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KEEPING SECRETS : ESP/LSP AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

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RESUME

L'article analyse les notions de "spécialité" et de "spécificité" telles qu'elles sont utilisées dans les expressions du type "Langue de spécialité" ou "Anglais pour objectifs spécifiques. On y montre que la spécificité d'une variété donnée de langue n'est pas une caractéristique objective ou absolue définie par ses structures formelles, ses thèmes et ses normes. La "spécificité" est plutôt le résultat d'une relation précise entre le discours et les locuteurs, entre deux cultures, ou deux univers de connaissance. Il n'est donc pas très économique de s'engager dans des descriptions détaillées des caractéristiques linguistiques de variétés spécifiques de langue. Il est plus important de situer le problème dans le cadre d'une théorie générale de la sociologie du savoir au moyen de questions du type : "spécialisé pour qui ?", "qui sait quoi ?" et "quelles sont les modalités d'acquisition et d'utilisation des connaissances ?".

Une théorie de la sociologie du savoir sera nécessairement relative à l'individu et à la distribution sociale du savoir. Mais elle sera nécessairement une théorie du discours puisque le langage interactif est l'instrument principal par lequel le savoir, spécialisé ou non, est acquis, mémorisé et utilisé par les individus. Le didacticien préoccupé de langue de spécialité doit poser deux questions fondamentales. La première concerne l'asymétrie du discours : le discours contient-il ou suppose-t-il un savoir que l'apprenant ne possède pas ? La seconde concerne le degré de collaboration : le discours essaye-t-il de faire partager le savoir aux non-initiés ?

"I am the Master of this college.
What I don't know, isn't knowledge."

(Lines on Jowett, Dean of Balliol College, Oxford from 1838 - 1893).

"Knowledge is power."
Francis Bacon

"Grace is given of God, but knowledge is bought in the market."
Arthur Hugh Clough

"Knowledge is of two kinds : we know a subject ourselves or we know where we can find information upon it."

Samuel Johnson

BACKGROUND

The historical development of LSP can be seen as a progressive broadening of horizons, with successive approaches being based on more and more far-reaching models of description (cf. Robinson, 1980). In the 1960's and early 1970's, for example, applied linguists working in ESP operated on the principle that the English of a given topic or content area such as chemistry, electrical engineering or prospective biology exhibited a characteristic **register** or configuration of lexical and grammatical features. **Register analysis** would identify those features and thereby stipulate the main elements to be included in the syllabus. (e.g. Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964.)

Such an approach is not without use or interest. However the very nature of its successes also demonstrated its limitations: when all is said and done, there really is very little, especially at the grammatical level, which is "specific" to scientific English. This realisation led teachers and applied linguists to raise their eyes above the level of grammar, of the internal structures of sentences, to look at **discourse**, the suprasential structures which make up the rhetorical organisation of texts. Texts, that is, could be described in terms of notional-functional sequences such as "Stating a purpose: reporting past research; stating the problem under investigation; presenting apparatus; describing experimental procedures." The aim of **discourse analysis**, then, is to identify and describe such sequences on the basis of units such as "acts" and "connectors". This, too, is an interesting and insightful approach to ESP, though in practice its application has been almost entirely limited to written texts. (cf. Trimble, 1985).

A third approach to LSP involves going from text to context, i.e. examining the target situation within which learners would be using their **L2** in terms of the linguistic and communicative features which determine that particular situation. (Munby, 1977). Two notions of exceptional richness underpin this approach: the first, obviously, is that of **situation**, borrowed from anthropology and in particular from the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1970). By looking at situations in terms of participants, roles, setting, key, topics, acts, objectives (etc.), it is possible to identify those parameters of communicative competence appropriate to them. In other words, and this is the second notion, it is possible to draw up a list of learners' needs (Richterich & Chancerel, 1977). By bridging the gap between the "text" and the individual, needs analysis also goes a long way towards meeting the requirements of a more learner-centred approach.

A last, recently-developed, tendency in LSP/ESP has been strongly influenced by research in fields lying outside applied linguistics, such as psycholinguistics, artificial intelligence and pragmatics. Cognitive process analysis involves studying the thinking processes that underlie language use. How do we go about processing and interpreting discourse? What knowledge and what strategies enable us to produce, interpret and participate in discourse? How is discourse and knowledge represented, and what is the relationship between the specialist's representations and those held by learners - their "mental models"? (Holland & Quinn, 1987) What is the relationship between representations and learning styles? (cf. a number of the articles in Willems & Riley, 1989).

It is one aspect of this approach to LSP - discourse as the distribution and activation of knowledge - which forms the topic of this article. But before turning to discuss that topic, I would like to make two further general points.

1. It would be historically and intellectually wrong to see the various "approaches" to LSP which I have outlined as merely a succession of fads or fashions. Rather, they are contributions to a progressive widening of our awareness of the different levels at which language operates - lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. In other words, we have accumulated these approaches rather than rejected them one by one in favour of newer approaches. We now recognise that what makes language varieties specific is not just the vocabulary or the grammar or the situation of use or whatever, but particular configurations of all of these.

2. My second point is more of a word of warning: ESP specialists can be ethnocentric. For example, it is almost impossible to find in the ESP literature any references to work in other LSP fields, such as le français fonctionnel or Fachsprachen. This is not just an academic objection, nor is it simply an expression of frustration at seeing people busy re-inventing the wheel. Such ignorance can have important and negative repercussions: for instance, some ESP textbooks are culturally very condescending. Even more important, though, is the presupposition that ESP implies a common set of notions and values ("Science") which is somehow impervious to the cultural and communicative differences invariably found in other varieties of language. There is increasing evidence to show that this is simply not the case, that the rhetorical structure and values of "scientific literature" and thought is subject to variation both intra and intercultural (Bureau & et de Saivre, 1987; Holland & Quinn, 1987). In what follows I shall try to indicate some of the reasons why this should be so. I will not, however, be restricting my attention to "scientific" discourse, as my main point is that "specialisation" is not simply a matter of topic or of linguistic forms but of how relevant knowledge is distributed and used. The domain in question might be scientific, but it might just as easily be legal or the language of betting shops or bargaining.

1. DISCOURSE AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

What do the following kinds of discourse have in common:

gossip [(1)]
highly technical scientific literature
exolinguistic conversation [(2)]
doctor-patient interviews
works of vulgarisation
adult/child conversation
bargaining
teacher talk

"Precious little" is, I suppose, a normal enough first reaction, since there are obviously clear differences along most of the parameters usually used to describe discourse. Some of these genres are written, some spoken; some are spontaneous, others prepared; some are interactive, others single-source[(3)]. We would expect these differences to show up clearly in vocabulary and syntax or in rhetorical and interactive structure: and they do.

However, they also have something in common: they can all be seen as variations on a theme. That theme is the way in which knowledge is stocked, assumed and attributed, distributed and exchanged. In other words, it is helpful to approach the categorisation, analysis and description of discourse on the basis of social rather than linguistic questions. Such questions would include:

(1) Who knows what?
Is the knowledge common knowledge, or is it unevenly or differentially distributed? That is, is the discourse asymmetric?

(2) If the discourse is asymmetric,
- is the main purpose of the interaction to share the knowledge, to make it common and restore the informational equilibrium, or
- is the knowledge being used unilaterally by one of the participants, for example for diagnostic purposes or to preserve some aspect of the status quo, such as social control or to make a financial profit. In other words, is the knowledge in some sense "secret" or withheld?

(3) If the knowledge is indeed secret, what are the communicative strategies and practises employed by participants in order to bypass this obstacle to communication?

In brief, what are the relations between social knowledge and the nature and quality of the individual's participation in an interaction?

What I hope to do in this article is to show that certain aspects of so-called "specialised" discourse types are the result of the ways in which social knowledge is networked and negotiated. That is, their characteristic "differences" are communicative and are produced by variations in the ways in which knowledge is selected and distributed. At the risk of seeming pedantic, I think it is worth

(1) For an approach to "gossip as information management", see Paine, 1983.
(2) "Exolinguistic discourse" is any discourse where at least one on the participants is using a language over which s/he does not have full mastery. See Porquier, 1979 ; Riley, 1987.
(3) For a discussion of these terms see Holec, 1983.

reminding ourselves that the etymology of the word "communicate" is "making common". The approach suggested here is focussed on that central idea: to what extent and for what purpose knowledge is made common. Almost all recent work on negociation or communication assumes that it invariably is. As we shall see, such a presumption is naïve and obscures the primordial role of social factors in moulding discourse.

To put it boldly, not all discourse is "communicative". Doctors do not always share their knowledge with their patients, nor do policemen interrogating witnesses or examiners questioning students or second-hand car salesmen. As these examples show, the reasons for withholding knowledge vary considerably. It may be to diagnose, solve or test (most social groups whether formal or informal use some form of evaluation of relevant knowledge as an entry qualification). One of the most common motives for withholding knowledge is that its possession confers an advantage of some kind, very often social or financial. "Insider dealing" is by no means restricted to the world of high finance: ask for a spare part using technical terms ("A B25 flanged grummit") and you may halve your car repair bills. And knowledge is something we pay for every time we consult a lawyer or have the plumber in.

You may know the old story of the man who took his car to the garage because there was a large dent in the bodywork. The mechanic gave it a tap with a rubber hammer and the dent miraculously sprang out. "That'll be £50, please", he said. "What! £50 just for one tap with a hammer?" "No sir, the hammer tap only cost £1 - the other £49 is for knowing where to hit."

This approach contrasts with other approaches to discourse analysis and ESP/LSP where the characteristic of "being specialised" is seen as somehow inherent to a particular topic, vocabulary, grammar or style. Instead "specialisation" is regarded as social and relative: relative to the individual and to the way in which knowledge is socially distributed.

This is, of course resoundingly obvious and what it means can be paraphrased by asking

Specialised? Specialised for who?

To take the simplest of examples: legal texts in English or French, such as the following baffle me completely:

> "I am prepared, for the purposes of this case, to assume (without necessarily accepting) that Section 70 (1) (g) of the Land Registration Act 1925 is designed only to apply to a case in which the occupation is such, in point of fact, as would in the case of unregistered land affect a purchaser with constructive notice of the rights of the occupier; and it is to be observed that the words "actual occupation" are used in Section 14 of the Law of Property Act 1925 and were used in Barnhart v. Greenshields (1953) 9 Moo. P.C.C. 18, 34."

Such a text, though, is meat and drink to my elder daughter. To the objection that because she is a lawyer she must know things I don't know, I can only reply: quite. She, on the other hand, might well have problems coming to grips with a text on linguistics which I would regard as fairly basic. The perception of a text as specialised or otherwise depends first and foremost, on the individual's state of knowledge.

Knowledge of technical domains such as law or linguistics is only one aspect of the individual's social knowledge or culture. Other domains may include cooking, using the telephone, writing reports, telling jokes, praying, dancing, hunting, being polite, counting - "common sense", i.e. everything we need to know in order to participate competently in social life. It is this knowledge and its role in realising and maintaining social reality which is the object of Study of the Sociology of Knowledge [4].

In very general terms, common sense exhibits the following characteristics:

(i) It is **socially transmitted**, learnt from parents, friends, acquaintances, teachers, arts, the media, literature. What you know is largely a matter of who you know.

(ii) It is **differentially distributed**: different people know different things. Any of the parameters of social identiy (age, sex, profession, religion, etc) can be a source of knowledge.

(iii) Knowing **how knowledge is distributed**, who knows what, is itself an important aspect of common sense knowledge.

(iv) Common sense knowledge is to a large extent **encoded in language** (vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, rules of practical reasoning).

(v) The common sense world is **perceived as objective reality** and we presume that others see it the same way: this is the "natural attitude".

(vi) Common sense thought and reasoning are based on the natural attitude and natural language, that is, they are **context-dependent statements** rather than attempts to formulate "objective" truths and therefore have little in common with formal logic or scientific argument.

(Schutz, 1962; Mannheim, 1956; Leiter, 1980)

These points help us to understand the relationship between common sense knowledge and "specialised" knowledge. In particular, they underline what might be called the communicative parradox: that while common sense is variable and we know it to be so, it is what we take for granted, the scaffolding of presuppositions we use when we construct discourse. By and large, it is only when we become aware of a discrepancy between what we know and what we assume our interlocutors to know that we may have recourse to explanatory or compensatory communicative strategies. (Harding, 1984; Riley, 1987).

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(4) The sociology of knowledge, then, is not a history of ideas, nor an epistemology. It deals with the world of common sense, of everything that passes for knowledge in a given society, its everyday realité. It has deep roots in sociology (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Thomas...) and in German philosophy (Husserl, Dilthey, Scheler... Habermas) but two men merit particular recognition in this context : Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). Not only is it in their publicitations that the tenets objectives and methodology of the sociology of knowledge were first systematically thrashed out, but they themselves were involuntarily responsible for introducing their discipline to the English-speaking world, since they were both obliged to flee Nazi Germany. Mannheim went to the University of London, Schutz to the University of New York, where his teaching directly inspired the approach to sociolinguistics and discourse analysis known as ethnomethodology (Berger & Lackmann, 1966 ; Garfunkel, 1967 ; Cicourel, 1973, Leiter, 1980 ; Benson & Hughes, 1983).

The history of science generally deals with "immanent" scientific theories. Nonetheless, it is true that a scientific literature which is sensitive to social factors is gradually developing. See, for exemple, Kuhn, 1963 ; Merton, 1973 ; Boorstin, 1983). Mannheim (1936) provided a theoretical framework for such work, though it has not always been heeded. This is a pity, since his reflections on scientific model of thought would have provided a counterweight to work on discourse analysis and ethnomethodology which, probably unconsciously, has almost always concentrated on collaborative discourse situations such as service encounters (Aston, 1988 ; Ventola, 1987) the language of the classroom, calls to the Samaritans, and so on.

A useful introduction to the sociology of knowledge is Simonds, 1978.

For the moment, though, let us consider a communicative exchange from the point of view of common sense assumptions. The scene is a newsagents', A is a customer, B the shop assistant.

A : Newsweek?

B : Sorry, tomorrow.

It would be possible to gloss this exchange by making explicit a few of the underlying assumptions:

A : I have come here because I know that this is the sort of shop where objects such as the one I want can usually be obtained. I have the money necessary. However, I am unable to locate the object in question. I am, therefore, addressing you in your role of sales assistant since that is precisely the sort of information I expect you to have.

B : I appreciate the fact that you have come here to obtain a particular article in an appropriate (buying/selling) way and that my role is to manage that exchange. However, Newsweek is pubblished weekly on Thursdays. Since it is Wednesday today, I regret to report that I am unable to satisfy your request. Should you come back tomorrow, though, I will be willing and able to do so.... etc.

In such an exchange, there is an almost perfect congruity between the commonsense worlds of A and B, so that B's reference to an external condition is sufficient for A to understand why this request cannot be complied with. When the knowledge gap is wider, though, negotiation and explanation may be called for :

1. A : ...... and at the end of the parents' meeting they decided to organise a kermesse.

2. B : A what? What's a ker.... what did you...?

3. A : Oh it's a a kermesse it's a traditional... it's a sort of party for everyone connected with the school.

4. B : A prize-giving ceremony.

5. A : No (laughing) no, no we don't have those in French schools. It's games and dancing more.

6. B : Do you sell things?

7. A : Yes, cakes and lottery tickets and maybe things from people's attics.

8. B : Oh, I know - that's very that's funny, that's what we call a 'school fête'!

At the beginning of this passage, A uses a term (an item of knowledge) which is not known to B (kermesse). B immediately indicates that there is a problem and tries to identify it for A (2: A what?) at the same time appealing for help. A responds by providing a descriptive paraphrase (3: it's a sort of party). On the basis of the information provided, B forms and formulates a hypothesis (4: a prize-giving ceremony) but for sociocultural reasons this is inacceptable to A (5: no we don't have those in French schools). A continues to provide supplementary information for B to work on (5: It's games and dancing more). B now forms a second hyupothesis which he tests by asking A to confirm a further piece of identification (6: Do you sell things?) which A

had not provided. A confirms this hypothesis (7: Yes) and illustrates it with more detailed examples (7: cakes, etc). B is now confident that he understands what A means by "kermesse" (8: Oh, I know) and demonstrates that this is so by providing a translation (8....that's what we call a school fête!) The negotiation has been successfully concluded.
Two further points need to be made about this process of negotiation:

(i) A tries to base his explanations on what he presumes B to know already: items like 'school', 'party', 'games' and 'dancing', as well as the fact that the first of these items only occurs with the others on special occasions. Had the discrepancy between A's and B's knowledge been larger, there would have been more to negotiate.

(ii) Both participants employ a variety of different strategies during the process of negotiation (requests for repetition and clarification, paraphrase, analogy, translation, etc). These strategies are the primary linguistic mechanisms of negotiation in any face-to-face situation, but they acquire additional importance in exolinguistic discourse since they allow interactants to create - albeit fleetingly - a "common culture."

The above example is typical of collaborative discourse, where participants negotiate a common meaning together. Such discourse belongs to the category of "non-zero sum games" (Rapoport, 1986; Riley, 1987) which allow players on both sides to make a profit, as opposed to "zero-sum gains" where there is a winner and a loser, the games of the one exactly balancing the losses of the other. Amongst the conditions which are necessary if a discourse is to be regarded as collaborative are the following:

(i) Participants must wish to arrive at a common understanding or agreement.

(ii) They must be willing to share their relevant knowledge in order to improve the quality of their collaboration.

(iii) They must have at their disposition the communicative, cognitive and social resources necessary, that is, a set of strategies appropriate to the game in question.

Bargaining as "LSP"

Let us now turn to look at a very different discourse type indeed and one which I think most readers will willingly recognise as "specialised": bargaining in bazaar economies. Here we have a situation where, for reasons which will be detailed below, participants are not nearly as generous with their knowledge as they are in "non zero-sum games".

Bargaining, in the sense in which this term is used in the discussion of "bazaar economies" is not as common in Europe as it is in Asia, for example. This serves to underline the basic point that there is a direct connection between communicative practises and the distribution of information: when we Europeans go shopping there is usually no bargaining or haggling since prices are displayed and fixed.

Nonetheless, even in Europe, there are certain situations where bargaining is appropriate: when you buy a second-hand car, for example, or an old piece of furniture; at auctions, or open-air markets, not to mention the small ads in publications like "Exchange and Mart" which include the expression "o.n.o.". Knowing which set of communicative practises to employ in which situation requires a personal "sociology of knowledge" which forms the basis of our communicative competence.

Bargaining can be defined simply enough as the negotiation of a price: the main characteristics of this type of situation are the following (Alexander & Alexander, 1987):

(i) By definition, no pre-established prices are displayed or announced.

(ii) Buyers and sellers have different objectives: buyers want low prices, sellers high ones. These objectives are not necessarily contradictory, though, since other factors "exterior" to the particular sale in question may have to be taken into account (the condition of fruit at the end of the day; "clientelisation" - will the buyer become a good regular customer or is he/she a "one-off" tourist; a feast-day with special culinary traditions, etc). This means that both zero-sum and non zero-sum games are possible.

(iii) Under these circumstances
- buyers will try to discover the current lower price range before starting the bargaining process: extensive search precedes intensive search;
- sellers will try to discover the quality of the buyers' information.

(iv) Information is difficult to obtain:
sellers compete with buyers, not with other sellers. The buyer can question other buyers and several sellers, i.e. they will conduct an extensive search before negotiations with one particular seller, but both groups have their own reasons for not wishing to divulge this information
- buyers because they do not wish to lose face and in the hope of exercising a downward influence on current prices, however small: they will quote prices lower than the ones they really had to pay;
- sellers because they do not wish to give away their lower price-range.

This is what leads Clifford Geertz (1983) to say that "The search for information - laborious, uncertain, complex and irregular - is the central experience of life in the bazaar," and it is this situation which determines the communicative characteristics of bargaining discourse:

(i) The overriding principle is that sellers try to confuse buyers as regards both the quality and nature of their knowledge and the current status of the negotiation.

(ii) The seller bids first if necessary.

(iii) Bids alternate.

(iv) "Backward jumps" are forbidden; that is, the buyer cannot offer less or the seller demand more than their own previous bid.

(v) Units may be changed ("Avocados are five francs each, but if you take a kilo....).

(vi) The buyer can break off the negotiation, walk away and come back later.

(vii) "Extras" may be added ("If you buy a dozen crayfish, I'll throw in the crown of dill for free").

(viii) Bluff: on both sides, participants try to give the impression that they are the best informed and to establish personal superiority in the field.

(ix) Patter: the seller will sing the praises of his goods.

(x) Either buyer and seller can change the object of bargaining (or the quality, etc.)
"By the way, have you seen my cucumbers?"
"Are you sure you wouldn't prefer something bigger?"

(xi) Bids should be honoured once they have been accepted.

Even a summary as succinct as this shows quite clearly that such negotiations operate on the basis of a social relationship where knowledge is not given away freely. It is this fundamental characteristic that makes the discourse "specialised", rather than any inherent features of form or content. Indeed, such features can be seen as an expression of particular communicative relationships (Myers, 1989).

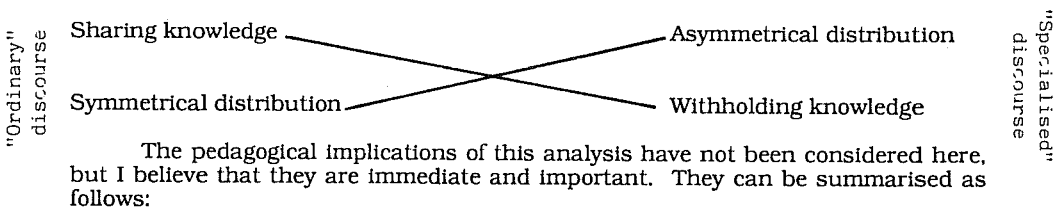
CONCLUSION

What I have tried to do in this article is to show that

(i) the way in which knowledge is distributed and used directly influences the communicative nature of the discourse concerned.

(ii) the notion of "specialisation" is best understood in terms of the relationship between an individual and discourse, rather than as a matter of formal linguistic features inherent to a given text.

The relationship between these factors could be tentatively diagrammed thus:



The pedagogical implications of this analysis have not been considered here, but I believe that they are immediate and important. They can be summarised as follows:

Most language-teaching activities and materials are based on models where participants who become aware of an imbalance of knowledge are willing and able to resort to appropriate collaborative discourse strategies to restore the equilibrium. This is not really surprising, as classroom discourse itself tends strongly to fall into this category; teachers are there to explain, reveal and share various kinds of knowledge. The result, though, is a pedagogical world where everyone is on the sunny side of the street: native speakers who have time to give long, clear explanations and shop-assistants who are unfalteringly polite. A world where everyone is friendly, interested, honest, generous and helpful - and never is heard a discouraging word. An anarchistic society in Kropotkin's sense (1899) founded on the ideals of "mutual aid", "supporting institutions" and "rhetorical transparency", but which does not always correspond to social reality, since discourse can also be used to obtain or confirm an advantage, to dominate and to dissimulate.

It is instructive to spend a few minutes comparing textbooks or readers on almost any form of ESP with authentic documents, "Medical English" with a specialised article, for example. The textbook clearly sets out to help, explain, etc. The specialised article, on the other hand, does not only assume background knowledge, it uses it as a secret to confirm and protect the social advantages of the initiated. Until we take this difference into account, by preparing learners for non-collaborative discourse types, our ESP/LSP courses will continue to leave them at a social disadvantage. As Pierre Bourdieu has said (1982):

> *"Relation de communication entre un émetteur et un récepteur, fondée sur le chiffrement et le déchiffrement, donc sur la mise en oeuvre d'un code, l'échange linguistique est aussi un échange économique, qui s'établit dans un certain rapport de forces symbolique entre un producteur, pourvu d'un certain capital linguistique et un consommateur (ou un marché), et qui est propre à procurer un certain profit matériel ou symbolique... Les discours ne reçoivent leur valeur (et leur sens) que dans la relation à un marché, caractérisé par une loi de formation des prix particulière: la valeur du discours dépend du rapport des forces qui s'établit concrètement entre les compétences linguistiques des locuteurs entendues à la fois comme capacité de production et capacité d'appropriation et d'appréciation ou, en d'atures termes, de la capacité qu'ont les différents agents engagés dans l'échange d'imposer les critères d'appréciation les plus favorables à leurs produits."*
> (Ce que parler veut dire, 1982, Paris, Fayard)

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