

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 6 (1992)

Vereinsnachrichten: The magic of English : SAUTE panel (Fribourg, May 11, 1991)

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 15.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Magic of English

SAUTE Panel (Fribourg, May 11, 1991)

The conference closed with a panel discussion reviewing and developing issues that had come up in its course. Participants included Patrick Parrinder (University of Reading) and Janice Radway (Duke University), who had attended the conference as guests and had been asked to open the discussion, and the two guest-speakers, Suzanne Romaine (University of Oxford) and James Boon (Princeton University). The discussion was chaired by Richard Waswo (University of Geneva).

Patrick Parrinder: I thought I would first of all propose a title under which we could arrange our thoughts, trying to bring together some of what has happened during the last two days, and then just offer, perhaps in a rather rambling way, some of my thoughts which have arisen while listening to a whole series of stimulating papers. The title is a quotation from John Blair's lecture: "Encounters with the Cultural Other." A lot of what we have been thinking about in the last few days, I think, has been concerned with that, and one thing that struck me was that there seems to be a curious fit between our interest in the cultural Other (and mixtures of cultures and intercultures), and our interests in the disciplinary Other, in mixtures of disciplines and in ideas of interdisciplinarity.

This raises for me some quite general questions: On the one hand we have the foregrounding of ideas of the mixing of genres, the blurring of boundaries, and one might say this also involves considerations of miscegenation and indeed of bastardy, as I suppose the sort of ultimate encounter with the Other. In one sense the encounter with the cultural Other leads to the production of something which will be labelled bastard or illegitimate. We don't have the other side of this, which is a whole series of processes of legitimisation by which the illegitimate product of the mixture of cultures is made legitimate.

It is interesting, for example, for those of us who are encountering a cultural other here in Switzerland, that the Swiss Confederation is celebrating its 700 years — a splendid example of a process of legitimization. In the British context, that highly legitimate prince the Prince of Wales recently made another of his speeches, to teachers of English in Czechoslovakia, and he had some thoughts which may interest us, but may also appal us. He says that, according to newspaper reports, it remains essential to preserve standards so that those who learn English as a foreign language can communicate, and enjoy — doubts? — the heritage of William Shakespeare and other literary figures. He goes (according to *The Guardian*, May 9, 1991) on: "It is important to guard against the danger of variants of English growing up, so that English speakers in different parts of the world could no longer communicate with one another." (He supposedly once made a speech in Pidgin in New Guinea, but he had forgotten about that). I think that could not be clearer as a condemnation of the development of Pidgins, Creoles and all these results of mixing of languages. So there we have a very clear example of anxiety about miscegenation leading to an attempted rush to legitimization.

That makes me wonder whether in our discourses we haven't also been concerned to rush rather quickly at times to legitimization. There is, of course, a scientific form of legitimization and something that I myself tend to notice — and this is the cultural Other, as far as I am concerned — when I listen to certain kinds of papers in socio-linguistics, but it also comes in certain forms of cultural studies. Our own position at the moment in literary studies, where we are thoroughly mixed up, miscegenated, and try to draw if we can some form of legitimization from our own confusion, is of course in great contrast to disciplines like certain areas of linguistics in which it seems that there is still a clear sense of the common field of work, the language in which to conduct it and also (and this is important) a direct political relevance in the work that is done.

However, there is also a very good argument, I think, for delaying, hesitating, perhaps even theorizing before one rushes to legitimization. This is one of the things that has interested me about the concept *culture* (and *cultural studies*) in the way we have looked at it. In other words: Do we see cultural studies as another discipline? Do we see it as something based on a marriage, a legitimate thing — I noted that Jim Boon in his lecture spoke of a "marriage" between literature and anthropology? Or do we see it as something which hesitates before it becomes legitimate, that remains in

this anomalous but very productive area of what we could call illegitimacy or miscegenation?

Janice Radway: I thought that I would try and put together just a few responses to the lectures given by the invited speakers to this conference. In listening to Suzanne Romaine I was struck by her notion of literacy as cargo and in particular found the notion of the pass very interesting, that anything written is considered a pass and is seen to embody a belief in the magical powers of literacy. This struck me as very interesting in the context of my research about the *Book of the Month Club*, which, as you know, is a major institution of cultural literacy in the United States. It was created in 1926. When it appeared it was much debated, and there was a great deal of vituperative comment published in literary magazines, newspapers, etc.; a large number of cartoons appeared in *The New Yorker*, making fun of the Book of the Month Club for, in general, usurping the proper and appropriate meaning of the book and of culture. In response to the Book of the Month Club and other institutional interventions like it, an entire discourse about the book began to appear in literary and political monthlies like *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic*. All of them debated the proper meaning of the book and the proper functionality of literature, that is, how literature should be defined, and what function reading had. But what is most interesting to me is that this was not confined to literary magazines. There was also a very elaborate discourse about the proper meaning of the book in women's magazines and in home decoration magazines. There were at least thirty or forty articles in the space of two years about the book as a decorative object; and there were many articles about how to purchase books and how to categorize them, many of them suggesting that one should categorize books not simply by topic or area but rather by colour. There are wonderful articles that talk about the magical properties of the book. It is not simply the Papuans of New Guinea who think of literacy as something with magical properties. *All of us do. We* are ourselves engaged in a very complicated debate about what precisely the magical properties of the pass, or the book, or culture is. It seems to me that Suzanne Romaine's lecture points to the debate we ourselves have been having about the concept of culture, its relationship to literacy and also its relationship to power.

The other thing that I found particularly useful about her lecture was the specificity with which she identified the powers in contest and the substance over which this struggle was carried out. I think that one of the

difficulties for us is that the mediations have become so complex and our relationship to the state and to civil society so complicated that it is often very difficult for us to identify precisely what our allegiances are, who we are acting in support of and whom we represent. As a consequence we are deeply embroiled in the difficulties of specifying those particular power relationships.

The conference has done a fine job of pointing out the difficulties of specifying and locating the multiple definitions of culture and literacy. I simply want to point to two concepts in Jim Boon's lecture, which I found particularly interesting: they are the notion of the *rectitude of writing* and the notion of *complex polyglossia*. It seems to me that we have constantly been vacillating between different attempts to rectify speech, to rectify writing, to discipline them in particular ways, and that we are also constantly therefore, as Patrick Parrinder has pointed out, dealing with miscegenation, dealing with the ways in which speech and communication leads beyond the properties of imprisonment or rectitude.

Suzanne Romaine: (reads passage in Pidgin), which means that I have got a bone to pick with the number-one son of the Queen, rather with what he said. But I thought this was particularly interesting in view of his comments, about two years ago, that standards of English were hopeless within Britain itself. He was complaining that basically the old refrain "good help is hard to get" in the sense that the help couldn't write proper English, and so now he is preaching this abroad too.

Not surprisingly, there is a great concern with declining standards both at home and abroad. I think it is partly a consequence of the broadening of literacy and the broadening of the concept of education. Now these things are coming within the grasp of people who, centuries ago, would not have been part of this process. Yet our ideas of standards have not widened to take into account all the diversity within these systems and that is obviously causing a lot of problems.

James Boon: I, too, have a bone to pick with the first son of the Queen (I will remind you that he read cultural anthropology at Cambridge; the late and lamented Edmund Leach was his tutor).

But just to keep the interesting commentary going: Even as we are speaking we are groping for metaphors for the kind of complexity we have in mind. I will remind you that yesterday, when I talked about literature and anthropology as marriage, I stipulated the marriage of unidentical twins as a transgressive marriage. Transgression is a very familiar figure in

a lot of the literature that I work on (which tends to be Tantric), and it is a predominant figure in politics in Bali as well. But it is still a legitimation — I like figures of legitimation if they contain a transgression as well. (I believe that I only recommended "interdisciplinary marriage" of unidentical twins. But even the image of *bastardy* is interesting, just look at the resonances attached to that term.) But the term just mentioned (and I think I know a little bit of the history of all this), *miscegenation*, which we use now, is terrible. I believe (recalling evidence from Ashley Montague, an anthropologist who has struggled against racism for a long time), *miscegenation* was coined by New York journalists in the 1850's or '60's as a joking, a parody term, to ridicule the fears of Southern racists about mixed breeding. Then the term *miscegenation* was taken up as though it were a straight term, indeed a scientific term, and laws directed against so-called *miscegenation* became a part of the different U.S. state legal systems.

But metaphors of difference and of mixing, of alloying or legitimately interrelating, are never safe, because they either prettify and sanitize things, or they "mishear" a parodic term, which is directed politically against a position being contested, taking it as straight; and they might routinize that idea as a reality, a doctrine of race and anti-*miscegenation*.

Patrick Parrinder: That's absolutely right. The terms are very difficult.

David Allerton (University of Basel): Could I say one word, in defence (without really wishing to defend him) of the Prince. I feel that what he was talking about is something we haven't talked about at all at this conference. I think honestly that the one aspect of language standards he is and a lot of other people are concerned with is simply that people grow up unable to spell. This raises the question of the relationship at a very low level between sound and writing. It also raises the question of diglossia, which I don't think we have addressed either. This is a bit tragic, considering that, perhaps not quite here, but not far away there is an area of the world, namely German-speaking Switzerland, where there is a big gap between what is spoken and what is written.

In English there is not such a big gap. Nevertheless, written English is still some distance from spoken English. Is this a significant issue and shouldn't it play a part in our considerations?

Suzanne Romaine: What do you mean by "Isn't there something that concerns us?", in what capacity?

David Allerton: Does it pose a problem in cases where there is

something like diglossia (and I believe there is diglossia in English, simply because written language is so bad a representation of spoken language)? Does that raise a cultural issue, in that it places a barrier in the way of people acquiring the standard language, which is in a way codified in the written form? Should responsible linguists, as opposed to others, ask if this is a desirable situation? In other words, I'm really asking: should we take up a position on spelling reform?

Patrick Parrinder: Can I say something as somebody who is by no stretch of the imagination a responsible linguist? It raises fascinating problems, when Suzanne Romaine says in her lecture that linguists speak of the introduction of a literate version of a language as a reduction. And Jim Boon strategically used a great deal of what, for want of a better word, we'd better call misspellings. Thus (and one can see this of course in twentieth-century experimental writing, above all in Joyce), there are all sorts of linguistic effect, which can be got through deliberate misspelling. Our anxiety about a common language, which is always spelt the same, may lead precisely to a reduction, at least from the point of view of literature and culture, because there has always been strong pressure (for obvious commercial reasons) for a common spelling. We should perhaps reserve some part of our minds for the interest or delight of variant spellings.

James Boon: I should like to interject a distinction between descriptive and prescriptive concerns about diglossia. I think of diglossia, perhaps *diglossia plus*, as the ordinary human circumstance. I don't think of it as a deviation from what could or should be a monoglossia. In Indonesia, for example, even in the places where the national language seems very close to the vernacular (a few small areas of Sumatra and a few islands off it) there is nevertheless a situation of diglossia.

As to the issue of the spelling standard, think of the effects in Third World areas. Spelling standards seem almost to be imposed in order for the next regime to turn them over. This produces terrible disruption, it also produces a rationale for updating the text books. It makes obsolete the previous printing, and can give dictionary-writers heart attacks (I actually had a colleague at Cornell who had a heart attack when the spelling system in Indonesia was changed).

But the issue of introducing a reliable spelling standard is a different issue from the kind of misspelling I look for in ritual or its equivalent. There the idea is to catch in writing some aspect of speaking that has been excluded by the spelling standard. That tension is something that,

descriptively, I want to work at ethnographically and historically. Prescriptively, I'm for spelling standards: indeed, I'm for a kind of education that teaches people how to spell, and also how to spell against that spelling. That might be utopian, but . . .

Suzanne Romaine: I think there is going to be an inevitable gap between written and spoken language, because that's in the nature of writing. It confers a special prestige on one form of language; and then, when people become literate, they come to think of that as being the real language, and the spoken as being somehow a deviation from it. Spelling reform is not going to solve any problems, because it's not going to erase that gap. You're just going to create a different kind of gap, no matter what spelling system you impose.

The imposition of standardization on any language is itself an act of power, by those who have the authority to impose those kinds of standards.

David Allerton: If we're going to have standardization anyway, if you are going to have something imposed, it might be just as well something which at least reflects some people's spoken language rather than nobody's.

Suzanne Romaine: Well, whose is it going to reflect? That's the power element of it. It's got to reflect somebody's, just as the very choice of what language you are going to use in a multilingual society is going to favour somebody, and not others. There is always going to be that gap. In any case, the spoken language is always going to change, and no matter how close that match is at any one stage, it is always going to deviate, and the deviation can grow larger at any time.

Richard Waswo (University of Geneva): Since the beginning of the reduction of vernacular languages to grammars in the sixteenth century, it was apparent both to English and French literate people that their spelling was not sane. And the two languages have been filled since then with efforts to impose some kind of simplified spelling. I would like to ask the linguists, is there in history a successful case of this ever occurring?

David Allerton: This happened in this century in Dutch for example.

Suzanne Romaine: This depends on how you measure success. I mean, certainly spelling changes have been imposed, and if you're subject to schooling, then you got to spell in that way. But of course what you do when you are out of school is another matter.

In developing countries the standardization of spelling may originally have to do with the creation of a lingua franca. But I was thinking, too, of

subsequent changes to spelling in Malaysia, in Indonesia, and also in the case of the French-based Creole spoken in Haiti, where there was a big debate over the orthography: was it going to use the French orthography, or was it going to deviate from that? Eventually, there were modifications to both of those alternatives. You can say that they were successfully imposed, in the sense that once the government decides that is what is going to be taught in the schools, that is what is taught in the schools. But that is only one part of the picture.

James Boon: These spelling reforms in Dutch were left deposited elsewhere as well, in Indonesia, for example. When the Dutch got rid of those cumbersome oe's, for example, they left them deposited in the orthography for Malay or Bahsaa Indonesia. Those oe's that remained therefore marginalizing a spelling-system in the Third World. There was a catch-up move on Indonesia's part, to the new clarified Dutch standard, but on the other hand they wanted the spelling in Bahsaa Indonesia to be distinguished from the spelling of Malay. These are two national languages that want to mark their difference.

To me spelling standards are part of power relations as well, but they have also moved spelling, writing, printing into other speech universes and other areas of writing. Indonesian is a funny language to be a national language (as all languages are, as *national* languages), one odd advantage of Indonesian was not being Javanese. Had Javanese become the national language you got a lot of Sumatrans, not to mention others, who would not have stood for that. There is a story like this about every national language.

But also there happened to be a tradition of, as Suzanne Romaine talked, "secularized writing" in Indonesian; you did not have that in Javanese in the terms she uses; that's because Sumatrans were doing much of the political writing in the late colonialist and early nationalist period. As to the notion of having a body of material that is secular, I use the term "secular" with quotation-marks only, because the material involves ideology, or a religion of nationalism. As a trade-language "Indonesian" held a lot of advantages, but also disadvantages.

Fritz Gysin (University of Berne): I have a totally different question. Two people have mentioned the *magical properties of the text*, and I was beginning to wonder, what this phrase actually means. Is this a matter of power only, or is there something else involved? We are talking about the difference between speech and writing that is often something magical, something that gives you some kind of power. We have not talked about

what kind of power this is. If it is political or economic power, it fits in with the current discourse. But do we still feel certain religious or quasi-religious issues at work?

Patrick Parrinder: Well, we've got very broad problems of secularity and secularization. What does it mean if we say that nowadays we live in a secular culture? Is there such a thing as a really secular culture? I must say that here I am attracted towards a kind of anthropology so ancient that I am sure it will disgust Jim Boon, the theory of Tylor on primitive culture, who talks about culture in terms of the power of survivals. It seems to me that you do not just dismiss the kinds of cultural energies that went into religion over the ages by saying that we now live in a secular society. It's quite likely that these energies have displaced themselves. There are perhaps magical functions in culture (putting *magical* in quotation-marks, of course) which are now taken by other things.

You were speaking specifically about literary texts, and secrecy and openness, but it seems to me that very often, if one wants to try to understand for oneself the genesis of literary texts, one can do so in terms of a process of deviation, of speaking around the problem, of obstacles to direct statement, of the need to circumvent them, and I am sure one could do that in terms of one or two of the writers who have been spoken about in this conference, like Melville; certainly one could do it for a writer like Conrad. Indeed, I think it is almost a precondition of being accepted as a major modern writer that interpreters will find a sort of deep biographical plot, a kind of secret biography inscribed in the texts. This has much to do with the way in which being a writer in a literary sense works today. It is to do with a particular kind of individualism in twentieth century writing, where each writer has, as it were, a different kind of personal signature in his writings.

Janice Radway: I can respond to that in the context of the American situation at the moment, in particular to the notion of secrecy. In the last six months the debate has escalated over the question of political correctness and the canon. I think the anger and the resources that have been mobilized in this debate are evidence that literature and literary texts are endowed with all manner of, in quotation marks, *magical* and *transcendental* properties; even though that is not often specified it seems to be carried along with them. One of the aspects of the discourse, being developed by the New Right, is the sense that they are exposing to view the terrible machinations of the political left, who, hidden away from public

discourse, in the ivory tower of the university, have been doing all sorts of nefarious things with English classes. So they speak this language of transparency and suggest that now you can see what's been going on, before your very eyes; we are making it visible to you precisely so that it can be rectified, so that it can be stamped out. And it is done because the property of literature is extraordinarily valuable and there is much at stake in who controls it, what narratives get told.

Balz Engler (University of Basel): If literary works then have these magical properties (with or without quotation marks), in what position does this place us as teachers of literature and as critics of literature?

James Boon: I cannot not answer that, but I would like to revise slightly the construction of literary works having magical properties, and put the matter this way: the edges between writing and speaking have magical properties. My paper tries to bring "magic" in from Marcel Mauss, along with the activities and politics, that are part of language life. Speaking something as insider language necessarily produces a boundary between that and a language outsiders to that language use; and that very movement seems to me to involve magical properties. Also I want to take very seriously religious texts, and missionizing (this is — I am an anthropologist — not to be confused with supporting missionizing). I want to think about the translation activities of missionizing. That was a major part of expansive European influence in the world. The conviction that there is something efficacious in those words, and the different ways in which that conviction is enacted in the process of translating Scripture into the vernacular, is enormously important. In Suzanne Romaine's paper we had that extraordinarily complicated context of Catholic missionaries in New-Guinea translating into Tok-Pisin, and (correct me if I'm wrong) Lutheran missionaries translating, as Luther wants to, into vernaculars. And if you zero in on that context, it appears like a repetition of a moment in European history. Tok-Pisin is a kind of Vulgate in the Catholic mission, with the Lutheran mission producing vernacular Scripture.

I've watched proselytization by Baptist missionaries in Bali (in Bali there has been very little missionary work going on). I'm talking about the scene of translating a foreign language into their language, along with the beliefs that are entailed. The strategy of the Baptist missionaries of about ten years ago was to get the spoken word heard by the Balinese. The tactic was to sell as many little record players as you could that cost 200 rupees, because the value of the transaction means there is value placed on the

Gospel of Matthew in Indonesian. The missionaries watch as the Balinese listen to the Gospel in Indonesian for the first time, they assume. The number of converts is calculated as the number of Balinese who have heard that sound emitted from the record-player. As an anthropologist, I want to understand something about Baptist convictions about the heard word, and understand whatever is going on on the Balinese side, perhaps a combination of irony and mystification.

Patrick Parrinder: Well, we were asked, what are we doing as teachers of literature, and I think one can't altogether dump this question and pretend it has not been asked. We have a whole series of historical explanations, of statements of faith about what we were once doing as teachers of literature. This is part of our problem today. Once upon a time we were missionaries, now we are not so happy perhaps about missions. More recently we have been interpreters, and I think particularly in the context of interculture and teaching native speakers of one language the literary works of another language, the interpreting function is going to be very important. I think we should also remember that interpretation is not entirely a secular function. It is very clearly something which historically emerges in relation to religious and scriptural texts. Then more recently we have other theories of what we're doing, which have considerable intellectual appeal. We are constant self-questioners, we are theorists, we are cultural subversives. And this I think says a lot about the self-image of those of us who put these theories forward.

But they are never quite convincing because we always have a double function, it seems to me. On the one hand, we are clearly, in teaching literature, concerned with transmission and reproduction, indeed one might even say with the consolidation of values which already inhere in literary works. On the other hand, we are also concerned with what I would call iconoclasm, with changing values and refusing values, and hopefully with recreation.

James Boon: I'll interject a thought about what we should do as teachers of (or perhaps I should call myself a teacher between) literature. I try to encourage students to be patient readers. That's a very tough assignment; the distractions from patient reading are almost insurmountable.

Hartwig Isernhagen (University of Basel): . . . and in the process you sacralize the text.

James Boon: Well, I confess myself to be a hermeneut, often thought of

as a post-structuralist.

Neil Forsyth (University of Lausanne): I very much enjoyed being asked to think again about literacy and secrets and magic, and wondering about whether we are a kind of covert priesthood; I think this is an important issue. But I wonder if I could still pose the questions of power like this: Isn't teaching English in an anglophone context, where indeed the risk of being corrupted into a kind of covert priesthood is quite strong, quite different from teaching English in the situation that we do, where English is not quite spoken. It seems to me that the metaphor of Suzanne Romaine's lecture makes a certain amount of sense here. In a sense we risk something quite similar, being the bearers of English as "cargo." Obviously many kinds of things come with English as a burden or a benefit.

Suzanne Romaine: A language obviously carries its cultural baggage with it. I don't think you can teach a language completely divorced from all the associations and connotations that it brings with it. And the fact is, in many parts of the world the culture that goes with that language is despised, but people still realize that there are instrumental reasons for learning that language, and they learn it. So I don't know how to separate the two.

John Blair (University of Geneva): Because English is the language we're concerned with, I find it hard to talk about the culture that comes with it. I'm thinking about Papua-New-Guinea: I suppose that it is primarily Australian people who are there, I'm not sure. . .

Suzanne Romaine: A larger anglophone culture.

John Blair: There are so many cultures and intercultures that go with the English language that my problem is not keeping culture out, but wanting to know which culture it is, or how to situate the language in relation to culture.

Suzanne Romaine: Now, that is a valid point. You should really say "cultures." But I think also that there is validity in talking about an Anglo-Saxon tradition. Some of the views that I was talking about earlier, the *one language—one nation*, is obviously part of a larger European rhetoric, and even though it's over-simplified, it is still appropriate to speak of that as European baggage that the colonizers brought with them. It was at that general, and admittedly over-simplified level that I was referring to a language having cultural baggage.

Gayle Wurst (University of Fribourg): When I was listening to Suzanne Romaine's lecture I was struck by the fact that there is more and more an

equation in Europe that English equals jobs. If you learn English you have access to the magic of technology, like computers. And I'm struck again and again when I walk down the street to see jackets and bags and sacks of all sorts that have English words on them, which really have almost no meaning. They are pretended clubs, or all kinds of odd things, and they are incorporated into clothing or accessories like the tin can was incorporated into the headdress of the man from Papua-New Guinea we saw in *First Contact*. I think that the people who wear them are saying I am an in-person.

I ask myself the question if those of us who teach English in a non-English-speaking environment are involved in one of the largest cargo-cults of history. And what is our responsibility? We seem to think that what happened in Papua-New-Guinea was morally reprehensible to a certain extent. How do we see our roles? What do we think about our jobs?

Patrick Parrinder: Well, I think that one of the delights of a good conference is the way in which metaphors take life, and spread and develop. I think we are being asked to comment on the broad question of whether English has become the centre of a cargo-cult. I find this a brilliant idea, but I also find it extremely difficult to comment on. We are here as visiting speakers, we're part of the cargo.

Gayle Wurst: I see that we are all hesitating, we want to theorize about questions of illegitimacy, miscegenation. And yet, I have demands made on me every day. My students want to acquire the baggage.

Janice Radway: Your articulation, Gayle, made me return to a reaction I had during Suzanne Romaine's lecture. I wrote down that this is a local version of the global demand for English, and I was horrified by that. It does seem to me that it's important to de-essentialize the notion of English, and in doing so we might think of the activity of teaching English to non-native speakers of English in another way: by distributing English among contending populations you help to ensure that this very valuable property, historically, is not the province of one set of people with particularly over-determined kinds of power. Teaching English to contending populations and people who are politically going to contend over the power of English-speaking worlds can, in fact, be a very useful act.

Suzanne Romaine: It's precisely that which Prince Charles is reacting against.

James Boon: We want to de-imperialize English. But I felt my remark just sounded like an imperial voice: "*we want to de-imperialize English!*" As

if I am a kind of proprietor of English. But *we*, if I can use that proprietary voice, don't have to worry about that. The receivers of English are perfectly capable, in fact very gifted at, de-imperializing English. Therefore, "they" would not just talk Pidgin, though obviously they'd know Pidgin. But even that more standardized English that becomes New-Guinea-English, is an English that is not under the control and scrutiny of the Queen, or Webster's. And that move in New Guinea, toward having English (Australian?) as a national language, implies resistance to, say, neighboring Indonesian. That assent itself plays an imperial game, but in a somewhat different register than before.

But I want to say one other thing. I am not very worried about "pure" motives for learning another language, or becoming adept at a standard language. I think an instrumental motive, to learn that language, say, to get a job, is probably the major continuing motive in the history of either learning a standard language, or learning a second language. But interestingly, that motive does not confine or even necessarily control, the consequences of making the effort to learn that language. The language can become much more for the learner than a means to an end.

Patrick Parrinder: Well, there are various questions there, like who controls the jobs in this society. I am a bit worried about the rather comfortable way in which we can sit here, having been thinking about cultures like Papua-New-Guinea, and say we want to de-imperialize English, disregarding the agencies which are asserting a centralized English. I'm thinking of television, movies, etc., which are enormously powerful forces. They are, I would have thought, holding together a common English. In fact, when Prince Charles speaks one thinks of the Decline-of-the-Roman-Empire scenario and the creation of the Romance languages. Interestingly he would have preferred Imperial Latin to all the diverse beauties of the Romance languages. But I also sometimes feel that if the Roman Empire had reached that point where television, the movies, and so on, would have been invented, then maybe we would all be speaking Latin. There is a very powerful, continuing, centralizing process through these technological means of reproduction and representation.

Richard Waswo: But there is nothing monolithic about the English reproduced in movies and videos and rock songs. It seems to me that the situation is just as Janice Radway describes it: Those are Englishes.

Patrick Parrinder: But there is a form of reduction going on.

Robert Rehder (University of Fribourg): There is an older reason for

learning foreign languages: it takes you out of your culture. People learn languages for different reasons, and one reason for many of our students is, they want a view of another culture which is to a certain extent from the inside. And this means that you see yourself in a new way. Learning a foreign language makes you aware of your culture as a culture.

Brian Gibbons (University of Zurich): It is also true that for most native English speakers the English of Shakespeare is a foreign language. A foreign language reminds you that you are foreign. The experience of being in it is also a way of discovering your origin, and your condition. It is like an escape, learning a foreign language, and I think that for those who can't speak well, studying English enables them to become very articulate, they are given power, which they could not otherwise have.

I think people should recognize the hard politics of that. That is what higher education in English studies in England seems to be about. It empowers people; they can have more control over their circumstances than they otherwise could. And literature is part of their history.

Gayle Wurst: It seems to me that we're in a situation where the acquisition of English is not like the acquisition of any other foreign language in non-native English-speaking countries. There seems to be a particular empowering with the acquiring of English, whether American English or British English or any English. It is a lingua franca, and those who do have access to English think that this will enable them to be a member of the élite. It's a pass to something else.