

## **Cultivating values: Knower-building in the humanities**

Y. J. Doran

LCT Centre for Knowledge-Building and Department of Linguistics

The University of Sydney

In 1967, Jerome Rothenberg attempted to shift the prevailing focus in poetics from ‘Western’ poetry to a broader exploration of the oral poetry of Indigenous peoples across the world. One of the ways he did this was by collecting poetry from a range of languages and cultures in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Oceania into an anthology called *Technicians of the Sacred*. Opening this anthology, Rothenberg problematised the term ‘primitive’ in relation to such poetry, arguing that Indigenous people’s oral poetry is just as multifaceted as any Western poetry. This argument he synthesised into the phrase ‘primitive means complex’:

### *Primitive Means Complex*

That there are no primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world. There are no half-formed languages, no underdeveloped or inferior languages. Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity. People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar. Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details. The language of snow among the Eskimos is awesome. The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given. No people today is newly born. No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

Text 1. Opening two paragraphs of the preface to Rothenberg (1967: xxx)

Rothenberg's anthology and preface have been highly influential in twentieth century poetics. Amongst other things, they have been heralded as key texts in the start of 'ethnopoetics' (Quirk 1999), an approach to oral poetry 'that attempts to correct the Eurocentric and chirographic bias against non-Western, oral traditional ways of speaking and meaning by deriving an interpretive frame from discourse in its own cultural context' (Quirk 1999: 95).

Of course ethnopoetics – or indeed any discipline – is not born of a single text. Disciplines develop through innumerable texts, books and conversations that progressively drive small changes in what is studied, how it is studied and who studies it. But as this anthology exemplifies, occasionally these small shifts are sparked by larger, more influential texts produced by higher status scholars. In many disciplines, especially in the humanities, such texts are often read and re-read by successive generations of students as they grapple with the developing knowledge of their field. This collective re-reading makes texts like this key sources for students learning the ways of their field.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will be concerned with what texts like Rothenberg's preface do for a new field, and what knowledge students are to learn by reading them. Such a concern is not born of idle curiosity. Exploring the role and organisation of knowledge across disciplines is key to developing educational programs that target disciplinary practices. As the knowledge students learn for disciplines such as poetics is often vastly different to the knowledge learnt in other disciplines (such as physics), pedagogical approaches that aim for applicability across disciplinary boundaries must take this into account.

In recent years, the study of knowledge-building has been at the heart of an interdisciplinary dialogue between educationally oriented research in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and a sociological approach known as Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Martin et al. in press, Maton et al. in press). This dialogue has led to a significant expansion in our understanding of disciplinary discourse and the knowledge-practices underpinning it (Maton and Doran 2017). A large focus of this dialogue has been on knowledge in the sciences. This has revealed a number of ways that language and other semiotic resources are used to build technical meanings and to reach between theory and empirical data (e.g. Maton et al. in press, Hao in press, Doran 2018). In contrast, the knowledge underpinning humanities disciplines has not been as deeply explored and so we are less clear on the ways of meaning in the

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<sup>1</sup> To give a sense of the long-term influence of *Technicians of The Sacred*, it is now in its third edition, released fifty years after the first edition.

humanities, their practices for building knowledge and their strategies for legitimising this knowledge (though see Hood 2016, Christie 2016 for key investigations).

This paper takes the knowledge of the sciences as its point of departure, before shifting to focus on the knowledge built in Rothenberg's text. It will focus in particular on what kind of knowledge Rothenberg is building, how this knowledge is organised and what linguistic resources he marshals for this. We will see that this text primarily builds an uncommon-sense way of seeing the world organised through systems of *values*, what LCT calls an *axiological constellation*, and that these values are concerned less with precisely describing a particular object of study, but more with developing a nuanced interpretation of whatever it turns its attention to.

### **Knowledge-Building**

Studies of knowledge-building in the sciences have mainly focused on the technical meanings of disciplines and how they are organised through language, images, mathematics and other semiotic resources. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, one vantage point for exploring these meanings is through a variable known as *field* (Doran and Martin 2019, Martin 1992). Amongst other things, field conceptualises different types of content meaning that permeate texts. Key relations from this perspective include long series of events known as *activities* that organise the dynamic flow of scientific phenomena. Activities underpin procedures, which step through how to do science, and explanations, which explain how things occur. In the following text, an activity concerning the orbit of electrons within atoms is jointly developed by a teacher and student in a high school physics class (from Doran 2018):

*Teacher:* This electron by definition is accelerating. Why is it? Who can tell me, Tony?

*Student:* It changes direction.

*Teacher:* Right, it is continually changing direction, moving in a circular motion and circular motion is a type of acceleration. What did Maxwell say that accelerating charges do? They emit?

*Student:* Emit EMR.

*Teacher:* They emit EMR. So this electron should be emitting radiation. And if it is emitting radiation, it is emitting energy. And if it is emitting energy it must be

losing energy, by law of conservation of energy, and if it losing energy, sooner or later it has to slow down. And if it slows down, John, what's it going to do?

*Student:* Ah, crash into the nucleus?

*Teacher:* It'll crash.

## Text 2. Activities in a physics classroom

The series of activity in this text can be displayed as follows with ^ indicating the sequence in reasoning:

(The electron) changes direction

^

(The electron is) moving in a circular motion

^

This electron is accelerating

^

This electron should be emitting radiation

^

(The electron) is emitting energy

^

(The electron) must be losing energy, by law of conservation of energy

^

sooner or later (the electron) has to slow down

^

(The electron will) crash into the nucleus

Activities give a dynamic perspective on the field by specifying events and changes that occur. Complementing such activities, scientific fields often also construe large sets of relations between items known as *taxonomies*. In the following text, a textbook distinguishes different types of matter and in doing so establishes a *classification* taxonomy:

Physicists currently view matter as being grouped into three families— *quarks*, *leptons* and *bosons*.

The standard model explains interactions in terms of these families, which it further classifies as follows:

1 *Matter particles*. These are fundamental particles (that is, they have no *known* smaller parts). They are the *quarks* and *leptons*.

2 *Force-carrier particles*. Each type of fundamental force is caused by the exchange of *force-carrier* particles (also call *messenger* or *exchange* particle). These are the *fundamental* (or *gauge*) bosons. They include photons or gluons.

Text 3. Types of matter (Warren 2003: 246-247)

This is followed with a table that specifies six types of quark – *up*, *down*, *strange*, *charm*, *bottom* and *top* – and six types of lepton – *electron*, *electron-neutrino*, *muon*, *muon-neutrino*, *tau*, *tau-neutrino*. The relations between the various types of matter here can be represented as in Figure 1.

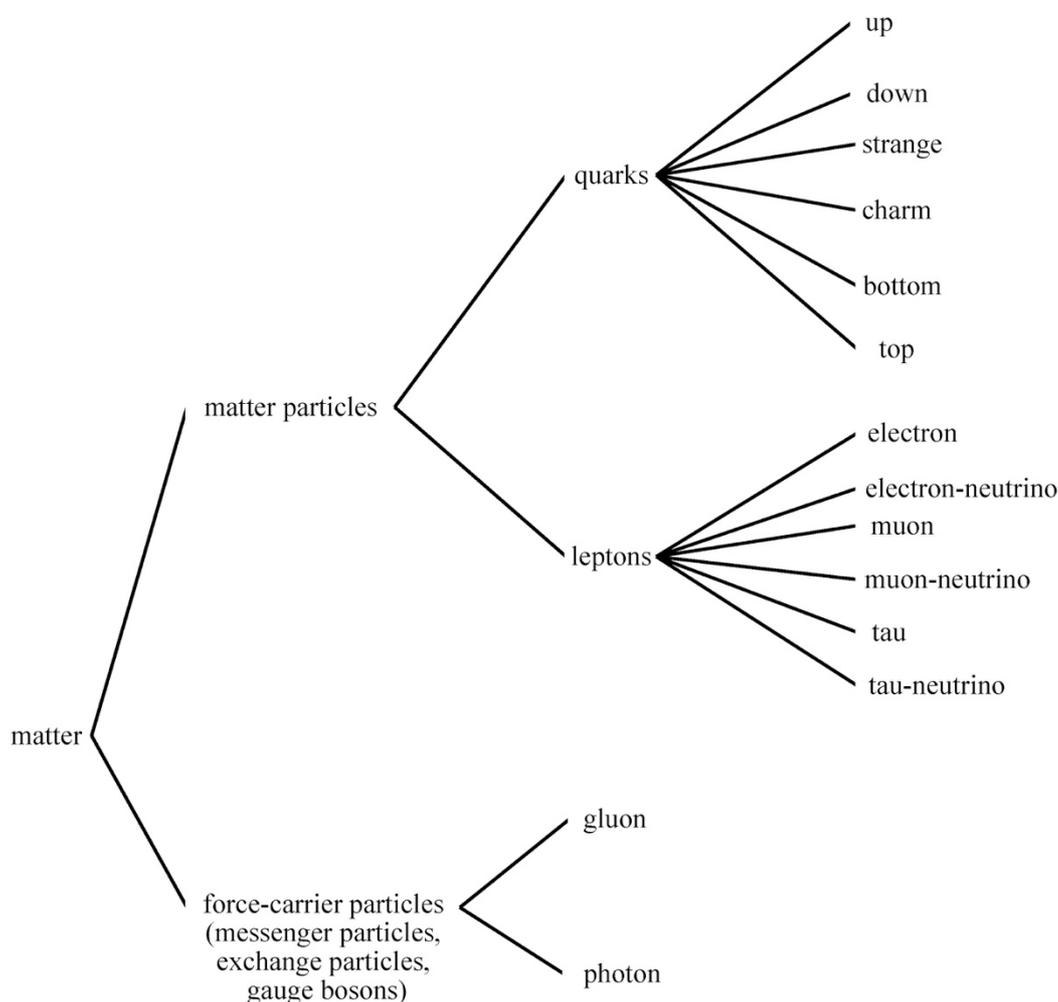


Figure 1. Classification taxonomy of types of matter.

Finally, scientific texts complement their activities and taxonomies with large arrays of variable properties (such as *volume*, *mass*, *charge* etc.). These properties can be quantified

and ordered in relation to other properties, and so are regularly used to measure various phenomena in the physical world (Doran in press). One key resource for realising such properties is through graphs. In Figure 2 for example, a senior high school student plots a series of measurements of the properties of Resistance and Temperature:

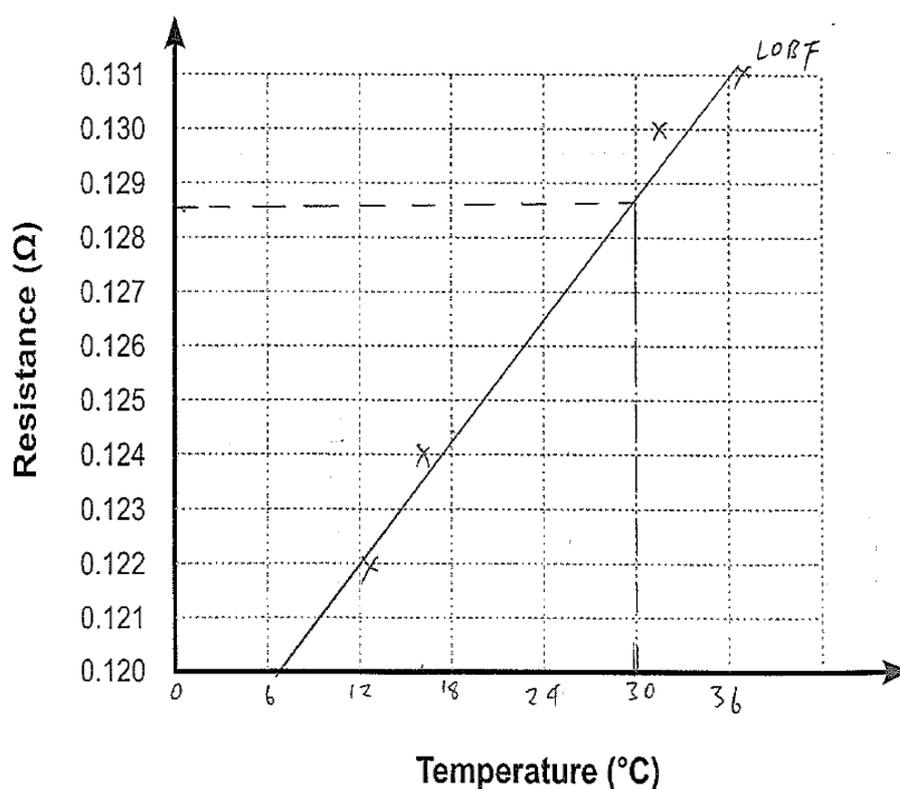


Figure 2. Graph organising the properties of Resistance and Temperature

Scientific disciplines regularly build large and integrated sets of activities, taxonomies and properties to organise their technical knowledge (Doran and Martin 2019, Hao 2019, Wignell et al. 1989). For SFL linguists, models of field have opened the way for scientific knowledge to be viewed in terms of these meanings and the language and other semiotic resources that realise them. This has contributed to SFL developing a rich set of resources for understanding scientific meanings in ways that integrate scientific genres (Martin and Rose 2008) with their field-specific meanings (Doran and Martin 2019), through to their ideational discourse semantics (Hao 2019, Martin 1992) and lexico-grammatical patterns (Halliday and

Matthiessen 2014). For educational linguists, these are crucial resources for targeted pedagogical programs focusing on scientific knowledge and literacy.

But for the humanities, these relations in field – activity, taxonomy and property – are not as useful for seeing how knowledge is built. Of course humanities disciplines establish sequences of events (activity), relations between technical items (taxonomy) and sets of gradable qualities (property). But these are often not as deep, integrated or consistent across texts as they are for the sciences (Martin 1993). But humanities disciplines do of course build knowledge; they do not simply display a deficit in relation to the sciences. So what are the specialised meanings emphasised in much of the humanities?

### **Knowledge and Knowers**

To explore this, we can turn to a dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) known as Specialisation (Maton 2014). Specialisation conceptualises different bases for claiming knowledge by distinguishing two key principles: social relations (SR) and epistemic relations (ER). Social relations conceptualise the relations between knowledge and its *subject* or author. Knowledge claims emphasising stronger social relations (SR+) emphasise tighter boundaries and control over who can claim knowledge. This often involves emphasising knowledge through personal experience or social position (gender, class, race, sexuality, etc.) and/or through a refined taste, a finely-tuned palette, or a nuanced interpretative sense developed through long immersion and engagement with the ways of knowing in a field. With stronger social relations, who can claim knowledge – either by virtue of their cultivated experience or taste or by their social position – tends to be tightly regulated. In contrast, weaker social relations (SR–) downplays relations between knowledge and who is claiming that knowledge. Such knowledge claims tend to allow a wider range of people with a broader range of experiences, social positions and points of view.

The second relation within Specialisation is known as *epistemic relations* (ER). Epistemic relations conceptualise relations between knowledge and its *object* of study. Knowledge claims underpinned by stronger epistemic relations (ER+) emphasise tighter boundaries and control over what is being studied and the ways of studying it. This often involves emphasising specialised knowledge, skills, procedures and techniques, and/or predictive accuracy, explanatory adequacy or quantitative precision. This means that knowledge-claims

emphasising stronger epistemic relations tend to more tightly regulate what can be claimed knowledge of (the object of study) and the procedures for claiming this knowledge (the investigation of the object of study). In contrast, weaker epistemic relations (ER–) downplay relations between knowledge and its object of study. Such knowledge claims tend to allow looser sets of objects of study and more fluid means of investigating them.<sup>2</sup>

In principle, social relations and epistemic relations can vary independently. In any instance, one may emphasise stronger or weaker social relations and stronger or weaker epistemic relations. This leads to four main combinations known as *codes*. Maton (2014: 30) describes these codes as:

- *‘knowledge codes* (ER+, SR–), where possession of specialized knowledge of specific objects of study is emphasized as the basis of achievement, and the attributes of actors are downplayed;
- *knower codes* (ER–, SR+), where specialized knowledge and objects are less significant and instead the attributes of actors are emphasized as measures of achievement, whether these are viewed as born (e.g. ‘natural talent’), cultivated (e.g. artistic gaze or ‘taste’) or socially based (e.g. the notion of gendered gaze in feminist standpoint theory);
- *élite codes* (ER+, SR+), where legitimacy is based on both possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower (here, ‘élite’ refers not to social exclusivity but rather to possessing *both* legitimate knowledge *and* legitimate dispositions); and
- *relativist codes* (ER–, SR–) where legitimacy is determined by neither specialist knowledge nor knower attributes – a kind of ‘anything goes’.’ (Maton 2014: 30)

These codes can be mapped onto the ‘Specialisation plane’ as in Figure 3.

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<sup>2</sup> For both epistemic relations and social relations, variations are by degree; one may be *stronger* or *weaker* in relation to any other instance, rather than there being a discrete choice of strong or weak.

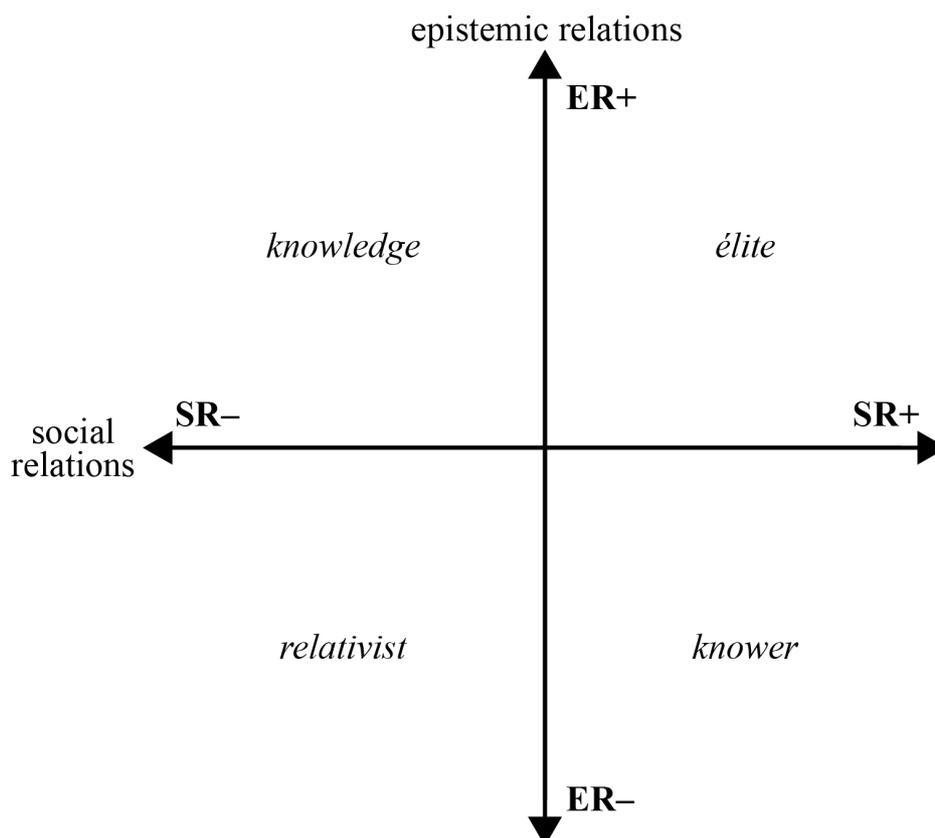


Figure 3. The Specialization plane

The natural sciences are often positioned in terms of knowledge codes (Maton 2014, Doran 2018). Scientific practices tend to involve probing highly specific objects of study through highly technical procedures and specialised knowledge (stronger epistemic relations), while downplaying any individual characteristics such as race, class and sexuality, or a particular ethical or aesthetic stance. For example in physics, students are regularly required to precisely measure particular physical properties using highly specific mathematical or graphical procedures in ways that lead to accurate predictions and explanations; but they are rarely asked to discuss situations based on their own personal experience or point of view (Doran 2018).

In contrast, much of the humanities is often positioned in terms of knower codes. Christie (2016: 158-159), for example, explains that learning literary studies in the Anglophone world involves ‘the cultivation of a particular attitudinal stance towards a literary text’ that is ‘expressed as a capacity to articulate moral positions and principles by reference to the literary text.’ Similarly Hood (2016) argues that ethnographic methods as they are commonly employed across various humanities disciplines tend to emphasise particular dispositions coupled with first-hand personal experience with what is being discussed, while at the same

time accepting a relatively wide set of procedures for exploring their object of study including ‘participation, observation, unstructured interviews, reflection’ (2016: 119). In each of these cases, particular dispositions – whether they be aesthetic, moral, ethical, political etc. – and/or personal experience are emphasised (stronger social relations), while the particular technical procedures for probing particular phenomena are downplayed (weaker epistemic relations).<sup>3</sup>

Different emphases on epistemic relations or social relations are associated with different types of meaning. In LCT these networks of meaning are conceptualised as ‘constellations’ (Maton 2014). An emphasis on epistemic relations tends to be associated with *epistemological constellations*, which are highly integrated sets of technical, ‘content’ meanings describing and explaining an object of study. In terms of SFL, epistemological constellations are often developed through highly elaborated field-specific taxonomies, activities and properties, like those of physics shown above. In contrast, an emphasis on social relations tends to build elaborated *axiological constellations*, which involve nuanced sets of values, positions, evaluative stances and interpretive frames. From the perspective of SFL, axiological constellations are often built through quite different types of meaning. For example, Hood (2016: 117-118) emphasises the role story genres play in ethnographies by providing ‘a connection to local, lived, social practices and a space for subjective voices’, while Doran (2019) emphasises the interplay of evaluation (ATTITUDE) and speaker

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that no discipline exhibits a single code. Epistemic relations, social relations and their combination into codes can vary depending on the sub-field, whether it is research or education, the year level, the task, the situation etc. Although physics tends to be associated with a knowledge code, this may at times vary. Assessments in schooling may ask students to comment on the social impact of physics in relation to such topics as coal-fired electricity generation, nuclear power and weapons, and medical technology, requiring a nuanced ethical disposition – stronger social relations (e.g. Board of Studies NSW 2012). Similarly, the study of English literature is unlikely to always be everywhere a knower code; at times it will emphasise the technical understanding of metre, grammar, types of poetry or periods of literature – all aspects potentially orienting more toward stronger epistemic relations. Nonetheless, there is often a strong *tendency* for physics to emphasise epistemic relations while downplaying social relations (a knowledge code), and for English literature to emphasise social relations while downplaying epistemic relations (a knower code). Thus discussions of codes are couched in terms of ‘tendencies’, ‘regularities’, ‘associations’ etc.

positioning (ENGAGEMENT) from the system of APPRAISAL (Martin and White 2005) for organising the highly implicit stances that permeate politically charged texts.

With this in mind, we can return to our poetics text. From the perspective of LCT, this text is likely underpinned by a knower code, with its specialised ways of seeing the world built upon axiological constellations. This means that rather than looking for explicit knowledge-building in terms of highly technical meanings (seen in SFL through field), we should focus on the *knower*-building occurring in the text. The specialised meanings being built are less likely to be associated with precise, integrated taxonomies or deep, intricate activities, but rather with particular values, dispositions, morals, aesthetics and political stances. In short, to understand how this text builds its disciplinary meanings and orients to a new way of thinking, we should focus on how the text cultivates a particular way of seeing the world. Accordingly, the following section will focus on the way this text cultivates specialised values, and how it organises, clusters and develops the dispositions of *knowers*.

### **Knower-building**

To explore knower-building in this text, we will introduce four main rhetorical strategies that Rothenberg uses. These are:

- *positioning* – where meanings are situated as being from the perspective of something or someone;
- *opposing* – where meanings are opposed to each other;
- *likening* – where meanings are construed as being similar or the same;
- *charging* – where meanings are given value through evaluation.

Each strategy uses a particular set of linguistic resources that will be described in terms of SFL. They also perform particular functions for organising the ways of knowing in this text (described in terms of LCT). In the following sections, we shall go through strategy in turn, analysing the text step-by-step and building the axiological constellations Rothenberg pieces together.

#### *Positioning*

The first strategy involves positioning meanings as being from a particular perspective. This is most obviously done when a source is explicitly stated. Rothenberg does this in the opening line of the text, where he indicates that from the perspective of *contemporary linguistics*, there are no primitive languages:

That there are no primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world.

In terms of Hao's SFL model of ideational discourse semantics (2019), this opening clause realises a positioned figure, that could otherwise be realised grammatically as a projecting clause along the lines of 'contemporary linguistics says that there are no primitive languages' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). Interpersonally speaking, we are in the realm of heteroglossic engagement (Martin and White 2005), where a voice is being explicitly stated. Here, the text is putting forward a proposition that 'there are no primitive languages' in a way that attributes it to contemporary linguistics.

Toward the end of the second paragraph, the text establishes two more positions. However this time it is not done through a particular source, but in terms of alternate perspectives:

Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

Here the text establishes two distinct perspectives: that viewed from the *Titan rocket & the transistor radio*, and that from *the poem or the dance event or the dream*. These perspectives are then linked to distinct statements: that the world is full of primitive peoples, and that 'it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands'. The three positioned meanings are synthesised in Table 1.

<b>perspective</b>	<b>position</b>
contemporary linguistics	<i>there are no primitive languages</i>
the Titan rocket & the transistor radio	<i>the world is full of primitive peoples</i>
the poem or the dance event or the dream	<i>it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands</i>

Table 1. Positioned meanings

From the perspective of LCT, this gives our first step toward the axiological constellation underpinning this text by hinting at some possible oppositions. Contemporary linguistics considers there to be no primitive languages, while those who view things from the Titan rocket and the transistor radio do consider there to be primitive peoples.

### *Opposing*

These hinted at oppositions are made explicit through the second strategy, called *opposing*. Opposing involves establishing a negation or contrast, and in doing so explicitly indicating that there are multiple competing ideas. Rothenberg makes wide use of this strategy throughout the text. Linguistically, he does this through two main resources. The first involves the use of negation, through words such as *not*, *no* etc. (Martin and Rose 2006). As Martin and White (2005: 118) argue, negation does more than simply stating a (negative) position, ‘it is a resource for introducing the alternative positive position... and hence acknowledging it, so as to reject it.’ In this case, Rothenberg uses negation throughout the text to establish and then oppose particular positions.

### *Primitive Means Complex*

That there are **no** primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world. There are **no** half-formed languages, **no** underdeveloped or inferior languages. Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity. People who have failed to achieve the wheel will **not** have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar. Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details. The language of snow among the Eskimos is awesome. The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given. **No** people today is newly born. **No** people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

This establishes a set of oppositions, established implicitly through negation, outlined in Table 2.

<b>position</b>	<b>opposition</b>
There are no primitive languages	<i>There are primitive languages</i>
There are no half-formed languages	<i>There are half-formed languages</i>
(There are) no underdeveloped or inferior languages	<i>There are underdeveloped or inferior languages</i>
People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar	<i>People who have failed to achieve the wheel will have failed to invent &amp; develop a highly wrought grammar</i>
No people today is newly born	<i>Some peoples today are newly born</i>
No people has sat in sloth for thousands of years of its history	<i>Some peoples have sat in sloth for thousands of years of their history.</i>

Table 2. Positions and oppositions established through negation

In addition to those established through negation, Rothenberg establishes another opposition through the concessive connexion<sup>4</sup> realised by *but* in the final sentence (Martin and White 2005, Hao 2019). This establishes the sentence before *but* as contrasting with that of the sentence after it.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given. No people today is newly born. No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. **But** once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

This establishes another opposition, in this case stated explicitly, shown in Table 3.

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<sup>4</sup> Martin (1992) calls these discourse semantic relations ‘conjunction’. However following Hao (2019), ‘connexion’ is used here to distinguish the discourse semantic relation from the lexico-grammatical word class conjunction (i.e. to distinguish the word *but* from the relation it realises in discourse).

<b>position</b>	<b>opposition</b>
Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples.	once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands

Table 3. Oppositions established through concessive connexion

This instance makes clear that a number of the perspectives and the positions they put forward, shown in Table 1, are in opposition:

*Measuring everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio*

is opposed to

measuring things in terms of *the poem or the dance-event or the dream*

and

Seeing *the world full of primitive peoples*

is opposed to

it being *apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands*

Rothenberg establishes positions and oppositions repeatedly through the text. In doing so, he builds alternate ways of thinking; one that abides by an interpretation of peoples as ‘primitive’ and one that is opposed to it. This repetition does more than simply specify the set of instances considered ‘primitive’ or ‘not primitive’. It emphasises a particular dynamic that is crucial for knower-building in this text. We will explore this dynamic by looking at the third rhetorical strategy, *likening*.

### *Likening*

The repeated positions and oppositions Rothenberg lays out are not isolated, independent statements. By repeating such oppositions line after line, he suggests that each are variations on a theme. We can see this more clearly by focusing on the third rhetorical strategy, *likening*, which involves construing multiple statements as similar in some way.

Rothenberg's main resource for likening various statements is an implicit one, where clauses are stated in sequence with no explicit conjunctive relation (such as 'and' or 'but'). The effect of this is that the reader has to 'read into' the text the relations between each successive statement (what Bateman (2007) calls 'abduction'). In this case, the relations are of similarity.<sup>5</sup> We can see this through the technique of inserting explicit conjunctions as below. In this case, the conjunctions that fit into the text include *i.e.*, *e.g.*, *similarly*, *that is*, *indeed* – all relations of similarity (Martin 1992).

#### *Primitive Means Complex*

That there are no primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world. [*i.e.*] There are no half-formed languages, [*similarly there are*] no underdeveloped or inferior languages. [*That is*] Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity. [*i.e.*] People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar. [*Similarly*] Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details. [*E.g.*] The language of snow among the Eskimos is awesome. [*Similarly*] The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. [*Indeed*] It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given. [*i.e.*] No people today is newly born. [*Similarly*] No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. [*That is*] Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

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<sup>5</sup> More technically from the perspective of SFL, the connexion relations between each statement are of *implicit internal similarity* (Martin 1992, Martin and Rose 2006).

If we pull together these relations with those established through *positioning* and *opposing*, we can visualise the axiological constellation established to this point as in Figure 4. Here we will just focus on the meanings of the first paragraph (we will come back to the second paragraph in Figure 6 below). The dotted vertical line divides the positions from their oppositions; = indicates statements that are likened to each other in the text, and the arrow → indicates that contemporary linguistics is the source for the positions in the constellation shown on the left side of figure.

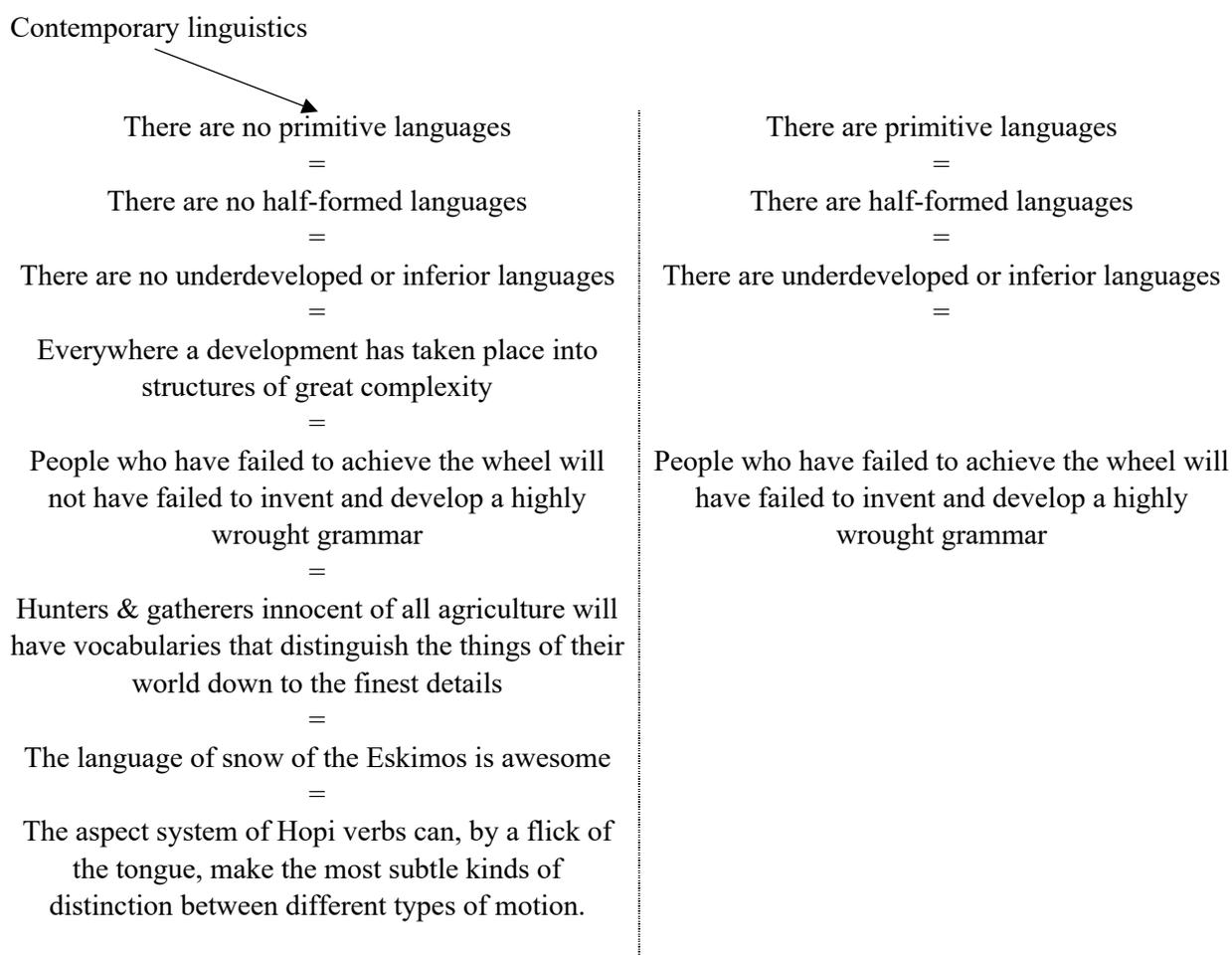


Figure 4. Preliminary axiological constellation in Rothenberg's text

This gives an overview of some of the values developed in the text. Rothenberg builds a constellation that opposes a conception of languages as 'primitive', 'half-formed', 'underdeveloped', 'inferior' and without 'a highly wrought grammar' to a conception that

sees none of this in any language. A lack of ‘primitive’ or ‘half-formed’ languages is then equated with a view that ‘everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity’, including ‘vocabularies that distinguish the things of the world down to the finest details’ such as the ‘awesome’ language of snow of the Eskimos and the ‘subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion’ made by the aspect system of Hopi verbs.

By equating these relatively disperse components of language – the aspect system of Hopi verbs, the Inuit (Eskimo) vocabularies for snow, highly wrought grammars and judgements of a lack of primitiveness or inferiority – Rothenberg suggests that belief in one suggests belief in the others. To accept that ‘there are no primitive languages’ is also to accept that ‘there are no half-formed languages’. Indeed Maton (2014) argues this is a key feature of axiological constellations. By aligning with particular meanings in a constellation, it tends to suggest one also aligns with a range of related meanings tightly connected to it. But by the same token, by establishing a clear-cut opposition between perspectives that consider there to be primitive languages and those that do not, Rothenberg is also constricting the possibility that ethnopoetics can hold elements from both the left and right side of the diagram at once. In other words it would be difficult in this field to simultaneously hold the position that some languages do not have a highly wrought grammar, while also suggesting that there are no primitive languages.<sup>6</sup>

This integrated set of positions and contrasting oppositions are key to the knowledge underpinning this text. But there is one more instance of likening that has a highly significant effect on the constellation. This occurs in the first line of the second paragraph (using an identifying clause rather than the connexion resources of the previous likenings):

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<sup>6</sup> We must be clear that this is the constellation as it is developed in Rothenberg’s text. Since it has been published, the field has changed such that the particular details of the language of snow of the Inuit (Eskimos) (originally, though somewhat erroneously, derived from Boas 1911) and the aspect system of Hopi (a clear reference to Whorf 1956) have been disputed (e.g. L. Martin 1986). Thus modern scholars who hold that there are no primitive languages may not agree with the particular examples used here. The discussion in this paper is not attempting to map any current constellations in use, but rather to show how constellations can develop in texts, and from this, understand how ways of seeing the world can be cultivated.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part.

This line explicitly states that the meanings built for language in the first paragraph (shown in the constellation in Figure 4) also hold for poetry and ritual systems. In doing so, it works to equate the constellation surrounding *language* to that for both *poetry* and *ritual-systems*. Not only are there ‘no primitive languages’, *there are no primitive poetries or ritual-systems*; not only has everywhere a development taken place into linguistic structures of great complexity, but so has a development taken place into *poetic and ritual structures of great complexity*. Essentially, Rothenberg has used this technique to borrow the entire constellation already established for language and put it to use for poetry and ritual.

**Language = Poetry = Ritual systems**

Contemporary linguistics

There are no primitive languages

=

There are no half-formed languages

=

There are no underdeveloped or inferior languages

=

Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity

=

People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent and develop a highly wrought grammar

=

Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details

=

The language of snow of the Eskimos is awesome

=

The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

There are primitive languages

=

There are half-formed languages

=

There are underdeveloped or inferior languages

=

People who have failed to achieve the wheel will have failed to invent and develop a highly wrought grammar

Figure 5. Constellation of language, poetry and ritual

This strategy of likening has a larger effect than just equating the meanings of language with those of poetry and ritual. It impacts how knowers reading this text should approach the knowledge of the field in general, far outside this single stretch. Throughout the text, Rothenberg claims knowledge over more and more objects, from language (including from structure, to grammar to vocabulary to the language of snow of the Eskimos, to the aspect system of Hopis verbs), to poetry, to ritual systems, to the dance-event, to the dream. By the end of this excerpt, the text has moved far from its original discussions specifically focusing on language. It has shown a gradual *accretion* of objects it is claiming knowledge of. Indeed,

this accretion continues far past this two-paragraph excerpt as further examples are given about a wider and wider range of semiotic and cultural practices.

The effect of this is to progressively weaken the boundaries around *what* this field can make claims about. Put in terms of Legitimation Code Theory, the accretion strategy progressively weakens epistemic relations; it emphasises that its specialised meanings can apply to a widening range of phenomena. This implies that the knowledge built in this text applies not just to those objects explicitly stated – e.g. only aspect systems of language, but not evidentiality systems; only dance-events but not musical events – but rather that the knowledge can be applied to objects further afield. In terms of knower-building, this text emphasises a disposition whereby one is able to interpret an increasingly wide range of things, from language to poetry to ritual to dream to dance to music to art to culture etc.

But importantly, the text does not open the way for knowers to interpret all of these in any way they wish. By repeatedly likening meanings to each other, the accretion strategy suggests that each meaning is in some sense similar to the others. This similarity can be broadly summarised in terms of the oppositions between: *there are no primitive languages* and *there are primitive languages*. Put another way, what is stable is not *what* this text is taking about, but *how* it is talking about it – the axiological constellation underpinning the interpretation. This text emphasises that a knower can claim knowledge over an increasingly wide range of phenomena, but can only do so through a very stable set of values ('Primitive means complex').

This is the basis of knower-building in this text. First, the text cultivates a particular axiological constellation through strategies such as sourcing and opposing. Second, it weakens the boundaries of what this axiological constellation applies to through accretion and likening.

### *Charging*

There is one final strategy important for the specialised meanings in this text. The text does not just establish an axiological constellation in terms of sourced positions and oppositions, it also charges them with *value*. The text evaluates these various positions and oppositions in very definite patterns. From the perspective of SFL, this charging uses resources of attitude, both inscribed, such as *inferior*, and invoked through resources such as graduation, *the finest*

*details*, and lexical metaphor, *newly born* (Martin and White 2005). Meanings associated with the ‘no primitive languages’ side of the constellation are consistently charged positively (*awesome, highly wrought, subtle*).<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the oppositions that are negated are consistently charged negatively (*half-formed, undeveloped, inferior*). Figure 6 shows the constellation and charging of both paragraphs, with [+ve] indicating positive charging, [-ve] indicating negative charging, and the element doing the charging underlined.

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<sup>7</sup> The exception to this is when mentioning technological developments such as the wheel and agriculture, which Rothenberg positions outside the scope of poetry, language and dance.

**Language = Poetry = Ritual systems = Dance-event = Dream**

Contemporary linguistics

There are no primitive languages

=

There are no half-formed languages

=

There are no underdeveloped or inferior languages

=

Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity [+ve]

=

People who have failed [-ve] to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent and develop a highly wrought grammar [+ve]

=

Hunters & gatherers innocent [-ve] of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details [+ve]

=

The language of snow of the Eskimos is awesome [+ve]

=

The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue [+ve], make the most subtle [+ve] kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given.

=

No people today is newly born

=

No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history

=

the poem or the dance-event or the dream

it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands

There are primitive [-ve] languages

=

There are half-formed [-ve] languages

=

There are underdeveloped [-ve] or inferior [-ve] languages

=

People who have failed [-ve] to achieve the wheel will have failed [-ve] to invent and develop a highly wrought grammar

Some peoples today are newly born [-ve]

=

Some peoples have sat in sloth for thousands of years [-ve] of their history

=

the Titan rocket & the transistor radio

the world is full of primitive peoples [-ve]

Figure 6. Constellation and charging of language, poetry, ritual, dance and dreams

So what does this text do? In terms of the knowledge it presents, it builds highly nuanced values that shape the ways of seeing language, poetry and ritual. It argues first that there are no primitive languages. But to accept this is also to accept that there are no inferior languages, no underdeveloped languages. It is also to accept the view of the world purportedly held by contemporary linguistics, and to position oneself from the perspective of the poem or the dance-event or the dream. Similarly it is to reject that people have sat in sloth for thousands of years, that the Titan rocket and transistor radio are the pinnacles of civilisation from which to view all else, and that there are any primitive peoples.

But the text does more than this. It emphasises that this way of seeing the world can be applied to any number of semiotic practices, from language to ritual to poetry to dance to the dream and onwards. In this way the text cultivates a particular disposition, one that can appreciate an ever-wider range of phenomena through a nuanced interpretative gaze. The ideal knower being built here is one that can perceptively interpret and appreciate a range of potentially new situations with a particular kind of principled judgement. The text builds this by accreting and likening a range of instances, positioning them from various perspectives and opposing them to others.

If we wish to understand the knowledge of the humanities, we must explore how axiological constellations such as this are built. But more than this, we must see how the principles underpinning such knowledge – the strengthening of social relations and weakening of epistemic relations – are developed. Many disciplines do not focus on precisely describing and accurately predicting the world. They cultivate refined ways of interpreting the world; they cultivate uncommon-sense values and build discerning knowers. For a linguistics and sociology that aims to contribute to disciplinary pedagogy, understanding how this is done is vital.

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