of the French original of *For the Love of Language* in 1978, has become a developing oeuvre. From a work of pure formal syntax like *De la Syntaxe à l’Interprétation* (1978) or texts including formal syntactic analyses like *Arguments Linguistiques* (1973) and *Ordres et Raisons de Langue* (1982) to not only *For the Love of Language*, which appeared in Lacan’s series, *Le Champ Freudien*, but also its political companion piece, *Les Noms Indistincts* (1983), published in the *Connexions du Champ Freudien*, along with the interpretive logic or “detections” of *Detections Fictives* (1985) and a recent book on the alexandrine, co-authored with François Regnault, *Dire le Vers* (1987), the alternate points of view are adopted, now sequentially, now by turns within the same work. ”Always, however, the differences between the two domains of thought are maintained. For to possess two such radically unconnected knowledges is not to connect them; it is above all to recognize more than “anyone their essential difference and to live, like the Duchess’s orchid, with discontinuous parts of knowledge.

Such a divided state is a familiar one—that called the “modern consciousness. Its appearance is consonant with the rise of science. That is, the modern subject of science cannot unite a plurality of “knowledges” which English expresses only by the word ‘sciences’ into that imaginary figure known as the Renaissance man.” It other—brought to MIT in the mid-1960s through the mediation of Roman Jakobson. When, in the wake of May 1968, generative linguistics in Paris could establish itself at the university, at Vincennes (Paris VIII) and elsewhere—indecent of the structuralist Martinet at the Sorbonne—Paris became in the next two decades an important and productive centre of “generativists,” as generative grammarians are called in France, gathering together such linguists as François Dell, Pierre Encrevé, Gilles Fauconnier, Hélène Huot, Pierre Pica, Mitsou Ronat, Alain Rouveret, Nicolas Ruwet, Jean-Roger Vergnaud, the Americans Richard Carter, Jacqueline Guéron, and Richard Kayne, and visitors like Joseph Emonds, Morris Halle, S.-Y. Kuroda, Tanya Rinehard, Luigi Rizzi and Sanford Schane.

9. *De l’École* (Paris: Seuil, 1984). Milner’s discussion of education in France, which was the object of so much attention and controversy in the year or so after its publication, appears to occupy a separate position. In a fuller discussion of Milner’s work, however, it could be placed with respect to the other titles mentioned. As for any relation with *For the Love of Language*, it is perhaps natural that Milner’s reflections in the latter on the factors tying the linguist, unlike other scientists, to the school (129ff.) should then direct attention to the school itself.

10. In other words, a figure who is not the subject of science. Here we can place Milner’s hostility to the universal teacher in *De l’École*: ”Thus, whenever one wishes to describe any particular educational content, one always arrives at an at the same time: a subject who is healthy of body and at the same time of mind, intelligent and at the same time of heartfelt generosity, amorous, passionate and at the same time an attentive spouse, modest and at the same time brilliant, and in addition, clever with the hands, and so on; this is the result that every true educator must aim for, in short, the total man, of which the French cavalier and the English gentleman of the past and the unionized teacher, do-it-yourselfer and athlete of today, are respective illustrations” (57).
is not that the scientist may not have access to more than one branch of knowledge, some scientific, some not; it is that science, in searching for "scientific" explanation, must reject what Bertrand Russell identifies as the mystic belief in "the apparent revelation of the oneness of all things." That mystic and all-embracing oneness is the contrary of what Milner calls, after Lacan, the One; the latter notion partakes rather of the features of that "atomism" or "pluralism" which Russell elsewhere counterposes, to the single, mystic One, the "common-sense belief that there are many separate things." For Lacan's One has the property of being countable "one by one." There is no once for all, but a countable series.

Science registers most acutely the limits or boundaries of knowledge; the condition for its existence is the recognition of its partiality. The resultant rejection of the belief in unity is the foundation of what Milner calls "the ethic of science" (79). That ethic, as we shall see, is based on a renunciation. It is not simply the renouncing of the goal for science to embrace all knowledge. It is also the recognition that the different parts of an individual’s knowledge cannot simply be added up into an interconnected whole and, correlatively, that the different objective spheres of knowledge cannot be integrated. It is perhaps predictable that linguistics today should stand at the frontiers of science and non-science, bearing witness to the impossible unity of knowledge—in the lack of comprehension it meets with everywhere, in the failure to see that it cannot be found wanting as a science for not having answers to all the questions put to it. For its knowledge is the newest science, unique in carrying formal representation and argumentation not into the external, physical world, but into an internal, non-physical one: the speaker's knowledge, which Chomsky calls "linguistic competence" (54-5). The validity of its claim to scientificity is thus dependent on its refusal to comment on all uses of language. The punishment for that refusal has been a universal skepticism denying any theoretical coherence to the limited claims of linguistics precisely because there exist aspects of language it cannot explain.

The experience of science

What is perhaps unexpected is that the linguist’s knowledge as linguist is not contaminated by this universal skepticism. Here lies the core of Milner’s argument from which so much else is derived: the linguists conviction is rooted in an experience unique to linguists among the researchers in the "human" sciences—and here Milner, speaking for himself, means to articulate something which other linguists, but not necessarily others than linguists, will immediately recognize, though it be only privately and though they might find the language in which it is articulated foreign. This is what one might call "the experience of science"—something more than its simple practice, but requiring that practice. It is on the basis of that

---

experience that linguists are led to what they think of as “linguistic discoveries” comparable to those of any physical science. Having had that experience, via what procedures they might not be able to say, some of them might, with hindsight, turn to scrutinize in order to make explicit the implicit logic of the arguments they came to follow. Thus is science brought into line with Proust’s formula for the work of art that the intelligence comes after a prior experience, reversing the priority of methodology over discovery which characterized the model of science of a structural linguistics, and which a structuralist poetics found in that linguistic model. It is its quality as experience—albeit a mental one—that confers its privacy, its incommunicability on the knowledge which is the content of linguistics and motivates the otherwise strange term Milner chooses for it: the jouissance of the linguist, that word which in ordinary French means not simply “pleasure” but can designate the climax of the sexual act. Jouissance has been taken by Lacan to stand for a precise complex of notions; his seminar XX, entitled Encore, takes jouissance as its point of departure, a jouissance qualified as “feminine” and explicitly contrasted with pleasure, the specifically female orgasm being emblematic of what interests Lacan in la jouissance. It is not simply a state, like pleasure, but an event, hence occurring in time (even if instantaneously), hence repeatable (the possible “Encore”), but also, like any real event, one which may or may not take place. That it has cannot, moreover, be determined by outward signs; it can be known only by the subject experiencing it, incapable of explaining, of communicating it, the je jouis like a sexual cogito. To capture this idea of jouissance as an event rather than a state, I have rendered the word in English by “the thrill” or “the thrill of pleasure” and the verb by “to take pleasure.” But “the thrill of pleasure” should not be understood as the state of pleasure nor should “to take pleasure” be understood as “to have pleasure.”

The linguist’s thrill lies, however, in the experience of science: that is, it is attached to a theoretical knowledge, a particular kind which the word “science” has come uniquely to denote. It is in the connection between linguistic theory and the experience in which it is arrived at that Milner locates the source of the misunderstanding linguistics has encountered. Of course, that theory is set down in the formal account which externalizes it from the experience, the process of discovery and the theory not being the same and the former disappearing in the latter, along

---

13. “The impression is for the writer what experiment is for the scientist, with the difference that in the scientist the work of the intelligence precedes the experiment and in the writer it comes after the impression.” The Past Recaptured, trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1971) 140. For Alexandre Koyré, the theory comes before—what he calls the “primacy of the theory over the facts.” Études d’Histoire de la Pensée Scientifique (Paris: PUF, 1966) 69—but methodology follows, if not at the very end, at least after the elaboration of the former: “I consider the place of methodology not to be at the beginning of scientific development, but so to speak in its middle.” Études d’Histoire de la Pensée Scientifique, 64. See also Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 94 and 151.

14. Chomsky, in his early polemics against structural linguistics, criticized the latter’s preoccupation with necessarily prior “discovery procedures.” Koyré makes the distinction between “methods” and “methodology.” Études d’Histoire de la Pensée Scientifique, 69.
with the one who formulated the hypothesis. The enigmatic quality that surrounds linguistics as science is due not simply to its difficulty but to the fact that, although it is theoretical, it—like any real science—can be seized only through a research, an “experience, whose sign has traditionally been not cognitive but exclamatory: a “eureka!” that is more than any mere heuristic, as je pense exceeds “it is thought.” To have that experience is already to be a linguist, even if for a moment (124). This is why the formal study of linguistics, like any of the positive sciences, crucially involves the assignment of problems, whereby the student is forced artificially to have the thrill connected with their solution, to repeat under idealized conditions insuring success the discoveries that make up the history of this science.

But For the Love of Language is no introduction to linguistics designed as a substitute for that knowledge gained only through an apprenticeship in practice. It is an attempt to reveal to the non-linguist the existence of an experience of science at the heart of linguistics in order ultimately to say in what way that experience is attached to linguistics’ legitimacy as a science—in other words, to defend the profession of linguistics before a tribunal whose accusations and sentence amount to the same thing: found guilty of the same boredom they are subjected to—the non-linguist’s—linguistics are dismissed, pronounced useless. But in their defence, Milner cannot merely communicate this experience, any more than for Lacan the woman can speak of her jouissance. For one thing, what it involved is afterwards as inaccessible for the one who has undergone it as for the one who has not. Milner takes recourse then to a version of Proust’s retrospective analytic method, set forth in Contre Sainte-Beuve. There, Proust argues, it is intellectual analysis which is required to establish the second-best status of this analysis subsequent to experience; it is only this analysis which is able to discern the importance of what has preceded it. But in Milner this scrutiny takes an unexpected—if, as we shall see, a not entirely unprecedented—form, aiming in part to isolate and analyse the experience, and in part to define the status and specific nature of this “science” linguistics claims to be. This dual perspective on both the linguist and linguistics accounts for

15. There is an important place for introductory texts within linguistics. But outside linguistics, the period of interest in linguistics gave rise to the phenomenon of an intellectual generation many of whom relied for their understanding of linguistics on commentaries written by non-linguists—Jonathan Culler’s Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1975) for instance.

16. “Yet all the same, it is intellect we must call on to establish this inferiority [of the intellect]. Because if intellect does not deserve the crown of crowns, only intellect is able to award it. And if intellect only ranks second in the hierarchy of virtues, intellect alone is able to proclaim that the first place must be given to instinct. Contre Sainte-Beuve in Proust on Art and Literature, trans. S. T. W. (New York: Meridian Books, Chatto & Windus, 1958) 25-6.
the peculiar form of this little book, so difficult to classify, at once a psychoanalysis
of the linguist as a subject of science and a philosophy of that science.

Confessio amantis linguae

A science contains in its history an experience whose place in that history must
be understood if the science is to be understood. Thus, it cannot be minimized or
forgotten that the author of For the Love of Language is a practicing linguist; and
this book, which proceeds in a way so unlike linguistic practice, should in no way
be construed as a rejection of that practice. Rather, in defending it, the book is
shaped by the private character of an experience: it is an apologia—pro curricula
vitae suae—making in an impersonal form a personal statement, a confession of
an attachment to a learning and its Object. The particular impersonal form that
is given to autobiographical material Milner identifies: it is a “wild self-analysis,”
in the technical sense of Freud. That analysis originates in a fact Milner observes
about himself so as to render it strange and in need of explanation: why is it that,
when linguistics has ceased to retain the interest of so many, does he, so easily
prey to boredom elsewhere, continue to find linguistics interesting?

The analysis and justification of a continuously renewed interest for a subject be-
come unfashionable situates For the Love of Language with respect to certain other
similarly conceived projects, without claiming them as sources. One of especial
interest is Roland Barthes’s The Pleasure of the Text, that apologia for a persistent
preference for the nineteenth-century novel which runs counter to the defence
of modernism of his own earlier Writing Degree Zero. In it, Barthes evinces a sur-
prise like Milner’s at catching himself in an attachment. Although, unlike Mil-
er, Barthes speaks specifically of pleasure and not its counterpart in Lacan’s
scheme, jouissance (there translated by Richard Howard as “bliss”), the pleasure
of Barthes’s title, like the linguist’s thrill, is that of one “obsessed” by “the let-
ter,” in contrast to the fetishist of the text, its paranoiac, its hysteric. In terms he
pronounces “could only be psychoanalytic,” the “typology” of “the readers of
pleasure” catalog among such obsessionals under the general heading of “all those
who love language (and not speech) logophiles, authors, letter writers, linguists”
(21), or again, “all the logophiles, linguists, semioticians, philologists: all those
for whom language returns” (63). What Barthes’s category calls attention to, to
the point of making it also strange and unaccounted for, is the very existence of
a love of language unshared by the population of speakers and readers at large, a
love which animated traditional grammar and, at times, even the schoolteacher,
and which apparently was still felt by Barthes, but which is so generally replaced
by boredom. Or something uglier boredom conceals, “There is no sincere bore-
dom,” Barthes comments (25). For the truth is, language as revealed by linguistics
is disturbing to certain cherished beliefs of our culture and arouses a “hatred”
of language or the “irritated regret that men are speaking” Milner invokes else-

17. The Pleasure of the Text, 63.
where.¹⁸ Milner’s text is thus a confession of a secret love for something fallen into disrepute, considered useless (and use is the supreme value) or even threatening.

Yet there remain some “for whom language returns.” Barthes’s deliberately emphasized psychoanalytic term “returns” echoes the title of perhaps the most important single text behind Milner’s: Lacan’s *Encore*. It is not simply that this seminar supplies an extended commentary on those of Lacan’s terms which play a central role in *For the Love of Language*—besides *jouissance*, the very subject of *Encore*, the notions of *lalangue* and the *pas-tout*, used so crucially by Milner and whose translations we have yet to comment on, are all elaborated in *Encore*. Nor is it the trace that an earlier text of Milner’s leaves in the transcription of the seminar for 10 April 1973 (93), there titled “The Position of the Linguist.”¹⁹ This makes not only *For the Love of Language* point to *Encore*, but to *Encore* to both *Arguments Linguistiques* and Milner himself as representative linguist.²⁰

These links between *Encore* and *For the Love of Language* are obvious enough, but stopping there would miss the most important connection and the one least apparent to the English-speaking reader. In the brief commentary Lacan makes on Milner’s presentation, he speaks of “a certain number of ways of proceeding that we owe perhaps—I am speaking of myself—to nothing but a certain distance that we were “from this rising science, when it believed that it could become just that, a science.”²¹ The subject of linguistics as a science that we recognize as Milner’s is perhaps not readily associated with Lacan’s seminars and most especially not with *Encore*, which is known in English through the excerpted translation of Juliet

---

¹⁸. J.C. Milner, *Les Noms Indistincts* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) 48. To be exact, Milner here speaks of a hatred of *lalangue*, a notion which we have yet to discuss. In Milner’s text, that hatred is introduced in the context of a discussion of English as the contemporary candidate for the ideal language. If what is new in the current notion of the ideal language, according to Milner, is the fact that it is presented as what will dispense with all language, it is symptomatic; he adds, that it should be English out of all languages which has appropriated this function, for it is the disappearing language, par excellence, whose end is marked by Joyce as by the talkies and journalese (47), here echoing Borges’s claim that it is English which is presently the most endangered language precisely because it is the most universal. Might we not also see English as the object par excellence of that hatred—not mainly on the part of the subject peoples made to speak it, Joyce included, but on the part of those who speak it natively, imposing it on others, and the English-speaking world of today, intolerant of bilingualism or history of the language, with no grammar schools or dadaists, as the purest realization of that “modern world” whose “dismal secret” Milner equates with the very hatred of language by contrast with systems of communication? Milner’s apologia is thus directed not only at the bore but at those who hate language per se, whether English or French.

¹⁹. This is the same seminar whose 19 December 1972 session is dedicated to Jakobson, then in Paris to deliver his lectures at the Collège de France.

²⁰. In the text of *Seminar* XX, Lacan introduces Milner by saying that “no one is more qualified to speak on the position of the linguist” (92).

Milner’s subject that day was a quite specific and technical comparison between two schools of linguistics—Zellig Harris’s structuralism and Noam Chomsky’s transformational grammar—with respect to the homonymous notion of transformation in both, in order to compare them as two versions of science. If today Lacan is one of those invoked to dismiss attention from such questions in the name of “poststructuralism,” the current nominalism and skepticism, which advertizes itself as the dismantling of all science and theoretical inquiry, a careful reading of *Encore* should be taken as a caution against the facile dismissal of the equation of linguistics and science. Rather, Lacan and Milner represent different workings out of a theory of science where linguistics is the science in question and where the existence of that science presents an explicit challenge to any nominalism with regard to language. If there is skepticism, it is directed toward a theory of science conceived as a preoccupation with a methodology whose assigned role is to define what any scientific research should be. Like all philosophy of science, this theory takes it as given that a distinctly scientific knowledge exists, and seeks rather to establish the criteria for identifying it and distinguishing it from non-scientific knowledge. These criteria receive their unique form, however, within a specifically French rationalist tradition. Determining the criteria for linguistics to qualify as a science is not Milner’s ultimate destination, however; he directs his analysis toward the experience at the heart of science, to what it is to arrive at the knowledge which constitutes it for the one who qualifies as a scientist by virtue of it. But to follow Milner’s itinerary, we must first try to situate ourselves at his starting point within the rationalist reading of science. In so doing, we will encounter other analogues for his project of a kind of “psychoanalysis of objective knowledge.”


24. This is not to say that the word “epistemology” does not appear in English usage with the meaning in question it has in French. “Epistemology,” as it is used by Popper in the Preface to the 1959 English edition of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York, Harper & Row, 1959), refers first of all to a general theory of knowledge or what Popper here calls “the growth of knowledge.” It is only within the context of this assumption that Popper can make the specific claim: “the growth of knowledge can be studied best by studying the growth of scientific knowledge” (15, Popper’s emphasis); in other words, the epistemologist...
philosophy of science can be taken as mutually exclusive. An empiricist epistemology is understood to overlap with psychology, aiming to account for the knowledge of individual subjects, classically rooted in sense perception; philosophy of science, as its complement, seeks to define and validate a knowledge ideally independent of the subject: "science." Within this tradition, the primary concern has been to keep these two domains separate—that is, to justify a domain of knowledge independent of the knowing subject, although dependent on observation, primarily conceived as the evidence of the senses. In this sense, philosophy of science is an attempt to solve the problem of knowledge as it is formulated by empiricism. The essential question bearing on the putative bifurcation of knowledge concerns the validation of an objective knowledge of the physical world which pretends to speak empirically. All this is well known; I have tried only to reiterate in broad outline the characteristic approach of philosophy of science—and it is as such that I refer to the British and Viennese tradition—so that what is different in the epistemology of science emerges. The differences of French epistemology of science reside, on the one hand, in a historical thesis—that marked by the notion of the break, perhaps traceable to Comte; and, on the other, in a rationalist conception of scientific knowledge as quite distinct from pre-scientific knowledge, developing a notion which itself is traceable to Pascal. Both share the conviction of the radical, indeed revolutionary, difference of scientific knowledge. This epistemology of science can be attached to certain names: Kojève, initially and not specifically linked to the sciences, Bachelard in a more idiosyncratic way, Duhem and Meyerson, Koyré, and, more recently for the human sciences, Foucault. If these names are known in the

is ideally a philosopher of science, but is not that by definition. When the words "epistemology" and "epistemologist" have that definition, they seem often to be translations from their cognates in some other language, as in Einstein's phrase "the systematic epistemologist" cited in Feyerabend, Problems of Empiricism: Philosophical Papers II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 198, n. 58, or in Feyerabend's own text. Another example occurs in the English translation of Gilles Deleuze's Cinema I: The Movement-Image: "we recall Bergson's profound desire to produce a philosophy which would be that of modern science (not in the sense of a reflection on that science, that is an epistemology)" (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 60. All these examples constitute exceptions that prove the rule. 25. Bachelard may be known to some in the English-speaking world as an epistemologist of science by way of his influence on Althusser. More typically, however, Bachelard's reputation in English is tied to his later work within "poetics," and the introduction by Northrop Frye to The Psychoanalysis of Fire in 1964, the first translation of a work of Bachelard's into English, effectively associates him with literary criticism in the mind of an English and American public. Other similar works have appeared in English since 1964—The Poetics of Space in 1969, The Poetics of Reverie in 1971, Water and Dreams in 1983—but it was not until 1985 that one of Bachelard's many works on epistemology appeared in English, The New Scientific Spirit, thus reversing the chronology of his reputation in French. (This one-sided view of Bachelard's work is not present in C. G. Christofides's original essay introducing Bachelard in English, which discusses the epistemological work as well. See "Bachelard's Aesthetics," JAAC, XX, 3, 1962.) Koyré's reputation in English is more firmly established; indeed, Koyré lectured at Johns Hopkins in the 1950s and published certain
English-speaking world, it is typically not in connection with a tradition of debate on a general theory of science; yet it is against the background of this theory that Milner’s specific claims for linguistics must be understood.

It is the particular hypotheses of Alexandre Koyré that are built upon in *For the Love of Language*. In Koyré’s epistemology, the bifurcation between scientific and non-scientific knowledge what, in philosophy of science after Popper, the so-called “demarcation criteria” are meant to characterize—takes the form of an “epistemic break”26 that is, a change which operates at the level of a set of theoretical assumptions. This break occurs for Koyré between Aristotelian and Galilean science. In his treatment of the rise of science Koyré has explicitly de-emphasized the role of observation in favour of what Lakatos has called “metaphysical” research programmes.27 It “is theory which sets the goals of observation for Koyré.

26 The notion of an epistemic break Foucault takes from Bachelard; Koyré presents his own version of the break. It is from Koyré that Foucault takes the term *episteme*, which for Koyré, according to Milner, meant “the ancient conception of science as opposed to modern science” while for Foucault “it designates the system of production of informative and meaningful statements that is characteristic of a certain discourse configuration” (‘Lacan and the Ideal of Science,” forthcoming), thus expanding it to encompass any historically characterizable unit of knowledge as part of a larger epistemological project not limited to the sciences which he calls an “archaeology” of knowledge. See also the references to the notion of an epistemological break appearing in Lacan’s *Écrits*, listed in the “classified index of major concepts” in Alan Sheridan’s translation of the *Écrits* (New York; N. W. Norton, 1977) 331. The connection made there between epistemology and the “theory of ideology” is one drawn by Sheridan, and particularly English.

27 "There has been much discussion of the role of observation and experiment, of the birth of an experimental attitude. It is certainly true that the experimental character of classical science is one of its most typical features. In fact, however, it is easy to misunderstand just what is involved here. The only role in the birth of classical physics played by observation, in the sense of simple observation, the observation of common sense, was that of an obstacle. The physics of the Parisian nominalists—even that of Aristotle—was often much more akin to such observation than was that of Galileo. As for experimentation—the methodical interrogation of nature—it presupposes both the language in which its questions are to be posed and a terminology which makes it possible to interpret nature’s replies. But if it is in a mathematical (or more precisely, geometrical) language that nature is interrogated by classical physics, then this language, or to put it more accurately, the decision to use it—a decision which corresponds to a change of metaphysical attitude—cannot itself be the product of the experiment which is conditioned by A. Koyré, *Galileo Studies*, trans. John Mepham (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978) 2. Or again: "the manner in which Galileo conceives a correct scientific method involves a predominance of reason over simple experience, the substitution of ideal models (mathematics) for an empirically known reality, the primacy of theory over facts. It is only in this way that the limits of Aristotelian empiricism could be overcome and that a true experimental method could be elaborated, a method in which mathematical theory determines the very structure of experimental research, or, to take up again Galileo’s own terms, a method which utilizes
Koyré’s “revolutionary” model of the rise of science has been given the widest circulation in English in Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. As this emphasis on the priority of theory has been translated into an Anglo-American universe of discourse, with its pragmatist assumptions, a distortion of the notion of the theoretical takes place. In Kuhn’s history of science, the theoretical is embodied in institutionalized disciplines, which substitute for independent criteria of evaluation; truth becomes “truth by consensus.” The resultant subordination of theory to external factors obscures the real originality of Koyré’s conception of the new, mathematical (geometric) language in order to formulate its questionings of nature and to interpret nature’s answers, one which, substituting the rational Universe of precision for the approximate world known empirically, adopts measurement as a fundamental, experimental principle and the most important one. It is this method which, founded on the mathematicization of nature, was conceived and developed, if not by Galileo himself, whose experimental work is practically without value, and who owes his reputation as an experimenter to the indefatigable methods of positivist historians, at least by his disciples and his successors. As a consequence, Mr. Crombie seems to me to exaggerate somewhat the experimental aspect of the science of Galileo and the closeness of its links with the achievements of experiment—in fact, Galileo is wrong every time he confines himself to experience.” *Études d’Histories de la Pensée Scientifique*, 69. Or again: “Before the advent of Galilean science, we accepted with more or less adjustment and interpretation, no doubt, the world given to our senses as the real world. With Galileo and after him, we have a rupture between the world given to the senses and the real world, that of science.” *Études d’Histories de la Pensée Scientifique*, 47.

28. Kuhn’s acknowledgement of Koyré’s influence is curiously vague. In his introduction to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, sketching the background of what he characterizes as “the historiographic revolution in the study of science,” Kuhn pronounces this new historiography “perhaps best exemplified in the writings of Alexandre Koyré” (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962) 3. But thereafter there is not a single reference to any specific claim that Koyré makes in these writings, which are not even listed for the interested reader. It is Lakatos who spells out the importance of Koyré and of the notion of epistemic breaks for the Kuhnian model of scientific change: “his [Kuhn’s] intellectual debt is to Kay” rather than to Popper. Koyré showed that positivism gives bad guidance to the historian of science, for the history of physics can only be understood in the context of a succession of metaphysical research programmes. Thus scientific changes are connected with vast cataclysmic metaphysical revolutions. Kuhn develops this message of Burtt and Koyré and the vast success of his book was partly due to his hard-hitting, direct criticism of justificationist historiography—which created a sensation among ordinary scientists and historians of science whom Burtt’s, Koyré’s (or Popper’s) message has not yet reached (Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 92, n. 3. A friend has suggested to me an interesting connection between Chomsky’s *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957) and Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Both Chomsky and Kuhn were junior Fellows at Harvard in the fifties, Kuhn just prior to Chomsky. Chomsky’s semantically meaningful counterpart of his famous example of a syntactically acceptable but nonsensical sentence, “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously,” was an entirely Kuhnian proposition, “Revolutionary new ideas appear infrequently.”
Galilean science and his challenge to an empiricist emphasis on observation; all that remains of Koyré’s history of science is the “revolutionary” model—i.e., one that proceeds by ruptures.  

On the other hand, the priority of theory does not itself suffice to distinguish science from pre-scientific thought. Any account of the supplanting of ancient and medieval science by the new science must deal with the obvious role of the empirical in the development of scientific theory. The distinctive feature of Koyré’s thesis, as the representative of a rationalist epistemology of science, lies at once in the particular formulation of the relative contributions of the theoretical and the empirical and in the conception of the empirical itself. These converge in Koyré’s conception of “Galilean” or modern science, which is of crucial relevance to Milner’s epistemology of linguistics.

The mathematization of the real

For there to be science—i.e., Galilean science—in Koyré’s account, theory must bring about the formalization or mathematicization of the empirical. That is, science is defined by the conjunction of two factors: the empirical and the mathematical—i.e., a mathematical writing. “Indeed,” Milner comments, “Koyré” always insisted on the radical novelty of the fact that mathematics could be connected with empiricity rather than eternity,” with the contingent rather than the necessary. The form of this conjunction is expressed in the proposition “the empirical is mathematicized.”

The past participle “mathematicized” suggests an achievement of the history of science. But there is not just an historically occurring mathematicization of the empirical, as an imposition of form on matter. Koyré’s claim, as Milner reads it, also involves the assumption of a prior condition permitting this mathematicization: the empirical is discovered to be “mathematicallyizable”—representable in a formal writing—where the adjective “mathematicallyizable” designates a quality inherent in the empirical. Milner’s formulation is the following: “It is not its writing which establishes the One by convention, but on the contrary it is the latter which makes this writing possible” (91-2). The operation of formally representing the empirical is thus not possible in any domain, but only where an empirical reality has properties

29. It is thus perhaps via a Hopkins connection that Koyré’s notion of radical breaks in thought has through Kuhn reappeared in a vulgar and popularized form in literary studies as the theory of competing institutionally determined ideologies. See, for instance, Stanley Fish’s *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). Kuhn’s own version of the revolutionary model is toned down or flattened by having the divisions between paradigms filled in by what Kuhn calls “normal science.” See the debate between Kuhn, Popper, and others, on the subject of normal science in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge.*

subject to formalization, and scientific discovery is the matching of an empiricity and a mathematical formula, of extracting, abstracting, the mathematical from the empirical. The mathematical writing is never thought to impose a form on a formless portion of the real; theory becomes a tool for representing a regularity, a law of the physical world. It is precisely in the discovery of a portion of empirical reality fitting the mathematical writing that, as we shall see, the experience of science lies.

**The encounter with the real**

The empirical for Koyré, however, coincides in no simple way with raw experience, common sense observation, or sense data. What, then, constitutes the empirical for him? Milner’s answer is the following: Koyré never defined explicitly what he meant by the empirical, but it is plausible to define that notion in the following way:

> In order to be considered as empirical, a statement should meet two conditions: (1) the state of things it refers to should be directly or indirectly representable in space and time; (2) it should be possible to think of the state of things it refers to as different from what it is.  

It is the second condition—the possibility of imagining the state of affairs referred to by an empirical statement as different from what it is—which permits the most characteristically rationalist definition of the empirical, placing it under the sign of the contingent. "In the philosophical tradition," Milner comments, "condition (2) has something to do with contingence and also with synthetic vs analytic." Condition (2) formulates a philosophical notion that has had a special and persistent role in French thought, under various incarnations and names, from Pascal to Lacan. In *For the Love of Language*, Milner connects it with Saussure’s notion of arbitrariness, attributing the term “contingence” to Lacan and “chance” to Mallarmé. Milner’s vocabulary supplies another term: a “meeting” or “encounter.” These words, as verb or noun, recur again and again in *For the Love of Language*; as verb its characteristic object is that key term we have yet to comment on: the real. It is in Lacan that the real receives this explicit formulation in terms of the chance encounter. There the concept is developed by contrast with the other two terms of a triad—the imaginary and the symbolic—as well as in contradistinction to the notion “reality.” Of the three terms of Lacan’s triad, the notion of the real has received little attention in the Anglo-American context, with as a result a concomitant shifting of the other two terms toward the same nominalism that marks Kuhn’s misreading of Koyré.

33. For a discussion of the real, see the entry under "IMAGINARY, SYMBOLIC, REAL" in the glossary provided in the “Translator’s Note” to the Sheridan translation of the *Écrits*, x.
the real; this is the force of Lacan’s formula that “the Real always returns to its place.”

Central to Lacan’s elaboration of the Real, set forth at length in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* is that of “the encounter with the Real,” a phrase Lacan himself emphasizes. The context in which the notion is there introduced can guide us in understanding and assessing its import and correct the already observed tendency to push Lacan toward either nominalism or idealism. Lacan opens the fifth session of 12 February 1964 by denying explicitly that psychoanalysis, contrary to a common assumption, can be taken “to lead in the direction of idealism.” The basis of that denial is, moreover, a consideration of “the experience of psycho-analysis.” It is in the context of this denial that the term “real” is introduced: “No praxis is more oriented towards that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the real than psycho-analysis” (53).

It is, then, in this context of a question raised about the epistemological status of psychoanalysis as both a theory and a practice that Lacan links the real to the chance encounter, to “something that occurs […] as if by chance” (54, Lacan’s emphasis). This encounter, as one “to which we are always called,” is not conjured up by the subject but enters from beyond, from outside what is governed by the imaginary, by a representation, something which confronts the subject. In this sense the real is by definition only encountered, and by virtue of this fact receives its characteristic structure. As in Proust, the sign of the realness of the real lies in its involuntary nature. It is what is not sought after, the unexpected, predictable only after the fact. Moreover, the real is always some particular encounter, a particular real—in Lacan’s use the substantive “real” can appear not just with the definite article, but with demonstratives and indefinite articles as well. “Perhaps the demonstrative or indefinite article more appropriately qualifies the term “real” contra the rules of grammar than the definite article; the real is essentially not generic but particular. A real is a particular, in Russell’s sense.

Milner goes on to equate what is encountered or met with what is given. Here, in this term, the empirical as data, the “given,” seems to meet the empirical as chance encounter. But the difference between a formulation of the data in terms of what could be imagined as other than it is and the empiricist notion of the data as para-

35 See Session 5, “Tuchè and Automaton.” Lacan comments on it as follows: “First, the tuchè, which we have borrowed, as I told you last time, from Aristotle, who uses it in his search for cause. We have translated it as the encounter with the real. The real is beyond the automaton, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies beyond the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud’s research, that it is this that is the object of his concern” (53-4).
36 It is thus that I render the French rencontre in order to stress the randomness of the meeting.
digamatically what is given to observation, understood as sense observation, should not be obscured. The first cannot be reduced to the second; indeed, the definition of the empirical Milner proposes for Koyré’s epistemology is carefully formulated so as to avoid the problem of knowledge so typically at the center of empiricist epistemology and its counterpart in the philosophy of science, the problem of the validation of a scientific knowledge.37 This is achieved by understanding the given as simply the way things are, with no concern either with how they came to be that way, or with how it can be guaranteed that they are indeed that way. The given thus stands for the set of initial assumptions any science begins with, the things it "takes as given" and in that sense does not have to establish are given. These are what Chomsky in Aspects (25ff) refers to as "the primary linguistic data" (see note 48 for reference). The given is encountered by chance in that it is the way it is not out of any necessity.

Without being in every instance separate—for sense-data is a special case of data, if not the only case of it—the empiricalness of the given is by Milner’s definition separable from the sensibly observed in a number of ways. Milner provides a crucial example from linguistics: the case of the grammatical categories. Structural linguistics has assumed that its units must be justified preliminary to their being used in the theory, while transformational grammar proceeds as if they are given (89-90)—i.e., it takes them as part of its primary linguistic data. Now if the paradigm case of the grammatical unit is the phoneme, it might plausibly be treated as a sense-datum, though structuralist phonology encountered notorious problems with this assumption, certainly recalling empiricism’s attempts to deal with what Russell called “the gap between the world of physics and the world of sense.” But if we take rather the syntactic units-noun, noun phrase, sentence, and so on—as paradigmatic of what Milner means by the given, their givenness is in no obvious way a matter of being given to the senses. They may never be observed, unless observation is extended to include the mental. If we thus approach the general question of the units from the direction of syntax as opposed to phonology, we can now see how Saussure’s classic difficulty with the units—with the necessary segmentation of phonology—clearly turns on the division between the sensibly perceived and the given. Speakers cannot strictly speaking perceive the units via the senses—i.e. instruments cannot record breaks between: all units which speakers nonetheless perceive in the sense of encountering them in their knowledge of the language.38

That defining the empirical as the contingent is meant to “Permit the science of linguistics to skirt the whole problem of knowledge centered on sense-perception on the analogy with physics can be surmised from Milner’s account of arbitrariness

37. One can also see Popper’s notion of falsifiability as formulated to avoid the same problem.

38. Each time a rule predicting a wide range of data in the form of acceptable and non-acceptable strings by generating the former and excluding the latter requires the category “noun phrase,” for instance, to achieve the most elegant statement of the regularity it means to represent, the category receives yet another justification. See Saussure, Course, 38.
in Saussure, for he claims that "the arbitrary aims at uprooting linguistics from the verisimilitude of sense impressions," adding: "One should recall here Koyré’s theses on Galilean physics" (95, n. 5). Arbitrariness is then asserted only to name "the encounter—what Lacan better names contingence, and also what Mallarmé names Chance" (87).

The element of chance in the encounter with the given has negative dimensions as well, which Lacan characterizes as "the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter." Here the non-coincidence of the data with the observed is again apparent, since what is given cannot be observed: At this point, the rationalist definition of the empirical Milner supplies for Koyré can be brought into line with logical empiricism’s most celebrated formulation of the demarcation criterion, Popper’s notion of falsifiability, which Milner calls “but an application of condition (2)” specifying that it must be possible to imagine the state of affairs referred to by an empirical statement as different from what it is. But for the falsifiability of the claim made in a scientific proposition to be equated with this formulation of the empirical, falsifiability—a formal condition which the state of affairs referred to by a proposition must meet—cannot be understood to entail falsification, a process which a falsifiable proposition may or may not actually undergo. In this sense, falsifiability, like contingency, is a logical property of some statements and not others, independent of their career in the history of science. It is this property, in part, which sets them off from non-empirical statements.

In other words, a rationalist epistemology of science is not concerned with validity, with setting up guarantees of certitude or even semi-certitude in the area of scientific knowledge; it is concerned only with identifying empirical statements and distinguishing them from those which are not. If the empirical is simply the given, what is encountered by chance, then no methodology can guarantee its discovery ahead of time; it is a particular theory and not methodology which retrospectively reveals the crucial data, those that furnish evidence, those which are susceptible to formalization: “it is the result which permits the reorganization and the rethinking of the past. It is the solution, once found, that reflects its light upon the data.” This applies specifically to the methodological procedures by which the crucial data is found. It is well known that structural linguistics, especially in its American form, heavily influenced by empiricism and behaviorism, conceived of its methodology almost exclusively in terms of the isolation of the data, of “discovery procedures.” These procedures, moreover, were focused on the problem of determining the units of the language: attempting to deduce phonemic structural form, the minimal pair

41. It is in this way that I take Lakatos’s claim that theories may contain falsified propositions, for it is theories that must be falsifiable, not empirical claims.
test is the obvious case of such a procedure in phonology. Chomsky’s rejection of not simply the necessity but the possibility of discovery procedures is hence in keeping with a rationalist epistemology of science.

The negative side of the encounter with the real can be understood in several ways. It can mean that non-observed or even impossible states of affairs can constitute evidence—a kind of negative thought experiment. We recall the first of Milnor’s conditions for a statement to be empirical: direct or indirect representability in time and space. It should be noted that the state of things referred to need not actually occur in time and space; it must only be so representable. Thus, in Milnor’s epistemology, the generative grammarian’s attention to syntax and its evidence in the form of native speakers’ judgments presents no problem in meeting Milnor’s conditions for empiricalness and the charge of “mentalism” levelled by structuralists and behaviorists at such evidence is deprived of its validity; this mentalism is not unempirical.

The speaker’s judgments are akin to sense-data in their subjectivity. The history of physical science has dealt with this subjective data by externalizing it as much as possible from the observer, thereby rendering it impersonal, if subjective; such is the function of the scientific instrument, as well as of rigorous measurement. The image on the lens of the telescope remains subjective in that it exists in subjective time and space—i.e., it is tied to a single perspective—but it is objectivized by not being dependent on a single observer. Such also is the function of the repeated experiment under ideal conditions. In the case of linguistic evidence, the consulting of speakers’ judgments is a kind of experiment; the utterance is externalized from one particular speaker and made accessible to the judgment of others. More important, as in physical science, it is the theory which disconnects the evidence from the observer. Consider those cases Chomsky discusses where speakers disagree or are undecided as to the grammatical status of a string of formatives in some language; in such cases, Chomsky argues, the theory must decide—i.e., in favor of the decision which favors the most elegant and least ad hoc solution, all other things being equal.

The negative side of the empirical as missed encounter can also be that possible state of affairs that does not obtain but if it did would falsify the empirical claim which asserts its contrary. Not only what turns out “to be the case” but also whatever “is not the case,” to echo the opening of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* what is not determined by any logical necessity, could thus always be the contrary of the scientist’s claim. Not that science is a game of chance, but insofar as the laws of the uni-

---

verse are not legislated by the scientist—indeed, are not legislated at all—science's claims are of the nature of intelligent guesses, as Pascal was aware.⁴⁵

But the missed encounter can also refer to the situation in which the scientist does not encounter a real at all, or not one which can be represented by a general law, the case in which there is no breakthrough and which makes scientific research no guarantee of results.

For if the real which science has to do with is recognizable in its quality of being either simply given, simply there, or not, formalizable or not, for whoever is so lucky to come upon it, it does not necessarily yield itself to methodic research but rather makes itself known as what is beyond the control of the scientist's wishes or expectations, then it is no wonder it takes on the features of a love. Each science encounters a real whose features in no way resemble those which are the object of another science, giving rise to formal representations peculiar to it, defining the issues of the science in a way that could not have been predicted by any general methodology.⁴⁶ Not, of course, Barthes's notion of "the impossible science of the unique being,"⁴⁷ for science, the possible sort, aims at the universal, formulating the laws which predict what is regular, rule-governed, but with this qualification. The features of the real each science encounters may turn out not to be generalizable beyond the domain defined by that real, even when it interacts with the real of another science. Hence the incommunicability of the experience of the encounter in which the real permits representation.

It is at this point that the characteristic formulations of a rationalist epistemology of science join with a familiar theme of French literature. It appears perhaps first in Pascal, post-Galilean mathematician, bearing witness to a common preoccupation of French science and literature. Milner, as we saw, invokes Mallarmé's

---

⁴⁶. As an example, take the way certain issues peculiar to syntactic theory are defined in a recent book by Joseph Emonds: "In contrast, the grammatical formative category that characteristically appears with N, namely DET (determiner), is a daughter, not a sister to NP, and similarly for the grammatical category of DEC (degree words) that appears with A. Within the bar notation, this asymmetry follows from my proposal that Y, but not N, A, or P, has a third projection in the bar notation. For in the bar notation, each lexical category X is paired with a corresponding grammatical formative category SP(X), called a specifier, which is a daughter to the maximal projection of X. If S = V, then we can take INFLECTION to be the specifier of Y, and it follows that it is the sister to YP (= V'), while SP(N) and SP(A) are daughters to NP and AP.” A Unified Theory of Syntactic Categories (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1985) 5. The specificity of these claims to a science whose object is language is in no way incompatible with traditional grammar, from which the notion of the grammatical categories in question is inherited. Nor should the formal language of the selection be confused by the reader unfamiliar with the real content of linguistics with jargon. For a version of the analogizing which does not observe the autonomy of each science, see Milner’s account of Jakobson on Japanese metrics cited in this Introduction (112).
chance. But it is in Proust especially that a literary search and a scientific research are both seen as dependent on a prior chance encounter with a real that imposes itself with the same arbitrariness as the object of desire, never deliberately chosen, never replaceable by another so long as it imposes itself. Such are the features of the reminiscences Proust seeks to decipher, “those [truths] which life communicates to us against our will,” the real as the involuntary:

they composed a magical scrawl, complex and elaborately flourished, their essential character was that I was not free to choose them, that such as they were they were given to me. And I realized that this must be the mark of their authenticity. I had not gone in search of the two uneven paving-stones of the court-yard upon which I had stumbled. But it was precisely the fortuitous and inevitable fashion in which this and the other sensations had been encountered that proved the trueness of the past which they brought back to life, of the images which they released, since we feel, with these sensations, the effort that they make to climb towards the light, feel in ourselves the joy of rediscovering what is real.  

Linguistics’ encounter with the real of language

It is both a strong claim and a central theme of For the Love of Language that linguistics, too, has come up against a real, one in language, and has found a way to formalize it. That real is identified at the start: it is the fact that not everything can be said, what Milner calls the “impossible” in language. It sets a limit to language, differentiating the grammatical from the agrammatical.

Moreover, that real is in no. way created or legislated by the grammarian; like the truths which Proust stumbles against, it imposes itself on speakers against their

48. Marcel Proust, The Past Recaptured, trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1971) 139. For the interested reader, the word here translated as “magical scrawl” appears in Proust’s original as the French word grimoire (see A La Recherche du Temps Perdu, Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 879), a word which appears as well on several occasions in Milner’s text. There is no single English word which implies, as grimoire does, something at once written and the repository of an abstruse knowledge. In translating it, I use on one occasion a line from Poe, on the author's suggestion. The word grimoire is etymologically related to the word grammar.

49. In generative grammar, the distinction between the acceptable and the non-acceptable divides the evidence provided by speakers’ judgments; the division between the grammatical and the non-grammatical holds at the level of grammatical theory. “Acceptability is a concept that belongs to the study of performance, whereas grammaticality belongs to the study of competence.” Noam Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965) 11. The rules predict those sentences which are grammatical and exclude those which are not; by and large, those sentences generated by the grammar correspond with those judged acceptable, but there are exceptions. See Carlos-Peregrin Otero, “Acceptable Ungrammatical [utterances] in Spanish,” Linguistic Inquiry 3 (1972): 233-42, and “Agrammaticality in Performance,” Linguistic Inquiry 4 (1973): 551-62.
Indeed, the notion of the impossible is linked paradoxically to that of the real. The real is the state of affairs that can be imagined as other than it is because there is no reason why it is the way it is. But it is not other than it is. In this sense, it is impossible for it to be otherwise and continue to be itself. There may be a possible world in which things could have turned out to be different, but once one is in one possible world, its nature is not to be other than it is. This inability of a given world, a given state of affairs, to be other than it is, is what Milner, following Lacan, means by the impossible.

That impossibility, insofar as it defines a contingent state of affairs, is at one and the same time epistemic and deontic; in other words, it is both the case that not everything can be said and that there is a prohibition against saying just anything. In linguistics, these two interpretations of the impossible in language are in general counterposed; one is descriptive and the other normative, and a grammatical theory is assumed to treat its rules as either one or the other but not both. Milner, however, argues that what is impossible in language is also forbidden. The analogy he draws is with the incest taboo, which he characterizes likewise as an impossible which is also a prohibition (105–6). What he means by this is made clearer by his discussion of the notion of a grammatical rule in an article published in the *Encyclopédie Universals* as “Grammaire.” In it he writes, “the grammatical judgment appears to have the form of a value judgment. This is connected to the fact that the impossible of language is in no way a material impossible: a sentence considered teratological by all the speakers of a given language can always, despite this, be produced, even if only in jest. Similarly, speaking subjects can produce every type of form, including those called defective, without running any physical risk” (746). In other words, the impossible in language, as in the incest taboo, is no physical impossibility, and yet it nonetheless exists in language. Its effect is not to prevent grammatical sentences from being produced but to mark them as agrammatical, to distinguish between the correct and the incorrect. “In that sense,” Milner observes, “if one agrees to consider all distinctions a norm, then all grammar is normative” (747). The peculiar nature of the impossible in language, of its laws and rules, is thus a function of its being non-physical.

For the real of language exists in language and not in the world or even in the relation of language to the world. It is in “the dimension of the purely grammatical,” as Foucault has called it, that linguistics locates its real. This, we shall see shortly, identifies a crucial step in the isolation of the real of language for the history of linguistics. For Milner, it has another consequence as well. With linguistics, the empirical need no longer coincide with the physical: “the agency of the One thus takes on a new form—from time immemorial, philosophy had recognized it

---

in nature...With grammar, and its intersection with science—linguistics—the One appears not only outside of nature, but in the very thing one would have wished to define by this externality. Galileo’s small letters are revealed as capable of spelling out something other than the \textit{phasis}" (93).

For Milner the existence of linguistics thus precludes the equation of empiricalness with the physical world, and science must now admit what has been classically defined by opposition to the physical and has always stood for the unreal. In view of early generative grammar’s response to a behaviouristically oriented structural linguistics’ charges of ”mentalism,” it might seem that Milner’s position is a natural consequence of his generative persuasion. One recalls Chomsky’s invocation of Newton’s uneasiness with gravity as an “occult force” as a defence of abstract levels like deep structure. Milner, like Chomsky, is defending the reality of theoretical constructs with no obvious basis in the physical, whether as biology or behaviour. But more recently some generative linguists have attributed to the speaker’s ”internalized grammar” a biological reality; it is thus to defend the notion of a real which is not ultimately recuperable by the physical that Milner makes this explicit point. What, then, is at stake in this debate?

The entire argument of \textit{For the Love of Language} is meant to align its author with the realists as opposed to the idealists and nominalists on language. That realism, Milner argues, follows from the epistemology of linguistics, and particularly generative linguistics as the science in question. But Milner makes clear that his philosophical realism in no way entails physicalism.

Milner’s position in \textit{For the Love of Language} can be glossed by some brief objections he voiced in another context to the biologism as a form of physicalism espoused by certain-generative linguists.\textsuperscript{51} The thrust of Milner’s argument there is to disconnect the assertion that linguistic theory seeks adequately to represent a reality which exists in language, and hence that its claims are falsifiable, from the further assertions that this reality is (a) psychological and (b) that a psychological reality is a biological state of a mental organ. This disconnection, Milner further argues, actually holds at the level of practice for those who identify themselves as generative linguists, who recognize as possibly falsifying evidence only linguistic evidence as opposed to evidence which is psychological or biological—i.e., non-linguistic.

The issue comes down to Milner’s denial that a specific substance must be attributed to what is real. The examples he invokes to demonstrate the non-triviality of the attribution of substance to the real are suggestive. The first is the notion of gravity within Newtonian physics, which we saw Chomsky himself has invoked in the context of a similar debate. As Milner points out in a way familiar within Koyré’s epistemology of science, the various positions maintained on the question of the substance of gravity, sometimes by the same individual, in no way prevented success in scientific work on the notion. Milner also invokes Saussure’s example of the identity of the 8:45 Geneva Paris Express, commenting that Saussurean linguis-

tics entertained somewhat sophisticated conceptions of substance. But the example he returns to several times concerns the substance of the incest prohibition. Here it would be rash to conclude that Milner’s point is only to connect the real with the structure of the social. The example is meant to invoke Freud, and it is for psychoanalysis that Milner wishes to clear a space for a nonphysical real, one which also in some sense is counterposed to the physical as its “other.” In so doing, he provides a basis for accepting Lacan’s assertion that psychoanalysis is a realism and not an idealism without going so far as Freud to claim it as a science. Desire, then, Freud is understood to argue, is real, but not a real out there in the world; the hysteric is not deluded, but has really though unconsciously desired.\footnote{Accepting this position of Freud’s is not incompatible with holding that in some cases of hysteria a real seduction may have taken place or even that the real desire in question might be that of someone other than the hysteric—the writer of the case history, for instance. But it should be clear that in Freud’s theory, desire is not imagined, but only something else that masks this desire.}

But in insisting on the non-physical nature of the real of language, Milner is not to be understood as identifying linguistics as a humanism. For to claim that linguistics has encountered a real which is formalizable is tantamount to claiming that it is a science in Koyré’s sense. The strength of this claim lies in the fact that Milner makes it only of linguistics among the so-called “human” sciences (78); it does not extend to the others which, according to Milner, “have typically to do with realities the constraint of which is properly speaking a \textit{parody} of the impossible” (78). Milner’s position is thus situated elsewhere than either with the optimistic and extravagant projects of a structuralist poetics or semiotics to construct a science of literature on the model of linguistics, or with the more recent attempts to “deconstruct” all linguistic theory along with literary theory; linguistics and only linguistics outside the physical sciences can lay claim to being a science. The reason this is so is not explicable in terms of any linguistic methodology, however; it is, Milner insists, attributable only to linguistics’ having encountered a real in language susceptible to formalization. If this is indeed the case, what consequence does the existence and nature of linguistics as a science have for all those who are concerned with language, both linguists and non-linguists?

Grammar’s Totality vs Linguistics’ All

Linguistics is not alone in encountering the real in language, but it is alone—so Milner claims—in making from the encounter a science. From the opening pages of \textit{For the Love of Language}, Milner places linguistics alongside other attempts to deal with this real, and the task of defining linguistics as a science is the task of differentiating it from these other loves of language. Foremost among these other approaches to language and the closest to linguistics is grammar. The contrast with grammar is elaborated in part epistemologically and in part historically, parallel to Koyré’s treatment of pre-Galilean physics and astronomy in an epistemology of
science. Milner treats grammar with the familiarity and respect both of the intellectual tradition which still includes an Académie Française and of that in general evinced by transformational grammar. It is necessary to call attention to this, because in the English-speaking world, where there exists a hatred of language as such, grammar as a discipline has essentially disappeared.  

To follow Milner’s argument, one must have a sense of what he means by grammar. An encounter with the real separates out both grammar and linguistics from what Milner characterizes as “the various hermeneutic disciplines” (91). From the further decisive meeting of the empirical with the mathematical dates the separation of linguistics from all arts of language, and from it follows all the other differences between grammar and linguistics. The limit between the acceptable and the non-acceptable in the speaker’s knowledge of language is discovered to be formally representable as the division between the grammatical and the agrammatical; a limit encountered in the real is embodied in a Gallilean writing, and science, in Koyré’s sense, is constituted.

The operation by which the formalizable is seized, which is the very experience of science itself, is in Milner’s account one of extracting and representing the regularities in the real. This set of regularities Milner calls, after Lacan, a *tout*, that universal quantifier which in French is translatable as either “all” or “everything” or as “whole.” The process of extraction is simultaneously one of exclusion, for not everything in language is formally representable. The all is hence defined by contrast with the not-all or everything real which escapes formalization. The initial gesture of science involves then a renunciation—what cannot be represented by a formal writing is set aside, for there is no necessity by which all can be mathematized. Such wilful ignorance is already in Descartes’ project, but it awaits Kant to be made programmatic.  

This is classically conceived in structuralist linguistics as the isolation of the object of study. Milner makes clear what is involved. The object of linguistics is that grammaticality which is defined by its limits: the existence of the agrammatical. Linguistics operates on the assumption that this grammaticality is...
and its limits can be predicted by formal rules; any features not so representable it will ignore.

Linguistics has given various names both to its object and to what is excluded from it, to the all and the not-all. The English-speaking reader is likely to be familiar with Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*. While it would be a mistake to equate these notions with Chomsky’s notions of competence and performance, whose content is different, at the level of their epistemological function they are comparable. Both pairs alike serve to name the object of study so as to indicate that it is not all-inclusive. *Langue* and competence then stand for what is formally representable, parole and performance for what is not. Hence the grab-bag aspect of the latter two notions—e.g., the typical list of performance errors (see 89 of *For the Love of Language*).

Milner operates with another distinction which we will eventually see is threefold, beginning with a Saussurean opposition less well known to the English speaker, that between *langue* and *langage*. The unfamiliarity of the distinction may be due to the problem of translating it; unlike *langue* and *parole*, these two separate items, rendered into English, become indistinguishable. I have translated them by the distinction between "language with a small l" and "Language with a capital L." It is "language" which names the object of linguistics; the concept represented by "Language" belongs to the tradition of non-linguistic, of even non-grammatical speculation on language, to philosophical grammars, philosophies of Language and treatises on the origin of Language. Its object does not presumably represent a real. One might reasonably associate Language with what Foucault describes as "language [...] defined as discourse," with "no other history than that of its representations" and language with what has "the dimensions of the purely grammatical."57

In Milner’s account, the purely grammatical is already acknowledged in traditional grammar, as opposed to philosophical grammar; but grammar, which is concerned with the rule-governed, does not represent these rules formally. The formal notation is not just a convention, however; its adoption by linguistics alters the conception of grammar’s and linguistics’ common object, language. The notion of the all linguistics attributes to language is distinct in Milner’s account from the unity of language grammar reconstructs. In this he depends upon Lacan’s distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic (75), which also allows Milner to identify two different ways of representing the unity formed within the real of language. Grammar’s conception of that unity he gives the name "totality" (75). The meaning he assigns that term derives from the features Lacan associates with the imaginary. Structured by the look, the unity of a totality might be likened to a Gestalt: it is

56. For the interested reader, there is only one place in the text where I have not capitalized the translation of langage, and that is in metalanguage. The language of the title and of Chapter 7 is with a small l.
seized all at once, "at a glance"; it is perceivable as a whole. This is what Milner means by saying that grammar constructs an "image" of language. Moreover, that totalized unity can allow nothing to escape it; there is nothing outside the fatality—everything must be completely represented in a grammar. There is no non-totality, as there is a not-all.

The all of linguistics is no imaginary totality. It can be represented only by deliberately ignoring what cannot be formalized. Hence the fragmentary nature of linguistics' account of language, which in no way contradicts the constraints imposed on its theoretical statements—that they account for all and only the sentences of the language. This conception of the whole is indeed contained in the very notion of a symbolic writing. A mathematical writing does not construct an image on a visual or perceptual model; it sets down structures and operations sequentially, accounting only for what can be captured in this writing. The nature of the knowledge thus represented is radically different. No longer presided over by the look, its unit is not containable in a single act of consciousness and hence traceable to an ego, an I; it is not graspable all at once but must be set down in the objective form of a mathematical formula.

The epistemic break in the history of linguistics

The step separating grammar from linguistics is an historical one as well, and Milner’s epistemology of linguistics recounts that history à la Koyré, locating an “epistemic break” separating prescientific thought from science. For Koyré, the rise of science is tied to the mathematicization of the empirical as an event in intellectual history. Just as science for Koyré is “Galilean science” (68)—that is, mathematical or Archimedean physics—and pre-science is Aristotelian or Euclidean physics, either ancient or medieval—or, as the moment of the historical break is approached, one of the various hermeticist or alchemical predecessors of science, its Giordano Bruno as opposed to its Galileo—so linguistics too has its counterparts of science and pre-science, developed, however, in the terms peculiar to its object.

For Milner, the decisive moment marking the break between grammar and linguistics is located in the rise of the comparative grammar of the Indo-European languages. In this, Milner is in agreement with Foucault, both providing an important corrective to the view current outside linguistics that linguistic science begins with Saussurean structuralism (82-3). 58 But while Foucault sees the crucial change in the shift from language as a system of representations 59 to language as an object,
as the purely grammatical, Milner credits traditional grammar, as opposed to the philosophical grammars Foucault treats, with an encounter with the purely grammatical, and sees the crucial departure for comparative grammar in its construction of a formal writing, even if a not fully developed one (94).

The history of this new science after its inception in comparative grammar is understood by Milner in terms of two competing versions of science—two "ideal sciences" both bespeaking a shared "ideal of science" which makes it legitimate to speak in the singular of the science of linguistics. Milner’s account of that history, like any history of science, begins with the recognition of a fact: the former dominance of structuralism and its displacement by generative grammar (81). These two versions of science are identified with partial reference to Koyré, as Aristotelian science, essentially Euclidean, for structuralism, and Galilean or Archimedean Science, for transformational grammar. In this history, Saussure occupies a place quite other than the one that structuralism as a general project of the human sciences assigned him. In a history of linguistics which begins with comparative grammar, structuralism becomes a throwback to an earlier position. Such is also the case in Foucault’s account of linguistics in the nineteenth century, but with an important difference. For Foucault, Saussure’s "backwardness" is bound to his theory of the sign: "It was also necessary that Saussure, rediscovering the project of a general semiology, should have given the sign a definition that could seem psychologistic (the linking of a concept and an image): this is because he was in fact rediscovering the classical condition for conceiving of the binary nature of the sign” (The Order of Things, 67). According to Foucault, in the wake of the radical break comparative grammar represented, Saussure had to by-pass this moment in the history of the spoken word, which was a major event for the whole of nineteenth-century philology, in order to restore, beyond its historical forms, the dimension of language in general, and to reopen, after such neglect, the old problem of the sign, which had continued to animate the whole of thought from Port-Royal to the last of the Ideologues (286). For Milner, however, Saussure did not provide a theory of the sign at all, neither a classical one nor a new one. Milner treats Saussure not as the originator of a new science but as himself a kind of epistemologist of linguistics, commenting on a pre-existent practice: “for him, linguistics already existed, namely comparative grammar” (82); “the object of Saussurean theory is linguistics itself”

significative value, in its formal consistence, is not itself an isolated syllable, like constant root; it is a system of modifications of which the various segments are interdependent:

"Until the end of the eighteenth century, this new analysis has its place in the search for the representative [representational] values of language. It is still a question of discourse. But already, through the inflectional system, the dimension of the purely grammatical is appearing: language no longer consists only of representations and of sounds that in turn represent the representations and are ordered among them as the links of thought require; it consists also of formal elements, grouped into a system, which impose upon the sounds, syllables, and roots an organization that is not that of representation." The Order of Things, 235.
(86). Saussure’s *Course* is thus an attempt to formulate the practising linguist’s assumptions in Kantian terms, as the neo-grammarians had done before him.

In the comparison between two models of a science of linguistics, it is the so-called Saussurean theory of the sign that Milner dismantles, what for so many who are outside linguistics constitutes the science of linguistics to the point that linguistics is taken as synonymous with the theory of the sign. Here Milner’s logical economy, measuring the Saussurean epistemology of linguistics against another newer but now existing linguistics—transformational grammar—applies Occam’s razor explicitly as Chomskyan theory had done in effect to Saussure’s putative theory of the sign, exposing in the process the minimal core of a linguistic theory and paring away what is unnecessary. It is the sign itself that is eliminated, its properties now redistributed in generative grammar to other points of the theory.

So contrary to the current orthodoxy outside linguistics is this attack on the sign, and such is the ignorance as to what linguistics is really about that one anonymous reviewer of *For the Love of Language* for an American university press could assert, out of total incomprehension, that Milner had added nothing new to the theory of the sign. Moreover, in the properties assigned the Saussurean sign, Milner finds a significance that runs counter to the facile slogans the general movement called “structuralism” took from Saussure. This is most apparent with respect to the arbitrariness of the sign, which Milner connects to a number of linguistics’ initial assumptions rendering possible the isolation of language as such. The arbitrariness of the sign marks the relation between language and the world (reference), between sound and meaning, as simply a chance encounter. Whatever regularities exist in language (and it is the rule-governed that linguistics is interested in), the account of them cannot go beyond the givens of this encounter, cannot seek for causes to explain why these regularities have the form they do. Thus, in Chomsky, “explanatory adequacy” is never conceived of in terms of explanatory causes located beyond the grammar, ones invoking meaning, for example, or function or language use (see *Aspects*, 30-7). Rather, explanatory adequacy consists only in providing “a principled basis for selecting a descriptively adequate grammar on the basis of primary linguistic data by the use of a well-defined evaluation measure” (*Aspects*, 34), in other words, “a way of evaluating alternative proposed grammars” (*Aspects*, 31). The only further stipulation that Chomsky makes is that there must be a way of guaranteeing that the most highly valued grammar is sufficiently rich in structure so as to restrict the range of possible hypotheses. Explanatory adequacy thus spells out an epistemological position which assumes the limits of linguistics and the principled decision not to know.

The notion of arbitrariness says nothing about the existence or non-existence of the real.60 It says only that there are two orders—that of language and that of the

60. In Chomsky, one version of arbitrariness is the autonomy of syntax, presented in *Syntactic Structures*. This is what Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson call the "sui generis" nature of linguistic structure, with a reference to *Syntactic Structures*. See Dan Sperber
world—and that the real in language—the grammatical and the agrammatical—is in no way caused by and explicable in terms of any reality outside language (87). Hence, the assertion of the arbitrariness of the sign indicates what it is that linguistics can have nothing to say about: why language is the way it is. It is only the given form of language’s existence—one out of a set of possible forms—which is its object; herein lies the nature of its empiricalness. Milner’s interpretation of arbitrariness also explicitly rules out conventionalism (n. 11, 96), and, a fortiori, the whole project of a semiology whereby the form of language is made to follow from a system of conventions and their functions. The same can be said of any functionalist explanation which goes beyond language to any social purposes it may have—for instance, a communications model of language.

Linguistics’ relation to lalangue, the not-all of language

The very possibility of a linguistic science is dependent, then, on this initial gesture by which linguists set aside certain questions as irrelevant to their concerns and represent their object within well-defined limits and subject to well-defined constraints. That object, then, the language of linguistics, is not synonymous with the totalized image of language constructed by grammar or with the Language of philosophy. Its unity, as we have seen, is a fragmentary one, gained by renouncing the goal of representing all; it thereby acknowledges that there is something which escapes it. For the members of Milner’s pair language/Language situate themselves not just with respect to one another but with respect to a third term, one coined by Lacan, and which I do not translate: lalangue.61

Once more, this term is defined by contrast with the other terms it co-occurs with. Lalangue is the name of the real in language; it is thus what escapes linguistic theory: the not-all. Indeed, the series the real, the not-all, and lalangue each occur in a triad; and, returning to the distinctions (25-7), one can identify a correspondence between Lacan’s imaginary, symbolic and real and Milner’s particularization of this triad for language which puts together Saussure and Lacan: Language with a capital L corresponds to the imaginary representation; language with a small l to the symbolic representation, and lalangue to the real. The imaginary Language constitutes a totality; the symbolic language an all or whole, and lalangue the not-all. It is in this sense that the imaginary totality can be said to mask the real, to convert it into something seemingly explicable; its representation gives no sign of incompleteness. Having no formal constraints on that representation, it manages to give some explanation of everything. If the real in Lacan’s formula is what

---

61. It is first in this sense that Lacan created this word, added it to the lalangue, in a single word thus uniting the definite article to the very name or vocable. We will say like him les lalangue, chaques (every) lalangue, because no lalangue is comparable to any other.” J-A. Miller, “Theorie de lalangue,” Ornicar (January 1975) 26.
escapes representation, its existence is nonetheless not denied by the whole or all constructed out of linguistics’ formal writing; it is rather deliberately ignored. Linguists are not unaware of the existence of those things in language which interest psychoanalysis: slips of the tongue, plays on words, and so on. These they would not construe as having no status as real. On the contrary, the homophony they bear witness to in language—the accidental falling together of sounds and constructions—is in no way imaginary. Only, despite its realness, linguists must ignore homophony as the precondition of their science. Real, yet unlike the real of the agrammatical, it is resistant to formal representation.

Yet out of the real, Milner insists, linguistics has extracted an all which it symbolically represents. This relation between symbolic and real is finally the subject of For the Love of Language. It is at the ever-shifting yet nonetheless clearly demarcated boundaries between the two that linguists find themselves; there they yield to their desire. But it would be to miss the whole point of Milner’s own subtle reading of Lacan to draw as the predictable conclusion to this confrontation between linguist and the object of the linguist’s desire the impossibility of representing that real and the fictional status of the linguist’s representations. For it is written, and that, not by virtue of anything the linguist, as opposed to the social scientist, for instance, has done, but by virtue of something in language, by virtue of the formalizable nature of some real in it. That in that real there should be something that can be represented by a writing is in For the Love of Language the fundamental state of affairs rendering both linguistics and the linguist’s experience of science possible, while at the same time in no way an expected or predictable state of affairs. The non-necessary and hence startling aspect of this state of affairs Milner never ceases to stress; it is what no logic could have predicted (67). It is moreover what the current dismissal of linguistics wishes to deny, and in so denying it, the linguist is deprived of any other than an illusory object of desire (62-3). Herein lies the crucial role of Milner’s psychoanalysis of the experience of science. For whosoever has had this experience, the features of that all delineated against the backdrop of the not-all are unmistakably revealed in a form for which there exists an adequate mathematical representation. For the interval, something ceases to not be written. It is this which is at the heart of the linguist’s love. For it is a love of language which endows the linguist’s enterprise with its special character, and not simply a desire.

If for Lacan, there is no sexual relation, the union of the sexes is an impossible one, desire being the form of that impossibility, an impossibility which, according to the formula of Encore, “does not cease to not be written,” it should not escape notice that in that seminar Lacan introduces another, quite distinct term, “love.” Love, according to Lacan, negates the impossibility contained in what does not cease to not be written; instead, it never ceases to be written.52

It is not simply philology—that name generally assigned the appearance of linguistics in the nineteenth century—which suggests Milner’s title. Milner’s choice of this one term “love” among other possibilities is meant accurately to identify the

---

52. Encore 132.
linguistic enterprise, even the unpoetic and tedious academic writing which sets down the arguments the linguist finds for it. By virtue of this love, unlike the often empty meanderings of the various hermeneutic disciplines or the forced optimism of the social sciences, linguistics is never sad, that adjective which in French suggests the pathetic, the depressing. For linguistics has its thrill peculiar to it. That every true linguist knows, and if it cannot be transmitted directly to another, it can be read, can be reactivated, for those who are able and persistent enough to decipher it, in the formal intricacies of linguistic argumentation, whenever they successfully touch the real, whenever \textit{lalangue} yields to the linguist a glimpse of the knowledge of language.”

The linguists relation to \textit{lalangue}: Saussure, Jakobson, Chomsky

In the series of existential statements which mark the stages of Milner’s argument and characterize his style, the existence of the linguist’s thrill—a kind of Lichtenbergian \textit{cogitatur}: “\textit{lalangue knows}” or “there is some all extractable from \textit{lalangue}”—forms the grounds of a certainty for linguistics. This is perhaps why Milner can conclude: “Such is indeed the uncertainty which guides linguists, as long as the real import of psychoanalysis remains unknown to them” (67). For this reason, to any epistemology of science, even if depsychologized, must be added a psychoanalysis of scientific knowledge. Nor is it surprising that Lacan, in attaching Freud to a philosophical tradition, should do so via the notion of the subject. But in Lacan’s concept of the subject of the unconscious: the Cartesian \textit{cogito} is detached from consciousness and shorn of the ego in which subjectivity—the subjectivity that furnishes the grounds for certainty—is now shown not to reside.

For the linguist, the thrill lies at that point where evidence meets theory; this is the point where the all emerges in its mathematicizable form out of the not-all, where \textit{lalangue}, as opposed to either linguist or speaker, knows. For this reason, far from operating in involuntary ignorance of \textit{lalangue}, of those of its features consigned to the not-all, the linguist, as much as anyone concerned with language, as much as the poet or the literary critic, must constantly confront what it is that escapes formalization. If, as Milner points out, the linguist’s ignorance of the not-all is wilful, a principled decision to ignore, to not know (60) which structures linguistics (74)—in Saussure this refusal of knowledge being directed toward what is labeled the arbitrary—then the experience of science the linguist is granted involves a relation, albeit negative, to the not-all, to \textit{lalangue}, this other of the “language” of linguistics. And the will not to know all must be constantly exerted in the face of a return of the not-all. This negative relation is the other side of that encounter with the real which is the subject of \textit{For the Love of Language}. Since it structures a private experience, its particular form varies with the individual linguist, constitutes a biography, appropriately understood through a psychoanalysis of the knowledge which it causes to be written, to cease to not be written. For these individual experi-
ences give shape to the body of knowledge that is written in formal symbols. That knowledge is objective, in that, as science, the structure realized by the writing of linguistics it comes to have is independent of the linguist’s will; it is subjective in-sofar as it emerges out of that experience in which the real is seized and formalized.

The history of linguistic science which follows thus presents a series of representatives of that science who are also decked out in the guise of lovers of language, and it is as much the way they deal with the not-all as the form they give to the all which distinguishes them. Milner’s representative linguists are Saussure, Jakobson, and Chomsky (though others are supplied), the contrast between Saussure and Chomsky operating in For the Love of Language and that between Saussure and Jakobson elsewhere. They stand for the stages of linguistics’ integration into science. But in this guise, they reveal a further truth—that no one is the master of language, that its laws are given by no law-giver. And, as lovers of a language which yields its knowledge not by the imposition of the linguist’s will but via the fortuitous encounter, they find themselves not in the position of masters but of servants—like all lovers, cutting absurd and even ridiculous figures, but ultimately redeemed only by the results of their endeavors. It is in this sense that, as Milner puts it, linguistics importunes. For it has, he claims, like Freud’s Copernican revolution, dealt a blow to man’s narcissism, displacing him from the center of his language (137).

The measure of linguistics’ ability to disturb the man-centered concept of language can be read in the story of Saussure’s mad pursuit of the anagrams. For Saussure himself, having recognized that language knows, is the first to be disturbed by it. It is not that the juxtaposition of phonemes Saussure discovers in Saturnian poetry does not exist in language—they have as undeniably occurred as slips of the tongue—it is that he must ascribe to this accidental falling together of elements of sound a conscious intentionality, a legislator, thereby undoing the arbitrariness of the sign. Here Saussure, the subject of that experience of a science of language which is comparative grammar, finds the implications of the knowledge it contains unbearable. Milner finds an analogy for Saussure and the anagrams from the history of science in Cantor’s finding in set theory a divine intention (115). Jakobson, by contrast with Saussure, presents another way of dealing with this new knowledge of language, one with its counterpart as well in the history of science. In an obituary dedicated to Jakobson entitled “Renaissance et Jakobson,” meant perhaps to recall Jakobson’s obituary for Majakovskij (142), Milner describes Jakobson’s characteristic way of incorporating the propositions of a new science—some his own contribution—into another, pre-Galilean way of thinking. Jakobson, Milner tells us, when he spoke French, never said langue—language—but always langage—Language. To Saussure’s distinction he preferred a maxim adapted from Terence: “Nillinguistici a me alienum puto.” Jakobson’s object was a totality without limits. “There is nothing foreign to my object—, how singular a maxim in the light of our epistemological traditions, which, in fact, strongly maintain science to be defined

by its having boundaries and its object by having limits,” Milner comments (62). Moreover, for Jakobson, science is reduced to the search for symmetries.

Milner also finds a counterpart for Jakobson in the history of science:

A reliable witness reports a conversation in which Jakobson marvelled that the metrical formula which he himself had recognized in some Japanese verses repeated the formula of physics recognized by the latest Nobel laureate—who was Japanese—in some atomic structure. His interlocutor on that occasion, most likely formed in the school of Koyré, expressed a limited enthusiasm. Perhaps he had even murmured—supposing him to be a Spinozist—“man is not an empire within an empire; henceforth it is vain to imagine a human production repeats, as the little repeats the big, a configuration discovered by physics.” His interlocutor, no doubt, had good arguments, and yet he had missed something: he was not able to recognize a claim which had come from elsewhere, from before Galileo, inserting itself, like a hapax, into the straight line of scientific discourse. Jakobson was indeed speaking of science, and any person who should happen to hear him was right to understand by science what had gone by that name since Galileo; nevertheless, via a homonymy and a studied Amphibology, it was permissible to understand something else—the science of John Dee, of Giordano Bruno, of Hermes Trismegistus.

He who wished to be a stranger to nothing was thus revealed to be the Stranger par excellence. In a universe marked by the Counter-Renaissance, he revived the forgotten figure: the learned doctor, master of the macrocosm and microcosm, doctor of intelligible and material forms, teacher of their harmonies. Like Dee and Bruno, constant journeying formed him, a journeying amidst flames and ruins. Even the places match: Prague, the city of hermeticists, was the place that received the new Magus of the West. (64-5)

Thus Jakobson, in Milner’s account, is “a return to what had preceded” the “Counter-Renaissance,” a term Milner here borrows from Gouhier to designate the post-Galilean period. The role of reconsituter of an older tradition, we have seen, is reserved by Foucault for Saussure. Foucault is right to point out how antithetical a theory of the sign is to what is essential in the new linguistic concept of language. But Milner, it will be remembered, rescues Saussure’s use of the sign for a general linguistics (as opposed to a general grammar) from what has traditionally been included in a theory of the sign. It is Saussure’s interpreters who represent a throwback to an earlier way of thinking. Saussure himself in Milner’s account presents the tragic figure of one driven mad by a knowledge which he sees all too clearly but which he is unable to render anodyne, consoling, useful. The contrast with Milner’s portrait of Jakobson is all too clear:

the subject who believed in symmetries knew how to regulate his own destiny in terms of them. And yet, might it be permitted for a modern to take from this accomplishment the indication of a weakness? How can one com-
pletely believe in this universe unrent, unlacerated, how can one believe that symmetry and asymmetry will suffice entirely to fill in the gaps? How can one not oppose to the happy figure of Jakobson the shattered figure of Saussure? The latter, an aristocrat, rich, handsome, living in a chateau, in a country at peace, never knew rest. At the very heart of Science, he had stumbled against the stone of scandal, and, as far as one can judge, never recovered from it. The former, a commoner, a Jew, poor, wandering through wars and revolutions; established over all things the reign of symmetry. Encountering himself the fatal anagram, he even succeeded in absorbing from it the effect of radical symmetry. Such success cannot satisfy. We take it as the greatest strangeness of all today: an ethics of happiness which is an ethics of symmetry, wrung from losses and abandonments. (66)

It is only with Chomsky that linguistics is fully integrated into Galilean science. What follows, in Milner’s account, is Chomsky’s politics—not, as others have argued, a set of ideological positions which are the direct logical result of Chomsky’s theory of language and mind but as the compensation for a theory of language which deprives man of his full freedom as subject in language.

But if, from the point of view of the history of science, linguists are now firmly established members of what is called “the academy of science,” the special nature of the object of their new science serves only to increase their isolation; “the impossible in it never ceases to be misunderstood” (77-8). If they behave like scientists, it is still with those other than linguists concerned with language and not with other scientists that they must continue to carry on the greater part of their intellectual exchange outside linguistics itself. And the full accession of linguistics to science accomplished with Chomsky has only widened the gulf that separates them from these non-linguists. It is the latter who are currently among those who find linguistics’ claims the most importunate, who continuously fail to understand the impossible in language, who have had no experience of science, and hence no certainty that the real exists in language and that some part of it is formalizable, who deny the legitimacy of linguistics’ renunciation to know all and hence dispute the scientifi city of any study of language, given the evidence of lalangue. But if indeed linguistics as Milner describes it does exist, and, a fortiori, the language it takes as its object, all the pronouncements on death and obsolescence are to no avail in changing the real status and shape of language itself, and its effects for speakers. The exploration of only some of these have been undertaken. What is required is not the construction of other sciences on the linguistic model, for these attempts have not demonstrated that they have encountered any formalizable real. Rather, the actual findings of linguistics must be seriously taken into account by those who hope—or hoped—to find in language some truth.

Fifteen years ago, Foucault undertook such a project in The Order of Things. He concludes his account of linguistics in the nineteenth century, treating it together with the political economy of labor and the biology of life, by listing what he calls “three compensations” for the “demotion of language to the mere status of ob-
The first is the development of a symbolic logic and the second is that of "all the techniques of exegesis" (297). Thus the methods of interpretation of modern thought are opposed by the techniques of formalization (298)—what he calls "the nineteenth century’s double advance, on the one hand towards formalism in thought and on the other towards the discovery of the unconscious—towards Russell and Freud" (299). These two “compensations” for the blow dealt man’s narcissism by linguistics strangely meet in For the Love of Language—symbolic logic transcribing the content of the linguist’s encounter with the real in language and psychoanalysis interpreting the linguist’s experience of that encounter. But it is the third and last compensation Foucault calls “the most important, and also the most unexpected”—the appearance of literature, of literature as such” (299). Literature as such, appearing in the same century as comparative grammar, Foucault defines as “the isolation of a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is literary... existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing” (300). “Literature,” Foucault asserts, “is the contestation of philology (of which it is nevertheless the twin figure): “At the moment when language, as spoken and scattered words, becomes an object of knowledge, we see it reappearing in a strictly opposite modality: a silent, cautious deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being” (300). Deleuze more recently observes apropos of this text: “What is curious is that Foucault here gives to language, in his beautiful analysis of modern literature, a privilege that he refuses to life and labor” (Foucault, 139). The privileging of language was once on the agenda. But the slogans derived from linguistics’ treatment of it—the arbitrariness of the sign, its conventional origins, the non-referentiality of language—can plausibly be seen not as truths testified to by linguistics, but as attempts to reinstate man as speaker and subject within language, and thereby to restore to him an imaginary mastery over it. It may be that that mastery for some, in the final twist, only makes man the ultimate artificer in a universe of his own making, in which there is no real but only fictions. Yet, beneath the tireless volubility producing our current fictions, the lovers of language can be heard to murmur, like Galileo, for whoever should care to listen, “but still it speaks, but still it knows, still language sets the limits to what can be said and not be said.”