

## **Language and Geographical Space**

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## **1. Introduction**

My goal in this chapter is twofold: to encourage readers to think critically about terms such as “geography” and “space”, and to provide an overview of the ways in which geographers have used these terms and others like them. Linguistics and geography have ridden the same political and intellectual currents over the past two centuries. During that time, linguists concerned with variation and change have imagined our object of inquiry – language – in various ways: as structure or process; as relatively orderly and predictable or fundamentally stochastic and unpredictable; as autonomous or distributed; as a cognitive or a social phenomenon. We have paid less and more belated attention to defining the variables we use to account for the distribution of linguistic forms across time and space, variables such as “society”, “gender”, “age”, or “region”. Investigating how geographers have imagined the object of their inquiry enriches our sense of the conceptual possibilities suggested by the phrase “geographical space”. Thus this chapter traces the history of geographical inquiry with a particular eye to the parallel history of dialectology and sociolinguistics. Where there are explicit, cited links between sociolinguistics and geography, I point to some of them, although I do not claim to be tracing all of the ways in which geographers and sociolinguists have drawn on each other’s work.

## **2. “The science of empire”: Geography to 1918**

In British and American geography departments, the principal division is between “physical” and “human” geography. Physical geographers overlap with geologists,

ecologists, hydrologists, biologists, chemists, and physicists in their interest in landforms and the flora and fauna they support. Human geographers overlap with archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and economists (and occasionally with linguists) in their interest in how humans interact with the environment, shaping “the world” as the world shapes us. I concentrate in this chapter on human geography. But the two branches have common origins.

The 16<sup>th</sup>-century European transition from feudalism to capitalism both enabled and was enabled by the development of a trading system linking Europe with resources in Africa and the “New World” (Heffernan 2003; on the history of geography in general, see also Livingstone 1992; Dunbar 2002). This became possible in the context of advances in navigation technology. Early Modern geographers helped develop such technology as well as techniques for map-making and systems for describing the flora, fauna, geology, and peoples of the rest of the world, some of which would become economic resources.

In Britain, geography began to acquire credibility as an academic discipline during the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Geographers began to present their work in more scientific ways, and they played a role in the intellectual conversation of the day about the relative merits of societies and civilizations. Geography was no longer seen as just a by-product of navigation. The origin of this shift in focus is sometimes dated to 1769, the year of James Cook’s first Pacific exploration (Heffernan 2003). But academic

geography was bound, often tightly, to the imperial project (Godlewska and Smith 1994; Bell, Butlin, and Heffernan 1994).

The link between academic geography and the aristocracy was forged in part through the rise of the aristocratic “grand tour” of the world, which often included observing, describing, and sometimes collecting artifacts and people. The grand tour helped spark the development of geographical societies which institutionalized and underwrote journeys of exploration. These societies were founded by wealthy businessmen with economic interests in the findings of such journeys, in collaboration with aristocratic amateur scientists and academic geographers. The first such society was the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, founded in London in 1788. This was followed by the Société de Géographie de Paris in 1821, the Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin in 1828, and, in 1830, the British Royal Geographic Society (RGS), which became especially influential. The RGS’s “fellows” were mostly amateurs, although some professional scientists were included. The society provided funding and equipment and set goals for the journeys they sponsored. The RGS was involved in all of the major 19<sup>th</sup>-century journeys of exploration in Africa. The maps and other results of these journeys fuelled the later 19<sup>th</sup> century European rush to colonize Africa, both as a way of getting access to new raw materials at the lowest possible cost and as a way to gain political influence in Europe.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the shift from often amateur “Wissenschaft” or knowledge-building to expert “science” (Woolgar 1988), geography was institutionalized

in academia, particularly in Germany and France. One argument for this was that training in geography would help inculcate patriotism. Nineteenth-century geography was exemplified by the German Alexander von Humboldt, who “sought to establish a systematic science of geography that could analyse the natural and the human worlds together” (Heffernan 2003: 7). He was the brother of Willhelm von Humboldt, whose linguistic theory was linked with 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism and nationalism in similar ways. Like his brother, W. von Humboldt sought to describe the essential link between peoples, landscapes, and language by virtue of which shared language was seen as one of the “pillars” of nationalist theory. According to Willhelm, each language has its own elements of “innere Sprachform”, “a peculiar property of the nation or the group that speaks it” (Robins 1979: 174-175).

By the end of the century, British geographer Hugh Robert Mill could claim that geography was “absolutely essential for our well-being, and even for the continuance of the [British] nation as a Power among the states of the world” (Mill 1901, quoted in Mitchell 2000: 17). Such a claim was based on the environmental determinism suggested by the von Humboldts and further developed in neo-Lamarckian thought. Neo-Lamarckism was based on geneticist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s theory that acquired characteristics could be inherited by an organism’s offspring. In geography, this idea was used to argue that environmental conditions create habits which are biologically transmitted to subsequent generations. Neo-Lamarckian environmental determinism holds, in other words, that there is an organic relationship between people and place, such that the natural, inherited ability of a people to better themselves, shaped by their physical

environment, determines the ability of a state to prosper. Since European and European-American peoples came from climates and continents that were particularly likely to produce positive behavioral traits, their intervention in parts of the world with less advantageous climates and physical environments (hotter, more tropical places, for example) was thought to be justified, if not morally imperative.

Environmental determinism (or “scientific racism”, as its detractors label it) continued to shape geography in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, geographer Ellen Churchill Semple (1911) articulated the theory most influentially. But by the 1920s the theory collapsed, in part because it failed to provide an accurate account of variation across space, and partly because it was no longer needed to justify imperialism and colonization (Mitchell 2000: 19).

### **3. Region and culture**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the “blank spots” on the European and Euro-American maps of the Earth mainly filled, intellectuals feared that the 20<sup>th</sup> century would bring a new era of conflict. World War I fulfilled some of those fears. The organic relationship between peoples, places, and languages was called into question by attempts by nation-states to conquer others, and the brutality of the war made many feel that human life was essentially disorderly. Geographers played important roles during the war, particularly in developing maps for intelligence work, and geography played a larger role in British and American school curricula after the war than it had before. Post-war

disillusionment with the idea that the nation-state was the natural condition for global peace led to a new concern with region.

One approach, called the “science of regions”, is associated particularly with Richard Hartshorne (1939). This descriptive approach to physical geography continued the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and earlier tradition of cataloguing the characteristics of “undiscovered” places, and it both developed from and created links between geographers and their colleagues in geology and other physical sciences. In response to the failure of environmental determinism, another group of geographers turned to culture to explain regional variation in human behavior. This approach was pioneered by American Carl Sauer in “The Morphology of Landscape” (Sauer 1925). For Sauer, “culture, working with and on nature, created the contexts of life” (Mitchell 2000: 21). Human life ways are not shaped directly by nature, as environmental determinists claim. Rather, by means of agriculture, architecture, and other activities, humans shape places into the landscapes that form the environments for their lives and the object of study for geographers. The activities that shape landscape are cultural activities, determined by human societies’ ideas about how to use and live in nature. Landscape is thus a manifestation of the culture that produced it; to find out about local culture, geographers read the landscape. So while it is important to describe the processes that create the natural (i.e. pre-human) environment, this is preliminary to the job of exploring cultural landscapes, which should be the primary task of geography.

Mitchell (2000: 22-23) links Sauer's work with that of 19<sup>th</sup> century German linguist Johann von Herder. Herder attributed the unique characteristics of languages not directly to nature but to the expression of the "spirit of a culture" (23); cultural variation was due not to the physical environment but to the relationships people created with places as they interacted with them. Thus the authentic roots of the nation-state can best be seen in vernacular practices such as folklore, folk music, folk poetry, and fairy-tales. The influence of these ideas can be seen clearly in 19<sup>th</sup> century European dialectology, particularly in the form of people like the Grimm brothers, who were both folklorists and students of language change.

But Sauer and his students were motivated less by 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic nostalgia for the authentic, unitary roots of the natural nation than by the sense that Western civilization was destroying what was particular about places and peoples, erasing the differences that would allow geographers and others to trace human history through the distribution of human artifacts and traditions. Influenced by anthropologists Boas and Kroeber, Sauer claimed that the job of geography was to "[chart] the distribution over the earth of the arts and artifacts of man, to learn whence they came and how they spread" (Sauer 1952: 1, quoted in Mitchell 2000: 25). Sauer's rejection of "causal geography" and his focus on the landscape, an object of study that no other discipline claimed, helped make geography more respectable as a science (Mitchell 2000: 26-29).

Like his colleagues in anthropology, Sauer went beyond the description of landscape. He attempted to explain the natural and cultural processes that create the meanings of human environments. For Sauer, cultural landscapes are constantly created and recreated, and geographers seek to trace their histories by describing such things as human artifacts, population patterns, building types, systems of production – and systems of communication. Geography textbooks thus often mention the work of the dialect atlas surveys about regional differences in lexicon as they reflect differences in culture and its interaction with nature. Just as do regional patterns of barn-building (Ensminger 1992), regional patterns of word usage track differences in how people interact with the physical environment.

Other regional geographers were less concerned with the processes of divergence and change that underlay regional differences, and their work sometimes consisted of descriptive compendia of observations about regions and their landscapes. This gave rise to one critique of Sauerian regional geography: it was too concerned with material artifacts and too mistrustful of modernity, hence overly focused on the rural, the primitive, and the archaic. Similar anti-modernist sentiment can be said to underpin (explicitly or not) the American dialect atlas projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are vulnerable to the same critique. For example, both the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* in the 1930s and 1940s and Ensminger's exploration of Pennsylvania barn types were published as or well after the kinds of regionally-based cultural differentiation they describe were beginning to break down due to such

influences as radio, motorized vehicles, urbanization, and the standardization of agricultural practices and vocabularies.

#### **4. Superorganicism and social-scientific geography**

Another critique of Sauer's approach had to do with its use of the concept "culture". Because he was in the end more interested in the effects of culture than with the processes that led to these effects, Sauer relied on a common-sense, uncritical understanding of this idea (Mitchell 2000, 29). This critique was addressed in Wilbur Zelinsky's (1973) work, first published in the early 1970s. Zelinsky, a student of Sauer's, attempted to define "culture" more systematically. For Zelinsky, culture could be seen as (1) "an assemblage of learned behavior", or, more abstractly, (2) "a structured, traditional set of patterns for behavior, a code or template, for ideas and acts", or, more abstractly yet, (3) "a totality which appears to be a superorganic entity living and changing according to a ... set of internal laws" (Zelinsky 1973: 71-72). The idea of culture as superorganic, existing "above and beyond its participating members" (40-41), means that individual behavior does not predict culture or vice-versa.

To describe culture in this sense is to describe what unifies it, the "internal laws" which operate behind the diversity in behavior that can actually be observed. Zelinsky acknowledged that modernization tends to make individuals freer to decide how and where to live and that "spurious" or "synthetic" regions created by sports fans or public relations professionals, like "the Steeler Nation", "Chicagoland", or "Pennsylvania Dutch

Country”, can sometimes seem more real than more authentic regions do. However, Zelinsky’s model of culture as superorganic fits best with the “traditional region”, the region into which people are born and in which they live their lives and in which “an intimate symbiotic relationship between man and land develops over many centuries, one that creates indigenous modes of thought and action, a distinctive visible landscape, and a form of human ecology specific to the locality” (Zelinsky 1973: 110).

Critical geographer Don Mitchell (2002: 30-33) suggests that Zelinsky’s view of culture as superorganic was a liberal reaction to the conflict and fragmentation of the 1960s, an attempt to reassert a fundamental unity underlying differences in behavior. Critiques of superorganicism point to how, by reifying culture and making it agentive, the theory positions the individual as an automaton. Critics like James Duncan (1980) ask how culture is constructed through human activity. Echoing many sociolinguists, they wonder how culture actually works in human society and life.

With increased state regulation of national economies and the increasing professionalization of business in the post-WWII years, many academic disciplines also “professionalized”, making new connections with government, industry, and the military in return for new sources of research funding (Woolgar 1988; Johnston 2003; see Johnston 1997 on geography after 1945). The time was right for the emergence of new ways of working that could produce “scientific” information about human behavior, and disciplines like economics, political science, and sociology became more influential as they turned increasingly to quantitative “social-scientific” methods, and to the research

questions such methods could best answer. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, some geographers began to re-orient their work towards social science. They liked the rigor of social scientific methods and thought that scientific rigor required quantitative methods (Gregory 1962). They also realized that quantitative research would raise geography's status.

The quantitative approaches to geographical inquiry that became dominant during this period were known as "locational analysis" or "spatial science". They drew on models from economics and other social sciences, including assumptions like the principle of least effort and that of rational choice – the assumptions, that is, that people will do the things that require the least effort and best serve their interests. Widely used textbooks that brought such ideas into geography from economics, sociology, and the like included Haggett (1965) and Morrill (1970). One influential theory that drew on social-scientific models was "central place theory" (Christaller [1933]1996; see also Berry 1967). Central place theory assumes that potential consumers moving through space want to minimize their time and effort and business owners want to maximize consumers' spending and the rate at which the consumer population turns over. The resulting model describes the ideal arrangement in space of smaller and larger central places that function as business and service centers.

Sociolinguists have drawn explicitly on models of spatial flow and diffusion from quantitative human geography. (For a useful overview of this work, see Bailey et al. 1993). The most influential model from the point of view of sociolinguistics has been

that of Torsten Hägerstrand ([1953]1967). Location theory is concerned with the simulation and modeling of processes of change across space, and it has been applied to various patterns of change, including the spread of disease. Hägerstrand's "gravity model" of hierarchical change was adopted by Trudgill (1974) in his work in Norway and by Callary (1975) in a study of the spread of urban speech forms in Illinois, U.S.A. Bailey et al. (1993) and Horvath & Horvath (2001) have also used elements of location theory to account for "contra-hierarchical" patterns of change and for "space effects" and "place effects".

In Hägerstrand's view, "innovation spreads in a community through a network of face-to-face interpersonal communication such that the likelihood of adoption at a given site is higher when it is close to a site of previous adoption" (Yapa 1996: 238). The assumption underlying this model is that interaction becomes less frequent as a function of distance. Diffusion can also be blocked by such things as economic and class differences or geographical factors that make face-to-face communication less likely. There are also amplifiers of diffusion, such as tightly knit social networks or population density. In general, according to Rogers (1983), the factors that influence diffusion across space include the phenomenon itself (for a phonological change, this might include whether it is a merger or a split), communicative networks, distance, time, and social structure. One effect of the need for face-to-face interaction is that innovations can either move from cities to suburbs to rural areas, or bypass the rural areas near cities, "cascading" to further-away urban centers where city dwellers are more likely to have

contacts. Both are types of “hierarchical” diffusion, models of the spread of change that begins in “central places”.

The social-scientific, quantitative “revolution” in geography was codified by David Harvey in a 1969 textbook (Harvey 1969). But by the 1970s, Harvey, along with other geographers, had begun to look to Marxist theory for a better understanding of the social inequality that so often serves as a barrier to spatial diffusion (Harvey 1973; 1982). Location theory paid too little attention, it was thought, to social structures and social systems. As Johnston explains it (2003: 62): “By reducing all decision-making to economic criteria, subject to immutable ‘laws’ regarding least-costs, profit-maximization, and distance-minimizing, geographers, it was claimed, were ignoring (even denigrating) the role of culture and individuality in human conditioning and behavior”. One of the most influential critics of social-scientific, quantitative geography was Derek Gregory (1985), who pointed out that location theory presupposes that each member of a society has the same likelihood of adopting change, assuming contact with it. In particular, quantitative geographers’ “laws” were thought to describe, and thus help perpetuate, the capitalist status quo.

One important reaction to the critique was L. A. Brown’s (1981) “market and infrastructure perspective”, a method for paying systematic attention to differences in access to resources. Studies taking this more socially conscious perspective came together with studies of the diffusion of modernization from anthropology, sociology, and political science. One such model is that of Lakshman Yapa (1996), who proposes a way

of talking about innovation based on the idea that what spreads from place to place is not simply information but “a nexus of production relations and associated innovation bias”.

## **5. The 1960s onwards: Towards new paradigms**

Just as in many other social-scientific and humanistic disciplines, quantitative approaches began to be questioned during the later 1960s and 1970s. New or newly discovered strands of philosophy and social theory were brought to the table, many with origins in 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy and political theory. Geographers skeptical of the static, consensual quality of social-scientific models began to explore Marxist and neo-Marxist social theory, with its focus on power, class struggle, and change. Feminist geographers including Gillian Rose (1993) and Suzanne Mackenzie (1989) moved beyond describing how capitalism pins individuals into places along an economic axis, describing “positionality” along multiple social dimensions including that of gender and theorizing identity in terms of performance rather than social determination. Feminists’ attention to the hybridity, mutability, and particularity of identity led to a more generally postmodern geography (Gregory 1989; Soja 1989; N. Duncan 1996). Others turned to the discourse-centered philosophy of Michel Foucault, exploring how place and space are socially constructed via a variety of knowledge-building practices. Methodologically, all these approaches suggested that qualitative, particularistic research aimed at describing social process and practices needed to supplement or even replace quantitative work aimed at making generalizations about the outcomes of such processes.

In the two sections that follow, I focus on two of the post-1960s approaches to geography that have found direct application in work about language and place: Marxist and neo-Marxist geography and humanistic geography. I then touch on their common concern with the ways in which places are created and their meanings shared through discourse, sketching some current approaches that draw on Foucauldian thought.

### **5.1. Marxist-influenced geography**

In the U.K., Marxist and then feminist “cultural studies” (first institutionalized at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) began to influence geographers in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Jackson 1980; Cosgrove 1983). What Keith Cosgrove called “radical cultural geography” required increased attention to issues such as race, gender, power, dominance (for geographers, often enacted in the control of space), and the production of “social space”. It also encouraged renewed interest in landscape in the Sauerian sense, but with a more direct focus on diversity and conflict in the creation and regimentation of landscape.

Edward L. Soja (1989) traces the beginning of “critical human geography” to the work of the French Marxist scholar Henri Lefebvre ([1974]1991). According to Lefebvre, the production of space is a consequence of modern capitalism. Space is *produced*, in Lefebvre’s sense, when it is the result of labor; the production of space is contrasted with its creation by nature. When a space is a product, it can be reproduced and it takes on the characteristics of an object. For example, it can be bought and sold.

Spaces that are produced may bear traces of how they were produced – how the original, natural raw material was modified. “One might say”, according to Lefebvre, “that practical activity writes upon nature, albeit in a scrawling hand” (117). But such traces tend to fade, and produced spaces eventually tend to become detached from the conditions under which they were produced, including the labor involved. The processes that “naturalize” produced space Lefebvre calls “forgetfulness” or “mystification”. People forget, for example, what residential neighborhoods looked like before they were developed; various practices at home and at school encourage children to think of the neighborhood as the natural environment for life and discourage them from wondering about its history. Eventually, physical traces of the neighborhood’s production out of farmland or forest – flattened hills or artificial contours, non-native trees and flowers, new roads and driveways –become invisible, part of a new “natural” background. The study of the history of space, then, looks at how the “spatio-temporal rhythms of nature” are transformed by “social practice” (Lefebvre 1991: 117).

Space can be “appropriated” or “dominated” by human activity. The appropriation of space occurs when space is minimally modified to serve the needs of humans. This may result in a structure – a hut or an igloo, for example – whose form stays close to what the raw materials dictate. Space is dominated, on the other hand, when it is transformed by modern technology which introduces new forms, which are often rectilinear, closed, emptied, and sterilized. A fort or a highway would exemplify the domination of space via technological modes of production. Lefebvre claims that most appropriation of space in the modern era also involves its domination (164-168).

The terms *space* and *place* and their derivatives have had many uses in geography. In general, space is seen as the raw material for the construction, by human societies, of landscape, or, more abstractly, place. But geographical theories differ on whether it is possible to speak of space independent of human activity. For those who carry social constructivism to its extreme, everything we observe is seen through one cultural lens or another, so it makes no sense to try to describe pre-cultural spaces. Geographers like Soja (1989) and J. Nicholas Entrikin (1991) come down in the middle, claiming that humans' space (or, for Soja, "spatiality") is always interconnected with the "physical space of material nature" and the "mental space of cognition and representation" (Soja 1989: 120). Entrikin similarly speaks of the "betweenness" of place, partly physical, but always also partly the result of social activity. The focus of Marxist geography is, however, on the social process through which human spaces are created, maintained, struggled over, and for Marxists, these processes are massively shaped by economic relations and their historical residue.

Sociolinguist David Britain (1977; 2005) draws on the work of Marxist-influenced geographers to add explanatory detail to the more abstract model of social networks that Lesley Milroy (1987) and others have used in describing processes of language change. Research by geographer John Urry (1985) for example, shows how social relations and spatial structures are connected in different ways depending on the local economic and political system. Nineteenth-century capitalism, in England, led to the foundation of towns near natural resources like coal and iron. These towns attracted

laborers, who needed inexpensive housing near where they worked; the resulting row houses led to new social relations among members of the working class, including, perhaps, denser, more multiplex social networks than they experienced in the countryside where they came from.

Beginning in the 1980s, critics of “radical” Marxist geography began to claim that Marxist approaches were too deterministic and too dependent on a static model of social structure as shaped by an unchanging set of economic relations between labor and capital. These geographers “reemphasized the need for more sophisticated conceptions of the forces shaping people’s subjective experiences, of the role of these experiences in shaping people’s practices and struggles, and of the significance of subjective knowledge in scientific accounts of social change” (Chouinard 1996: 389-390). Doreen Massey’s (1984) “critical realism” is considered a classic formulation of this position. According to Massey, there are general tendencies, in a capitalist economic system, for socio-spatial relations to take certain forms, but the particular processes that lead to these relations are implemented by individuals. As a result, both the situation and the individual actor are changed. In other words, there is a continuous interplay between “structure” and “agency”, terms drawn from sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984), who calls this dialectic process “structuration”. Methodologically, for Massey, this means that a geographer can explain particular locational events but not make general laws. Geographers Allan Pred (1984; 1990) and Nigel Thrift (1991) were particularly influential in bringing structuration theory into geography.

Drawing on social theorists like Zigmunt Bauman (1992), who suggest that the mass media are now among the main technologies for the production and distribution of culture, some neo-Marxist geographers have explored how the media function in contests over the meaning of space. Robert D. Sack (1988, cited in Entrikin 1991) shows how advertising can make strategic use of (and help perpetuate) nostalgia for neighborhood, community, or region. Sociolinguists have begun to notice that linguistic forms people think of as local can be used in such advertising, and in other planned attempts to capture the “heritage” or “authentic” aspects of places (Beal 1999), and that these uses may have ramifications for the trajectory of linguistic change.

Critics of Marxist-influenced geography included feminists such as Mackenzie (1989) and Rose (1993), who pointed out that humans are positioned not only in an economic system but along many other axes as well, one being gender. They encourage attention to the hybridity and particularity of identity and of people’s relations with space and place. They advocate new methods of interpretation, sometimes less theory-driven ones such as text analysis and the analysis of narrative. For Courtice Rose (1980), doing geography is more like reading than like traditional scientific work. Sociolinguist Greg Myers (2006) draws on Massey’s (1994) feminist work in his discourse analysis of how members of focus groups “formulate place” (Schegloff 1972) as they introduce themselves and support their positions. The turn away from the formulation of general laws about how economic systems shape space and how it is experienced is encapsulated by Margaret Rodman (2003, 208): “It is time to recognize that places, like voices, are local and multiple. For each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which

meaning is shared with other people and places. The links in these chains of experienced places are forged of culture and history”.

## **5.2. Humanistic geography**

Another new approach with origins in the 1960s and 1970s draws on the phenomenological strand of German philosophy. Like Marxist, feminist, and other critical approaches, it originated as a reaction to the “old” cultural geography and the abstract law-finding of quantitative social-scientific geography. Humanistic geographers, drawing on phenomenologists such as Heidegger, are concerned with how individuals experience and “inhabit” the world, describing human interactions with the environment from the humans’ perspective, in other words our “senses of place”. Key humanistic geographers include Yu-Fu Tuan (1977), Entrikin (1976), Edward Relph (1981), and Anne Buttner (1993).

According to humanistic geographers, the physical aspects of place are always mediated by subjective experience. We experience a house not as a set of geographical coordinates or a particular arrangement of building materials or furniture, but as a set of smells, sounds, scenes, and emotions that are shaped by repeated ways of interacting with houses. We “inhabit” a house, making it our own, by experiencing and/or manipulating it in a variety of ways – walking through it, touching the walls, looking out the window, turning the water on and off, rearranging the furniture, maybe even writing a poem about it. We experience a region, sometimes, partly through the sounds of a dialect (Mugerauer 1985). Physical places are sometimes designed with particular human experiences in

mind, as when people build structures or post signs that make places more distinctive and memorable or make sure a house is well-lit and fresh-smelling before showing it to a potential buyer. Such manipulations have become more obvious in the past few decades as attention to “heritage” and “authenticity” in the marketing of place has led to the increasing commodification of senses of place: shopping malls that incorporate elements of the industries that once occupied their sites, towns designed to feel “like home”, with nostalgic street names like “Cherry Lane”. Technological developments like satellite navigation and online mapping systems have also changed how we experience space.

A sense of place comes both from immediate experience and from more abstract modes of knowledge. Spatiality is constructed directly through bodily experience that results from motion and sensation: vision, smell, touch, and hearing (Thrift 2000; Urry 2000). Among the indirect sources of knowledge about places are art (for example, landscape painting, travel writing, television documentaries), education (school lessons, guide books, maps and brochures, and so on), and politics (debates over urban redevelopment or public transit, for example) (Tuan 1977: 161-164). These make places visible and encourage people to see them in common ways, or make them aware that they see them differently.

### **5.3. Discourse and place**

Neo-Marxist and humanistic approaches to geography, as well as other strands of postmodern geographical thought, have in common the idea that spaces become human places partly through discourse. “Discourse” in this sense (Foucault 1972; 1980) refers to

talk, writing, and other practices involving language, as well as to the ideology that is produced and reinforced through talk. In other words, it is through ways of talking that arise from and evoke particular linked sets of ideas that people come to share or attempt to impose ideas about what places mean and how to behave in them. The “linguistic turn” to which Marxist, Foucauldian, and feminist theory gave rise has shifted many scholars’ focus throughout the humanities and social sciences, and geography is no exception. As Bridge and Watson (2000) put it in connection with urban studies, “Cities are not simply material or lived spaces, – they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation” (7). Among the “technologies” (Benjamin [1933]1968) or “practices” (de Certeau 1984) that shape how places are offered to the imagination are the mass media, with their particular economic goals and technical constraints, as well as linguistic practices like narrative, which arise in particular social and situational contexts.

Students of language and space have begun to draw on humanistic and discursive geography (Johnstone 2004). For example, they explore how storytelling and other genres of discourse can evoke and shape the meanings of places and ways of speaking, encouraging people to experience them the same way and learn the same lessons from them (Johnstone 1990; Modan 2007). Recent work on the “enregistration” of dialects, drawing on the semiotic theory of Michael Silverstein (1993; 2003) and Asif Agha (2003), explores how sets of linguistic forms that are hearable or visible in an area can coalesce, in people’s minds, into “dialects”, and how dialects get linked with cities and regions through practices like newspaper feature-writing (Johnstone, Bhasin and Wittkofski 2002; Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006), the telling of travel stories

(Johnstone 2007), and nostalgic online chat (Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004).

Interrogating how linguists ourselves construct dialects and places as we talk about them may add a much-needed layer of reflexivity to our work.

## **6. New concerns**

It has been argued that economic and cultural developments have diminished the relevance of place in human lives. The threat to meaningful places in the modern world is often said to be the result of rapid change and mobility. Edward Said (1978, 18), for example, speaks of the “generalized sense of homelessness” experienced by the globally mobile.

According to Giddens (1991), the dynamism of modern life has the effect of separating place from space, removing social relations from local contexts via “abstract systems” such as currency, therapy, and technology (14-21). Once social life becomes “disembedded” in this way, “place becomes phantasmagoric” (146); an individual’s experiential world is no longer the physical world in which he or she moves. The electronic media are often associated with a sort of liberation from place, and new attention to what happens on the borders and at the boundaries and to heterogeneity and adaptiveness calls into question the idea that “cultures” in the traditional sense ever existed (Bhabha 1994; Urciuoli 1995).

But local, space-based community may still have a role to play. People sometimes attempt to “re-embed the lifespan within a local milieu” (Giddens 1991: 147), via such activities as attempts to cultivate community pride. Cultural geographers who focus on traditional cultures and traditional aspects of culture recognize the continued persistence and importance of traditional sources of meaning such as localness (Entrikin 1991: 41). Local contexts of life may be tied to human identity in more immediate ways, too. As Stuart Hall points out (1991: 33-36), “the return to the local is often a response to globalization”. Face-to-face community is knowable in a way more abstract communities are not. Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996: 26-27) proposes that the local may still be an important source of continuity, because “everyday life” is local. People’s earliest experiences usually take place in a local context, and local encounters tend to be face-to-face and long-term. Furthermore, the local is sensually immediate and immersive in a way that more distanced forms of experience are not. Thus the principal vehicles for the production and transmission of culture may still be local ones.

Geographers come down on both sides of this debate about whether place still matters. For Castells (1966), economic, political, and cultural globalization mean that “flows” are replacing places and geography is in danger of losing its traditional object of inquiry. Castree (2003) argues, to the contrary, that the role of place in human life has changed, but not vanished. To be sure, geographers can no longer think of the world as a mosaic of bounded places, each of which can be studied on its own. For contemporary human geographers, places are both unique – the result of particular, small-scale interactions and experiences – and the same – shaped by the same large-scale global

forces. The identities of people and places are thus “glocal” – both global and local. Global forces play out differently in different sets of local circumstances, because particular local circumstances constrain how such forces are experienced and dealt with.

Sociolinguists are likewise noticing how the larger-scale leveling effects of language and dialect contact can be counteracted by particular regional loyalties and patterns of interaction, media consumption, and such, which can lead to the preservation of variant forms and the development of new differences. Like sociolinguists, geographers are now being reminded of the importance of scale, of thinking about change not as a singular process but as a series of incremental shifts in patterns that emerge at different grain sizes (Herod 2003). Like sociolinguists, geographers are thinking about identity, power, and resistance (Katz 2003) and about the technology that standardizes space as well as the local ecological systems that such technology can disrupt (Simmons 2003).

## **7. Conclusion**

In choosing to organize this chapter chronologically, I mean to highlight the the variety of ways in which “geography” and “space” have been imagined over time. I do not mean to suggest that subsequent approaches have always displaced earlier ones or that chronology necessarily represents progress. Geographers today do many different kinds of work; different research questions call for different conceptions of space and its role in human life and different methods for answering these questions. The same is true

of linguists exploring language and space. We can learn from several strands of geography, and I hope this chapter has provided a framework for doing so.

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