

RECEIVED 12 NOV 1997

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November 11, 1997

Ken Follett  
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Dear Ken,

Thanks for sending me those two bits on psycholinguistics. It makes psycholinguists sound like an amalgam of Henry Higgins and Sherlock Holmes. On behalf of my profession: many thanks.

Technically I thought both bits were fine, though I know rather little about the writing stuff. The speech analysis was very good and reminds me of my first encounter with psycholinguistics. It was a TV show called "Hear me, see me", from the early 60s I think. Three experts, Professor Denis Fry, Dr John Trim (both phoneticians), and Dr Frieda Goldman-Eisler (a former student of Freud's, and later the first Professor of Psycholinguistics in the UK), all from UCL by the way, formed a panel which had to guess things about a speaker who they could not see and whom they knew nothing about. What's more the speaker was reading from a text and they could infer nothing from his/her vocabulary. I remember them as being very accurate about height, weight, age, education, social and geographical background, and also personality, just using their ears - no equipment was allowed (or available I would guess). This emphasises the role of trained ears: a point you imply nicely. Of course, things are easier now, with better spectrographic analysis and with speech editing programmes, which you bring in with the idea of reconstructing the speech from background noise.

I thought you explained it all very well, especially the post-vocalic R as a class marker, though I wonder whether your readers will understand the phrase "vocal tract" (page 210). There is some work on accent/dialect convergence (and other accent phenomena) and personality that might be useful. Why do some English people in the US end up speaking American and others not? Need to be accepted, to pass as a native?

I'm enjoying *The Third Twin*, but had to take a break from it to go to Venice for a long weekend - research for my book, needless to say. This meant other kinds of reading. Will pick it up again tonight.

All the best,

BW.