Culture

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Article abstract

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Is There Authoritative Voice in Ewok Talk?: On Postmodernism, Fieldwork, and the Recovery of Unintended Meanings

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Are there genres of pure self-expression (without the traditional authorial form)?
(Bakhtin 1986a:182).

What reduces the signifier to noise and the speech act to an accident is the absence of intention (Knapp and Michaels 1982:735).

A speaker is to his utterance what an author is to his text (Holquist 1983:315).

Some texts are more orphaned than others (Culler 1975:132).

Postmodernism emphasizes perspectivism, celebrates indeterminacy, and abjures the authoritative voice. Understanding is to be gained dialogically and achieved through participation and performance, activities often synonymous with anthropological fieldwork. However, fieldwork entails the recovery of unintended as well as intended meanings which are, in turn, invariably situated in a hermeneutical hierarchy. This paper points up the inevitability of constructing such a hierarchy by addressing the problem of voice and meaning in the electronically mediated communication that is Ewok speech. Ewoks are fantasy creatures whose heroic manoeuvres figure significantly in the film *Return of the Jedi* and who are accidental speakers of Tibetan.

Le postmodernisme met l'emphase sur le perspectivisme, célèbre l'indéterminisme et renie toute forme autoritaire. Sa compréhension s'est acquise par la communication et s'est achevée à travers la participation et la performance, activités souvent synonymes du travail de terrain anthropologique. Quoi qu'il en soit, le travail de terrain occasionne le recouvrement du non-intentionnel aussi bien que de l'intentionnel invariablement situés au sein d'une hiérarchie herméneutique. Ce texte pointe l'inévitabilité d'une construction d'une telle hiérarchie en s'adressant au problème de la voix et de la signification des communications électroniques du parler Ewok. Les Ewoks sont des créatures fantastiques dont les manoeuvres héroïques figurent de manière significative dans le film Return of the Jedi *et qui parlent par hasard tibétain.*

In applying poststructuralist theory to accommodate the role of electronically mediated communication characteristic of contemporary media, science, computer applications and surveillance in the social context of communication, Poster (1990), drawing from Jameson (1981), Terdiman (1985), and, most importantly, from Baudrillard (1984), asserts that electronically mediated communication has precipitated a crisis in representation. Poster (1989) concurs with Baudrillard's (1988) selection of commercially motivated mass media as a particularly rich context for appreciating this crisis. Baudrillard asserts that television commercials, for example, grant unprecedented autonomy to signs and modes of representation, creating floating signifiers that subsequently engulf their newly defined referents and are uncritically accepted by a passive consumer audience. Baudrillard contends that the messages in these media appropriate the interlocutorial role (which is to provide a considered response as opposed to a simulated response or reflex action) and, therefore, that the legitimacy of these messages should be challenged. Following Baudrillard, Poster finds that the different patterns of communication enabled by electronic mediation effectively foreground the "self-referential aspect of language" and obscure the place of referents

in the sustaining of cultural meanings (1990:13). For the receiver of messages, then, "it becomes increasingly difficult, or even pointless, for the subject to distinguish a 'real' existing 'behind' the flow of signifiers" (1990:15). Thus, while Baudrillard's immediate concern rests with the vitiation of the subject-receiver's "independent" judgment when bombarded with the messages of a television commercial, Poster appears to locate a more subtle abrogation of the interlocutorial role, that of the subject-receiver's ability to locate authenticity behind the "flow of signifiers", an authenticity I shall refer to as the 'authoritative voice'. In other words, while Baudrillard appears to focus upon the legitimacy of message reception, Poster turns to the problem of situating authority "behind" the message itself. For Poster, the problem is stated more succinctly when he contends that the "function of representation comes to grief...when language represents itself" (1990:13).

This paper[1] takes issue with the totalizing position of Poster's contention statement by investigating the status of a message that "escapes" the locutionary arrogation of electronic mediation within a decidedly commercially motivated environment, that of George Lucas's film *Return of the Jedi*. This third segment of the *Star Wars* trilogy was released in 1983 to such popular acclaim that the success of a secondary marketing venture, the commercial distribution of toys and accessories emblazoned with or in the image of the film's major characters, was assured.[2] However, none of the other new characters created for the film could rival the Ewoks, whose self-presentation and heroic manoeuvres ignited viewer and journalistic enthusiasm:

> *everybody's favorite new characters will be the oh-so-merchandisable Ewoks, cuddly koala-bearish critters that variously act like African tribesmen or Robin Hood and his merry fuzz balls* (Ansen 1983:96);

> *[the heroes'] new allies are a tribe of primitive Ewoks, pugnacious little warriors who look like cuddly Teddy bears but have the combative and fearless temperaments of Yorkshire terriers* (Clarke 1983:64);

> *amidst all the plot convolutions of who Princess Leia really is and who Luke's father really was, **Return of the Jedi** is stolen by the Ewoks, 40 little creatures in furry suits... the plucky Ewoks reside on a jungle planet in harmony with their environment. The objects of moviegoers' affections... the most compelling complaint about the Ewoks in **Jedi** is that the audience doesn't see enough of them* (Lubow 1983:44-45).

Moreover, the popularity of the Ewoks launched a spin-off television cartoon series and two television feature films. What is, for the purposes of critical inquiry, particularly interesting about these fantasy creatures, is a fact appreciated only by a minute portion of their global audience, that Ewoks speak Tibetan and do so quite appropriately.[3] The status of Ewok speech, then, as an 'escaped message', commands our attention. If we are to situate this phenomenon within the context wherein it is presented, that of electronically mediated communication, then is Ewok speech yet one further instance of 'representation coming to grief'? Does Ewok speech only represent itself?

To answer such questions, Kellner's trenchant critique of Baudrillard, that "media analysis should attempt to recontextualize media images and simulacra, rather than simply focusing on the surface of media form" (1989:73), is a useful point of departure. To resurrect attention to the context of content in media communication is to ease towards questions of communicative legitimacy and authority more from dialogical, hermeneutic, and Foucaultian perspectives than from that of Poster's (1989; 1990) "mode of information". This paper will employ these perspectives in considering the question of Ewok speech as representation. I begin by sketching the relevance of the approaches of Bakhtin, Gadamer, and Foucault to the general problem of authority, then discuss Ewok speech in its cinematic and historical contexts, and follow by examining the response of Ewok speech to the conditions which have represented the authoritative voice.

The Dialogic Privilege

In an essay situating Bakhtin's privileging of dialogic relations as the analytic focus for a linguistic anthropology that would be "a truly social, human science of language" (Hill 1986:89), Jane Hill describes the place of Bakhtin's translinguistics in language theory and suggests its relevance to critical concerns of contemporary anthropology. While linguistics will continue to focus on "the systemic constraints on the freedom of utterance," translinguistics will take up the

> *momentary, the individual, the performative, the disorderly - all of those aspects of the human voice, which linguistics considers beyond the scope of systemic order* (1986:92).

In so doing, translinguistics pursues a "moral goal" wherein the voices of a speaking community are interpreted and analyzed but never submerged to a "transcending monologue" (ibid.). In effect, Hill imbues Bakhtin's translinguistics with the mission of postmodernism, a mission celebrating, among other agendas, indeterminacy, fragmentation, the "decanonization" of conventions of authority, the loss of self "in the differences from which reality is plurally made", irony (perspectivism), hybridization (the deformation of cultural genres), carnivalization, and performance (Hassan 1986:503-507). Hill finds Bakhtin (and, therefore, this mission) of particular relevance for an anthropology "that will allow the voices of others to speak without submerging their uniqueness within each culture and historical situation" and is concerned with "how the voice of the anthropologist should engage the voices of these other selves" (1986:94).

One question begged, however, is whether or not a boundary can exist between interpretation and transcending monologue (anthropological paradigm?). If Bakhtin's translinguistics takes up the "expressive point of view, which is meaningful only in the context of a unique dialogic confluence" (Hill 1986:92), would an anthropological interpretation no longer be informed, for example, by the signature persuasion of the discipline, the cross-cultural perspective? If, as Hill has it, anthropology is to interpret and analyze the voices of others, then anthropology continues to be charged with the task of producing a "version of what something means, thus producing, or presupposing, the need for (some would say, the problem of) authority" (Bruns 1980:300).

Consider Bakhtin's discussion of the juxtaposition of a native language with a foreign language in literary works. While the resulting dialogue illuminates and objectifies respective value systems and world views, for the "consciousness creating the work", the appeal of such juxtaposition rests in an "absolutely untranslatable conception of the world" revealed by the "style of the foreign language as a totality" (1975:427). Unlike Bakhtin's literary creators, however, anthropologists tend to make it their business to try to penetrate "untranslatable conceptions of the world", and some are judged more successful -i.e., found to make better interpretations, 'to speak with more authority' - than others in this task just as certain individuals are recognized as better "informants" than others. Furthermore, the

question of who does and does not speak (for whatever reason) to the anthropologist is in itself highly significant, especially so for an anthropology that would be directed towards a dialogism privileging the uniqueness of individual voices within cultural and historical contexts. How, after all, are the non-speakers to be regarded/included? Dialogism may well leave the anthropologist in a quandary with respect not only to the question of whether or not to attribute authority to specific voices or interpretations, but also to the question of how to attribute it. Can the mission be salvaged without tossing out the possibility of anthropology? Can authority be located while meaning is plurally constructed? Perhaps an answer is indicated by the recognition that dialogism is only superficially tautological.

Holquist (1983) notes that for Bakhtin, communication replaces the distinction between system and performance as the object of study, and utterance, which blends the activities of speaking and listening, becomes the intrinsic unit of study. Utterances engage words which are necessarily dialogic since, to have meaning, the words must evoke prior "contexts of usage"; thus, "*every* utterance, covertly or overtly is an act of indirect discourse" (Emerson 1983:248). At issue in any consideration of utterance is, as Bakhtin notes (1981:401), the knowledge of *who is speaking*. For Holquist, the significance of this knowledge is evidenced in an inspection of verbal exchange between two subjects where "it quickly becomes apparent that what each says to the other is difficult to describe in terms of language alone. The talk is segmented not by words and sentences but by *who is talking*" (Holquist 1983:312). This concern for an awareness of who is talking calls attention not only to the historical and cultural situation of the speaker but also appears to resurrect a well-established (pre-post-modern) interest in how the intentions of the speaker might affect interpretation. Bakhtin (1986b) is also interested in the author's intention, but limits his exploration of the problem to the choice of speech genre without probing the implications of the problem, implications that are telling. To evaluate the speaker's intentions, after all, is to select from possible interpretations of what is said as well as to locate authority in some speakers and not in others. With interpretation, then, voices cease to be equi-valent. Thus, to the dialogic message that meaning is plurally constructed is added the dimension that it is hierarchically constituted, and questions of hermeneutics are conjured.

The Hermeneutic Privilege

For Gadamer, understanding reveals a process emerging from the "determinate tradition" in which the interpreter lives and binds his/her perceptions, and the suspension of the products of that tradition -e.g., prejudices - in an encounter with another individual, a work of art, or a text. In such an encounter, however, Gadamer finds that

> always something more is demanded than to understand the other, that is to seek and acknowledge the immanent coherence contained within the meaning claim of the other... what is also implied is a transcendental demand for coherence in which the ideal of truth is located (1979:108).

The immanent coherence sought in the other's meaning evokes Poster's quest for "a 'real' existing 'behind' the flow of signifiers" (1990:15). But to seek such coherence is to ask "how, under what conditions and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse" (Foucault 1977:158). To have "transcendent expectations" is to assume some sort of consonance between authorial intention and interlocutorial appropriation(s). What specifies the hermeneutic task is a proper understanding of temporal distance, by which Gadamer means the negotiation of a "continual series of perspectives through which the past presents and addresses itself to us" - a mediation "between the once and now" (1979:159). Such negotiation parallels Bakhtin's charge that the receiver is as involved in the content of discourse as the author (Todorov 1988:11); however, to acknowledge temporal distance is to hierarchize the contexts of meaning — i.e., meaning emerges in certain temporal contexts but not in others — and thereby to implicate the authoritative voice.

For Bakhtin, dialogical relations emerge where there are semantic relations between utterances "behind which stand (and in which express themselves) actual or potential speaking subjects, the authors of the utterances in question" (1979:303). Bakhtin's authors are, however, not necessarily individuals, as he suggests that "the dialogical reaction endows with personhood the utterance to which it reacts" (1963:246). But how may interpretation, which calls for hierarchizing the contexts of meaning, contextualize such authors?

Foucault's Poststructuralist Privilege

Foucault (1977) offers a provocative response to this question. He points out that the "modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses" (the modes of discursive existence) are culturally specific (1977:158). To understand how social relationships determine the articulation of discourse is to be guided by the author-function. In Foucault's view, the author does not precede the work, rather the author is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses" (ibid.:159); in effect, the author-function is a hierarchizing principle. While, as Emerson notes, Bakhtin could not conceive of words "apart from the voices who speak them; thus, every word raises the question of authority" (1983:248); for Foucault, "ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes" constitutes discourse, but it is not discourse characterized by the author-function — that is, discourse "that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status" (1977:147). The task at hand, then, is to determine whether or not Ewok talk is dialogic, and whether or not it fulfills the conditions Foucault attaches to the presence of the author-function in textual discourse. Before taking up this task, I must turn to the cinematic and historical contexts of Ewok talk.

The Ewok Scenario

The film *Return of the Jedi* is largely a Hollywood version of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey punctuated by colourful sub-plots of which the Ewok scenario is most memorable. The Ewoks, a troupe of teddy-bearish hunting and gathering forest dwellers who base themselves in a village of thatched tree houses and rope suspension bridges, appear in the story when the heroes slip through the force field used by the "Evil Empire" to control the Ewok's planet and its denizens. The heroine, Princess Leia, is separated from the heroes upon their arrival on the planet and discovered by an Ewok whom she befriends by offering him food. Meanwhile, the heroes, some distance away, free themselves from an Ewok hunting trap only to be recaptured. It is at this point that the Ewoks begin to speak, and I shall confine my description of the film to the segment wherein Ewoks have speaking roles (and, not inconsequentially, figure significantly in plot development). To a naive audience of English speakers, Ewok speech appears to be gibberish, but Ewok dialogue, which is rendered almost entirely in Tibetan, bears an uncanny semantic relationship to the actions it accompanies.

Ewok dialogue begins when the Ewok recapture two of the heroes in the forest and one, poking a hero with a spear, asks in Tibetan, "What is this?" Another Ewok asks his (her) compatriot, "What time is it?" A golden humanoid robot referred to as C3PO (an established Star Wars' trilogy character) approaches the group and the Ewoks' reaction to it is immediate and profound. They bow before the robot and utter a Tibetan Buddhist prayer for sentient beings:

> For all sentient beings who are at peace,
>
> It is in peace we value life.
>
> For all sentient beings who suffer,
>
> It is in suffering that we discover the suffering of life.
>
> From the nearest [to us] to the furthest,
>
> We should treat all sentient beings equally.

At the conclusion of the Ewok "prayer", one hero questions the robot in English, "Do you understand anything they're saying?" The robot replies, "Yes. I'm fluent in over six million forms of communication. Hello. I think I could be mistaken. They are using a very primitive dialect, but I do believe they think I'm some sort of God."

The Ewoks grant the robot significantly preferential treatment. While the heroes are transported trussed and hanging from poles, the robot is carried in a sedan chair. As the procession enters the village, an Ewok who manifests himself as the Ewok leader remarks twice in Tibetan to the other Ewoks," There's a lot of money on this side!" A trussed hero responds, "I have a really bad feeling about this."

The Ewok leader approaches the robot and calls out to the other Ewoks, "Come here." The leader asks (in Tibetan) if the robot is from a different country. The robot babbles on for awhile in true gibberish and the Ewok leader states (in Tibetan), "I am a silent person. You better leave me alone." An Ewok onlooker requests (in Tibetan) that his picture be taken.

The robot informs the heroes that they are to be the main course of a feast to be held in the robot's honour. Princess Leia, who has befriended the Ewoks (after offering one food), arrives, is greeted in Tibetan by the Ewoks, discovers her friends' plight, and cries, "But these are my friends! 3-PO, tell them they must be set free!" The immediate response given by the Ewoks is an emphatic "re" (*red*), meaning "yes."

One hero says, "Somehow I get the feeling that didn't help us very much." The situation is resolved when another hero, Luke Skywalker, causes the robot and the chair in which it is seated to levitate. As the seated robot rotates in the air, one Ewok (in Tibetan) instructs another Ewok, "Watch your eyes." At this point the Ewoks are duly impressed with the robot's power, accede to its demand for the heroes' release, and become the heroes' staunch allies. Significant Tibetan speech from the Ewoks is not heard again in the film.

Ewok Characterization: A Field Perspective

From the perspective of an anthropologist who studied and lived with Tibetans, Ewok dialogue, as noted above, exhibits an uncanny semantic parallel to the action it accompanies. After my initial surprise and delight that the Ewoks were indeed speaking Tibetan, I was arrested not by the simple prescriptives of Ewok speech, that is, the "come here," "take him away," and so forth, but by the essentially denotative utterances. One is the Ewok leader's statement, "There is a lot of money on this side." My immediate reaction to hearing this was to laugh, as my fieldwork experience persuaded me that I was party to an inside joke.

The Ewok leader utters "there is a lot of money on this side" at the very moment the heroes are brought, albeit unceremoniously, into the Ewok village. It is precisely the kind of comment Tibetans in the marketplace would make to one another while assessing a foreign customer, especially if that customer is a Westerner. From this utterance, a transparent parallel can be drawn between Ewoks and Tibetans as third or fourth-worlders and the heroes and the villains of the piece as high-tech first and second-worlders. The heroes and villains made their debut, after all, in a film that lends its title to the latest word in military one-upsmanship, *Star Wars*. The Ewok, as low-tech hunter-gatherers who can lasso jet-powered air cars and steal scenes from technical marvels, serve distinctively as counterpoints. That the director George Lucas lavishes so much attention in this third film of his trilogy to the low-tech Ewoks is intriguing.

The "dialogic" response to the Ewok leader's market evaluation of his visitors, is one hero's aside, "I have a bad feeling about this." This utterance stands quite well as a reflexive statement by the investigator who discovers that she herself is not in

the least mysterious to the mysterious Other — that is, her assets, abilities, and failings have been accurately assessed.

The Ewoks' deification of the robot might superficially be thought to symbolize their worship of high-technology since the robot, after all, represents a magnificent technical achievement. However, framed by a Tibetan context, one might well suggest that the robot is worshipped because it resembles a golden statue, potentially a Buddhist statue. That the robot levitates in the course of the action is a nice touch, since Westerners assume such movements are commonplace among talented Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, and ostensibly such activity would confirm the robot's identity in the minds of the Ewoks.

A political message is discernible as well. The Ewoks are, after all, in bondage to an "Evil Empire" whose minions are the constant targets of Ewok guerrilla warfare. This empire surrounds the Ewok planet with a force field that effectively bars all visitors save those equipped with the correct password. Thus, when Princess Leia begs the Ewoks to release her friends from captivity and her plea is immediately answered with a Tibetan affirmative, her request conveys a double message that would not be lost on any Tibetan nationalist. A further message emerges when one of the heroes fails to discern a positive Ewok response to her request and says, in an aside, "Somehow I get the feeling that didn't help us very much," a statement echoing the rarely voiced but commonly shared sentiments of Tibetans who frequently make verbal and written demands for Tibetan national autonomy to no avail.

A final point concerning my interpretation of Ewok dialogue concerns the Ewok leader's statement, "I am a silent person. You better leave me alone." Though, in the context of the script, such an utterance is not an inappropriate response to an overly chatty robot, it suggests that the speaker is irritated. This use of affect in Ewok speech propels me from one interpretive context to another — that of the context within which Ewok speech was actually recorded. Someone spoke this sentence in Tibetan and I infer that the speaker was, at the time of the utterance, resisting participation in the "dialogue".

While the above analysis draws upon my fieldwork expertise to authorize my interpretation of Ewoks, it acknowledges as well that members of the Tibetan speech community, though they may reject part of the interpretation I have drawn, will find a richer field of meaning in the Ewok scenario than will non-Tibetan speakers. For example, the *Tibetan Review*, the only monthly publication on all things Tibetan, noted that many Tibetan words and sentences were distinguishable in the curious language of the "furry, teddy bear-like creatures" (1983:7). The *Tibetan Review* cites some of the dialogue and remarks that money is mentioned when there is no money in sight. This is cited as problematic to the editor, who had not himself seen the film at the time. He suggests that the Tibetan language in the film may have been recorded by Steven Speilberg in the bazaars of Kathmandu; hence, the reference to money. One question I would have then concerns whether or not the editor would also find the comment about money as the heroes enter the primitive Ewok village amusing; a second question, one concerning the history of Ewok speech, is perhaps even more provocative in view of the "coherence" of Ewok dialogue.

The History of Ewok Talk

In a 1989 telephone interview, the sound editor and credited creator of Ewokese for the film *Return of the Jedi*, Ben Burtt, noted that he himself had not invented the name "Ewok", but that it most probably derived from the name of the aboriginal inhabitants of Marin County, California, the Miwok. The Ewok were to be diminutive versions of a character already familiar to **Star Wars'** audiences, Chewbacca, a Sasquatch-type astro-pilot and companion to Han Solo, a Star Wars Trilogy hero. Unlike their gigantic template, however, Ewoks were presented as simple and exceptionally charming "folk" - that is, as hunting and gathering forest-dwellers who lived in tree houses.

Burtt stated that he preferred his *Star Wars'* trilogy fantasy creatures to speak real but obscure languages in order to lend a sense of authenticity to their speech. Real languages, he felt, had a "detail and complexity" which could not be created artificially in the studio; therefore, he sought a language that would "fit" the Ewoks. Burtt, who has had no formal linguistic training, expressed his conviction that such knowledge might possibly have hampered his ability to be guided by "how people would react to the language as a sound." That he may have had some notion of an appropriate cultural background for speakers of Ewokese, however, is evident in the fact that Burtt initially taped several different North American Indian languages in his quest for Ewokese.

In his judgment, however, the speakers of these languages had "a limited range of expression." Ultimately, Burtt found the language for Ewoks when he viewed a BBC documentary on Tibet shown him by friends in London. Tibetan, Burtt thought, was "an interesting language" and its speakers had "an interesting voice quality." To Burtt, the Tibetan language "sounded appealing." "It felt," he said, "affectionate." Tibetan was the right language for Ewoks, he thought, because it would help to make them instantly sympathetic. In this way, Ewokese came to be based upon Tibetan (with rare utterances of Kalmuck Mongolian). Since Tibetan, Burtt was convinced, was not on the tips of many Western tongues, a sense of mystery enveloping Ewokese would be preserved.

All of the recordings for Ewok speech were made in the studio of Lucas film productions in Marin County. Burtt found nine Tibetans in the San Francisco area and a Kalmuck Mongolian refugee woman who was a very recent arrival in the Bay Area. He remarked on being drawn to the fact that the latter, coming from Central Asia, had apparently been only just introduced to the twentieth century and its technology, a comment which situates her in somewhat parallel circumstances to the fictional Ewoks.

Burtt's methodology in obtaining Ewok speech was to ask one of the Tibetans, who acted as translator, to encourage the others to recount stories about their families and their lives. Burtt initially assumed that his informants would be likely to speak in a lively fashion about such subjects, but this strategy did not result in their production of the animated speech he desired. Burtt then tried a different tack by showing the translator the story line for the Ewok episodes in an effort to obtain emphatic dialogue. Once again, however, the strategy was not successful. A third recourse was to ask his informants to give simple commands, which do indeed appear in the dialogue. But what was to become quintessential Ewokese failed to emerge until the translator finally revealed the secret to obtaining lively dialogue - that is, to provide one's informants with a bottle of vodka in order "to relax them."

The Ewoks utter only two denotative Tibetan utterances. I asked Burtt about the possible context of the first statement, "There is a lot of money on this side," and learned that one of the elderly ladies was quite impressed with all the recording equipment at the Lucas studio. I did not, however,

inquire as to what might have elicited the second utterance — "I am a silent person. You better leave me alone" — indicating resistance on the part of the informant. Many Tibetans disapprove of those who are considered "talkative" or "too ready to talk" because people who talk too much are gossips, and cause social disruption. Thus, in the context of the film scenario, this utterance ostensibly directed to the robot by the Ewok leader is ironic.

The voices Burtt ended up preferring for the Ewok were the voices of elderly women. These voices were high-pitched, which he felt were appropriate for Ewoks, who were, for the most part, played by dwarfs, and, furthermore, conveyed "neutral gender". The desirability of neutral gender for Ewoks is a promising line of inquiry in the context of mass media and projected audience age, but it is one that I was unable to pursue in the telephone interview. Several of the voices recorded for the Ewok dialogue were speeded up while others were augmented electronically to insure that Ewok sound exhibited the same pitch. Moreover, some of Ewok speech results from Burtt's personal efforts to mimic the elderly Tibetan ladies and the Kalmuck Mongolian lady. Burtt maintains that there was no intentional or conscious semantic matching of the spoken Tibetan to the scripted action and English dialogue.[4]

Analysis

I shall draw first from Bakhtin's stipulation that to have dialogic relations is to guarantee the possibility of response to an utterance. This possibility is enabled by the establishing of boundaries for the utterance accomplished through a change of speaking subjects, a change made possible by the finalization of the utterance. Bakhtin defines this finalization by delimiting the features constituting an utterance as an "organic whole":

1. referential and semantic exhaustiveness of theme;

2. the speaker's "speech will" or "speech plan"; and

3. typical compositional and generic forms of finalization (1986b:76-77).

Though acknowledging the relativity of a referential and semantic exhaustiveness of theme, Bakhtin proposes that examples of this condition may be found in requests, orders, or through the communication of a theme "posed in a particular way, on the

basic of particular material, [and] with particular aims set by the author" (1986b:77). The latter is inextricably bound with the notion of a speaker's "speech plan or speech will" which includes the choice of subject, its boundaries, and its semantic exhaustiveness. The speaker's plan is inseparable from

> the objective referentially semantic aspect, limiting the latter by relating it to a concrete (individual) situation of speech communication with all its individual circumstances, its personal participants, and the statement-utterances that preceded it (1986b:77).

For Bakhtin, however, the third aspect of the "organic whole" of utterance, the choice of a particular speech genre, is the most important. Through choice of speech genre, the speaker permits individuality and subjectivity to be "shaped and developed within a certain generic form", imposing a "certain compositional structure" which enables interlocutors to gauge the approximate duration of the utterance (ibid.:78-79).

Does Ewok talk then fulfill Bakhtin's definition of the dialogic? Ewok speech, as noted above in a discussion of the Ewok scenario, does indeed constitute utterances at once directed towards a change of speakers and comprising thematic unity. But what of the fact that, at times, the Ewok respond (in Tibetan) to utterances given by the heroes (in English) or vice versa? According to Bakhtin, metalinguistic forces transcend any potential dissonance:

> Two juxtaposed utterances belonging to different people who know nothing about one another if they only slightly converge on one and the same subject (idea), inevitably enter into dialogic relations with one another. They come into contact with one another on the territory of a common theme, a common idea (1986b:114-115).

Ewok speech, then, would appear to fulfill the conditions for Bakhtinian dialogue. The question of Ewok speech genre, however, cannot be well answered until we explore the issue of Foucault's author-function.

Foucault's author-function concerns the "existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society (1977:148). Although acknowledging its potential presence in non-textual discourses, Foucault refrains from discussing what might identify the author-function in such contexts. He does, however, find the following conditions in textual discourses endowed with the author-function:

1. discourses must be the objects of material appropriation;

2. discourses may or may not, as culture dictates, require the attribution of an author;

3. discourses are never spontaneously attributed to an individual but rather acquire the author-function as the "result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author'" (1977:150); and

4. discourses possess a plurality of self:

> it would be just as wrong to equate the author with real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance (1977:152).

While the fourth criterion suits the dialogic agenda, the third criterion (vague though it may be) rather fits many an anthropological enterprise. Does Ewok speech as textual discourse fulfill the criteria outlined by Foucault? Ewok speech is definitely an object of appropriation caught up in delineations of ownership as part of the copyrighted film. The second criterion, that of attributing authorship to Ewok speech, I venture, would be an issue solely for Tibetan speakers, who "discovered" it in a "state of anonymity", leaving the game open to whomever would rediscover the author (Foucault 1977:148).

The third and fourth criteria are critical, and I would conflate them for the present discussion. The author-function can neither be located specifically in the voices of the Tibetan speakers (who did not follow the script), nor in Ben Burtt, who claimed no knowledge of semantic congruence and, moreover, who manipulated the soundtracks of the voices. The plurality of "self" in Ewok speech is evident in the juxtaposition of the Tibetan speakers, the electronic augmentation of the voices, and the fictional creatures themselves who have been given "voice". But what is perhaps of greater relevance to the quest for authority in Ewok talk is the significance Foucault attaches to the discovery that the assumed author of a text is not its actual author. My appropriation of Ewok speech was semantically transformed by the discovery that their speech was not gibberish (noise) but rather sensible Tibetan. Thus, in the Ewok case, the complex construction of the author-function appears to be juxtaposed with the choice of speech genre.

Conclusion

I now return to the initial task of the paper, that is to determine whether Ewok talk is "representation coming to grief" or if the recovery of coherent, albeit unintended meaning, substantiates an authoritative voice. Though I address the latter question by examining what at first glance might appear to be an extraordinary example, that of Ewok speech, the problem, one of legitimating interpretation, exists generally. That I can recover multiple levels of meaning from Ewok dialogue that are not similarly captured by Ben Burtt, their speech "inventor", or necessarily by other Tibetan speakers, arises from an attempt to enlist several perspectives in order to interpret the dialogue; namely, (1) the Tibetan speech in relation to the English dialogue; (2) the symbolic implications of Ewok characterization *vis-à-vis* those for the major heroes and villains of the film; (3) the response of an elderly Tibetan lady to the apotheosis of acoustic and video high-technology; and (4) my "historical consciousness" of Tibetans. What then might constitute "coherent meaning"? Perhaps, essentially following Gadamer(1979), it emerges where there is symmetry and iteration of meaning on multiple historically constructed levels.

If I have recovered a coherent meaning from Ewok dialogue, can I maintain that the intentional object of Ewok speech is felicitous to my interpretation? Recall that Ben Burtt claims ignorance of any semantic relationships correlating Ewok speech, English dialogue, and the action sequences. Wittgenstein (1968), however, maintains that intentions are always embedded in their situations. Furthermore, some literary critics (Bakhtin among them) resolve the problem of intentionality by "locating it in the genre itself" (Bruns 1980:297). Derrida finds that every text "participates in one or several genres," genres that can be identified by a "trait" (1980:64). In the case of Ewok dialogue, this trait is perhaps the Tibetan language. Todorov, in his commentary on Bakhtin's intertextuality, notes that "every representation of language puts us in contact with its utterer; to make us "conscious" of what language is, is to have us identify who speaks within it" (1988:62). Barthes (1977) finds that it is the language which speaks, not the author, but does not probe the next possibility — that language itself might serve Foucault's author-function.

If the intentional object of Ewok speech is the Tibetan language, then the intention Ben Burtt finds in Ewok speech is the mellifluous sound of spoken Tibetan, one that his audience will find suitable for the Ewok characterization. For the anthropologist, the language evokes social interaction, symbolic dimensions, affect, and innuendo. What is more, the language enables an identification of authoritative voice in Ewok dialogue, the Tibetan language enables me to hierarchize interpretations of Ewok talk. While the language makes possible a more coherent (meaningful) interpretation of the scenario than what is possible for non-Tibetan speakers, the coherent interpretation beckons subsequent fieldwork (the telephone conversation with Ben Burtt), which further enriches the interpretation. In conclusion, then, I can question Poster's (1990) certainty that language representing itself is tantamount to "representation coming to grief", and, following Bakhtin, resolve the question of authoritative voice in Ewok talk since, from several perspectives, it is answered.

Notes

1.   An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 16th annual meeting of the Canadian Ethnology Society, Ottawa, May, 1989, in a session entitled "Beyond Postmodernism and Hermeneutics" organized by Michael Lambek.

2.   *Time* (1983 121:70) reports that the first day showing of the film registered a box-office record of $6,437,005 and that the revenue at the end of the first week was $45,311,004, about twice the amount earned by the previous record holder, *E. T. Return of the Jedi* products included Pepperidge Farm *Jedi* cookies: "chocolate for the villains, vanilla for the good guys and peanut butter for the robots and assorted fuzzy-wuzzies" (ibid).

3.   Clarke (1983:65) writes that Ben Burtt designed a "new" language for the Ewoks as he did for all speaking *Jedi* creatures, and describes Ewokese as a "combination of five tongues, including Mongolian, Tibetan and Nepali. All were garbled together in Burtt's sound mixer." As this paper demonstrates, however, Clarke's presentation of the nature of Ewok speech is misleading, and obscures the possibility of Ewok talk as an "escaped message".

4.   Pertinent to a discussion of the problem of Ewok talk is Burtt's revelation that one of the fantasy-creature pilots in the film speaks scripted Swahili and was given its voice by a bilingual Swahili-English speaker. Some five years after the original release of the film, Burtt learned that both the fantasy creature and the reader who supplied its Swahili voice became instant media heroes in Tanzania and Kenya.

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