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ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS: THE
ROLE OF THE NATIVE (A Review of *A Critical
Analysis* by Michael L. Blake)

Kenneth Hale

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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A Critical Analysis

by

Michael L. Blake

Some Questions About Anthropological Linguistics

The Role of the Native

by

Kenneth Hale

The author seems to be greatly concerned about current trends within his profession of Anthropological Linguistics. He has made some extremely valid observations and some equally valid suggestions to reconstruct the field of Linguistics in order to deal with pertinent problems of today.

Hale views Anthropology as a product of its origin. He believes that it is constrained by the limitations of a white Anglo-saxon domination in the field, in academic endeavors, and more precisely in its most important aspect, it's application. In particular he attacks the idea that non-native speakers, as objective observers, are more successful. The probable cause for such success is that compiled data is more readily available to application by "Imperialistic Western Powers," and thus gains support from certain government agencies.

The author suggests that a reversal of proportion with a dominance by native speakers within the field would be more successful in accomplishing the original goals of Anthropology. I disagree, in that a balance of native and non-native speakers would be much more appealing. I would favor a cooperative effort in solving questions of relevance for the benefit of all concerned.

Argument against such a position would be a hesitation on the part of the native speaker to confide valuable information about his culture and its linguistic patterns. The native speaker armed with knowledge of the aims and techniques of anthropological inquiry would be more capable of avoiding answers to questions directed towards these goals. And, if cooperative, he would be subject to distrust and ill regard by his peers.

My experience as a linguist in the field was not as an Anthropologist, but as a linguist performing duties to complete military objectives. Nonetheless, the difficulties I encountered in dealing with the native people were no different than those faced by Anthropologists all over the world today. I would hazard a guess

that theirs is the same suspicion, antagonism, and hostility as confronted me the first time I used my language in a more or less casual atmosphere. The reaction was generally that of being flattered that I could speak their language, but conversations became more reserved and seldom returned to a relaxed, personal level.

The suspicion, antagonism, and even hostility is easily understood when an account is made of the use, or misuse depending on your point of view, by government agencies of data acquired from a wide range of sources. Resistance is most strongly felt from younger people, usually under 40, because they have seen or are aware of what has been employed by "Western Powers" to gain control of countries and foreign interests. A key to this control is that of understanding cultures so that manipulation of the country, politically or otherwise, may be more effective and less obvious.

With such an obstacle to overcome, it would seem advantageous to have the support of a native speaker, trained in Anthropology, to help dissipate the suspicion of the Anthropologist intent. As the native speaker gains a realization of the beneficial application as a result of linguistic inquiry, he could reassure the people that all information acquired would be applied to universal concerns and not just by the "Imperialistic Powers". The native speaker with a much greater understanding of the language would enable him to more readily establish a rapport with the people.

The benefit of such an alliance is immediately evident, as questions raised by both native and non-native linguists can be answered and explained by the native speaker and analyzed by both. Erroneous data gathered from informants with deceptive intent would be less likely confronted. Problems that arise after data gathering in the field can be resolved without the necessity of returning to the field.

The drawback for native speakers at present is that they cannot achieve accreditation necessary for them to realize a vocation in Linguistics, which is due to financial and political limitations. A reform of government towards a socialistic state would be necessary to initiate such a worthwhile endeavor. The author sees this as a highly unlikely event and seems willing to sit back apathetically and accept inevitable defeat of his proposals. If he finds his ideas worth writing down and publishing, he should be at least ready to support them, regardless of his opposition.