topology is itself part of the general intellectual movement of our time, of which the structuralist or 'new-anthropological' trends in social anthropology are another expression. Topology was for Leach as the phoneme was for Lévi-Strauss - something good to think with (Ardener 1970: 130).

Such was the climate of thinking into which I entered at the Institute of Social Anthropology in 1970. As things turned out, I did not use topological spaces for reasons explained in Volume II of the D. Phil. Thesis (1975) in connection with the analysis of the Tridentine Mass:

> The important contribution which acquaintance with topological ideas made to the study of action sign systems is connected with 'distance' ... one of the [useful] characteristics of a topological space is that the existence of a metric need not be assumed for it ... In a metric space, continuity depends upon distance. In the case of the Mass, we are at the outset dealing with a structured, semantic space in which continuity *does not* depend upon the function of distance either in time or in space (Williams 1975: 89 -Vol. II; also see Williams 1994: 64-65).

In the end, I only used certain lines of reasoning and suggestive ideas from the mathematical language of topology. I re-interpreted topological ideas so that they were consistent with groups and sets and the rest of the theoretical apparatus that informs semasiology. Thus it is important to know that

> [H]istorically, the subject of topology arose because of some abstruse problems and counter-examples in calculus which displayed difficulty with the intuitive notion of continuity of functions with which Newton, Cauchy and others had worked for many years. These counter-examples took a long time to turn up and much of the actual vocabulary of topology is in response to these problems. The language does not, therefore, provide the best framework for the research in hand ... for it cannot compare in power and flexibility with group and set theoretical terms. *The reason for this turns around the notion of continuity* ... The continuity involved [in topology] is mainly the continuity of *fixed points,* as in the "rubber-sheet" cases or as in a projection, say, of a [photographic] slide of some *situ* which is then projected onto a draped piece of cloth which hangs in folds.[5] It would not be going too far to say that one runs into the same problems here as one might if one were restricted to a geometry of *planes*. As always, it is [multi-dimensionality] which haunts us in considering human structured spaces. (Williams 1975: 89 - also see Williams 1994: 76-77, Note #5).

The Introductory Essay: *Social Anthropology and Language*
(Excerpts from Ardener -- 1971)

At the beginning of the D. Phil. Thesis, I say, "Finally I should like to acknowledge my greatest debt of gratitude, owed to my tutor, Mr. Edwin Ardener, of St. John's College, Oxford, who has maintained unflagging interest in this research since it began and without whose patience, subtlety, wit, wisdom and concern, it could never have been written" -- a statement of

---

[5] Topological spaces were essentially two-dimensional and they could not accommodate the feature of *agency*. They were incompatible with notions of human beings as efficient causes of their own actions.

simple truth that holds to this day.[6] Having said that, how can I best illustrate Ardener's influence on semasiology? By creating a kind of 'list', I think, for the essay is long and I will hope that keen students will take the trouble to read the whole at their leisure.

After setting the historical scene, readers encounter the levels of relationship that social anthropologists have with linguistics. Ardener outlines three levels of relationship: 1. A *technical level*; 2. A *pragmatic level* and 3. The *level of explanation* (pp. xiii-xiv). From his exegesis of the pragmatic level, I learned about the importance of classification and categories (p. xix*ff*):

> Broadly speaking, most of this work confirms Saussure's conclusion that language is not simply a labelling device for elements of the 'real' world. Rather, there is some relationship between the categories through which the world is experienced and the language used to express them (Ardener 1971: xx).

The relationship between categories and language is the driving idea behind Chapter VI of the D. Phil. which deals with the different experiences had by those dancers who are speakers of a technical language, 'ballet-French' and ordinary French speakers who use the same language. Also in the section on the pragmatic level, Ardener exploits "the usual elementary example of colour terminology" to illustrate how the color spectrum is divided in different languages. Here, he touched on the problem of 'universals' with which I later had to grapple in terms of movement. I was especially interested in what he said about *naming* bodily parts, i.e.

> It is precisely the diachronic aspect of human category systems that even modern social anthropologists have for the time being tended to neglect. In the naming of bodily parts, 'hip' in Latin was *coxa*, and 'thigh' was *femur*. In French the reflex of *coxa* (*la cuisse*) has come to mean 'thigh' and a new term of Germanic provenance, *hanche*, now fills the category once occupies by *coxa* (see Fig. 4). The situation in Italian, French, and Portuguese is similar. The linguist says,

> > The explanation lies in the awkward situation which [arose] in Latin: femur, -oris had become homonymous with *fimus* 'dung' following the modification of *fimus, -i* to *femus, -oris* under the influence of *stercus, -oris*. In order to avoid the now unacceptable *femur*, speakers had recourse to the name for the next nearest part of the body, *coxa*, which henceforward designated the region from the hip to the knee. And as this extension inevitably led to confusion, they turned in case of need to German **hanka*, which they had sometimes heard used by Germanic mercenaries and colonists (von Wartburg, 1969: 118, cited in Ardener 1971: xxvi).
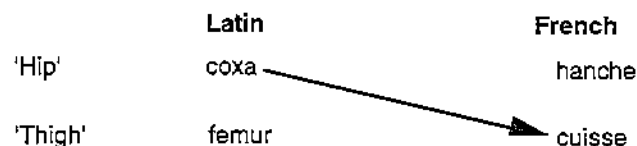
	Latin	**French**
'Hip'	coxa	hanche
'Thigh'	femur	cuisse

Figure 4 'Hip' and 'thigh'

(after Ardener 1971: xxvi)

---

[6] Ardener is no longer with us: he died suddenly in 1987. I received the news while carrying out research in Cape York Peninsula in Queensland, Australia. A sense of deep loss is still with me.

The anthropological problem lies precisely in the last sentence. The acceptance of *hanka* is not a self-evident further step. It had social as well as linguistic aspects and we are in that world of diglossia, idiolect, register, and diatype, which is analysed by the contributors to Part II of this volume (Ardener 1971: xxvi-xxvii).

It was from Ardener that I learned of Ferdinand de Saussure:

> The total neglect of Saussure by British social anthropologists for so long is at first sight incredible.[7] It can be explained in part by the intellectual isolation, and preoccupation with ethnography, of the interwar period. In mitigation, however, it should be said that J. R. Firth, the functionalists' own linguist, was not a truly sympathetic interpreter of Saussure, and that Malinowski never understood him. Even in the more enlightened conditions of recent years many social anthropologists seem to have discovered Saussure backwards, as it were, through Roland Barthes and Lévi-Strauss, both of whom in their different ways insert a barrier between the reader and Saussure. Yet his thought lies behind many of the ideas we have just discussed ... [He] made great contributions to comparative philology at an early age (1878). He taught Sanskrit in Paris from 1881 to 1891, but he is known chiefly for his lectures on linguistics given at the university of Geneva 1906-11 (Ardener 1971: xxx-xxxi).

My doctoral thesis is an attempt to apply Saussurian ideas to human movement which resulted in a theory of human action that is linguistically tied, mathematically structured and empirically based. The theory developed out of the conviction that new methods of reconstituting and interpreting data in the field of human movement would be of value to comparative studies of human systems of actions. But that may be putting the 'product' of semasiological theory (the 'cart') before the living ideas that led to its formation (the 'horse').

> *For anthropologists the significance of Saussure's own approach is that his analytical ideas were 'socioloinguistic' rather than purely linguistic* (italics added) His central distinction was of course between *la langue* and *la parole* (which may be translated as 'language' and 'speech', or 'speaking' - Engler, 1968: 54). *La langue* for Saussure is the system that is abstracted from the whole body of utterances made by human speakers within a speech community. *La parole* is susceptible of acoustic measurement, of tape-recording, and of other physical tests. *La langue* is not, because this is a system abstracted from, and in turn superimposed upon, *la parole*. This distinction *langue/parole* can provide a master exemplar for other distinctions: such as the colour category versus the physical spectrum, or the kinship category versus the biological relationship measured by the study of genetic structure and mating patterns. Yet *langue/parole* is used by Saussure in several different ways ... its essential character derives precisely from this supposed source of confusion [between 'form' and 'substance'] ... We can now see that its interest lies for social anthropology in its original intuitive form, and the antinomy deserves a place among those ideas that are part of the 'intellectual capital' of the subject (Evans-Pritchard, introduction to Hertz, 1960: 24; Needham, 1963: xl-xliv, cited in Ardener 1971: xxxii).

It is impossible, I think, to understand semasiological practices without understanding key Saussurian concepts: [1] *la langue* and *la parole,* [2] synchronic, diachronic and 'panchronic', [3] signifier and signified, [4] arbitrari-

---

[7] Although I was later to discover that the neglect was equaled (and in some cases, surpassed) across the Atlantic.

ness, [5] *valeur*, [6] his science of 'semiology' (which, like the panchronistic zone of explanation remained on a programmatic level) and [7] the chess game analogies. Ardener systematically explains each of these items in Saussurian terms in the introductory essay. After twenty-nine years of acquaintance with his exegesis, I have found nothing to equal it.[8]

"Blank Banners"

> We might visualize a semiotic system that depended, *in the absence of the power of speech,* (italics added) upon the apperception by the human participants of contextually defined logical relations among themselves in space ... The 'elements' of the semiotic would be stated by their existential presence and would acquire 'meaning' ('value') through the 'relations', which would themselves be apperceptible as some kind of syntax. The possible range of such separate semiotics without speech is great ... for the actors themselves are symbols in the semiotic (Ardener 1971: xliii-xliv).

When I approached Ardener after passing the Diploma course (June 1971), I stated my request that he supervise my B. Litt. Thesis by referring to the above passage, *with the proviso that I need not take the italicized phrase in the first sentence seriously,* pointing out that the "absence of the power of speech" would either mean that his "participants" were not human, or (if they were), it would mean that they were physically disabled in some important way. I argued from a standpoint of Harré and Madden's "nature, powers and capacities" arguments, which later appeared as *Natural Powers & Powerful Natures* (1973); then in a book, i.e. Harré and Madden (1975).

At this time, I also asked him if I understood the difference between 'perception' and 'apperception', having noticed his use of the latter term in several publications and in lectures.[9] In contrast to 'perception', 'apperception' denotes the process in which knowledge of intangible realities is gained through the mediation of the tangible. It also connotes the linguistic process through which the sense of words is changed. In common usage, 'perception' is usually associated with the gross act of 'perceiving' , i.e. 'noticing' or (sometimes) 'comprehending' of a very simple kind. The entailments of 'apperceiving' are, therefore, somewhat more complex. The following examples of sentences are relevant.

> 1. If it is stated, for example, that *time is apperceived* in our society by means of space and specifically in terms of movements of objects in that space, it is clear that the statement can be "cashed in" as meaning that time is an intangible feature of human life which is understood by us chiefly in relation to distances between movable, or static, tangible objects in space. It follows from this that space (in this *apperception* of the matter) has logical priority, and concepts of time are therefore derivative.

---

[8] Holdcroft (1991) is useful for most aspects of Saussure's thought, but there are problems, notably with Section 7.1 'The Fundamental Dichotomies', p. 137*ff.* The problem starts with his usage of the word, 'dichotomy', but more will be said later about this (p. 143).

[9] This distinction is spelled out in the doctoral thesis in Note 3, Chapter V, p. 168.

2. If it is stated that *time is perceived* in our society by means of space and the distance between movable or static objects in space, it is clear that the statement is cashable in terms of meaning that the nature of perception among all members of our society is such that time is perceived by everyone in this way.

The trap is obvious: one case of one individual who does not perceive time in this way disproves the whole statement, thus the usage of 'apperception' and 'apperceived' rather than 'perception' and 'perceived'. Statements about time in semasiology are not cashable in terms of concepts about perception. It was clear to me (if not to Ardener at the time) that the mathematical guts of semasiological theory (which I still thought of as semiological theory)[10] would be based upon my *apperceptions* of the intangible structures of space/time and the moving body -- largely through my thirty years' experience of teaching dancing.

I depended upon Ardener's discussion of Lévi-Strauss in the Introduction (1971: xlvi-lvii) and, although I owe a considerable intellectual debt to Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, semasiology is not 'structural' in a Lévi-Straussian sense, although some have mistakenly thought it is (see Williams 1975: 50).

After a characteristically Ardenerian historical précis, we come to Evans-Pritchard:

> We had had by 1958 a mental Odyssey, thirteen years of Lévi-Strauss reflecting upon linguistics. The ideas are those of the great Saussurean development, inspired with Durkheim's *sociologie*, passed through Baudouin de Courtenay's phoneme, rendered linguistic flesh by the Prague School and post-Bloomfieldian structuralists, scientized by the communication engineers, perceived intuitively by Lévi-Strauss, and reunited with Durkheim though Mauss. ... [L]inguistics, as a discipline became as [Evan's Pritchard's] frequent admiring statements express, an ideal type. He was nevertheless the only social anthropologist equipped to perceive intuitively the analytical and explanatory, rather than the pragmatic, implications of linguistics in the period 1945-1955 ... His social anthropology has itself tended to be informed with an approach that was consonant with that of the continental schools of linguistics. His famous phrase about 'relations between relations' independently echoes Hjelmslev. His notion of 'opposition', as originally developed in *The Nuer* (1940) was Saussurean in type ... (Ardener 1971: lvii-lviii).

One of the advantages gained from prolonged study of the Introductory Essay was an overview of the discipline from the important standpoint of the relation between social anthropology and language. I will stop here, although much more could be said about the rest of the essay, but we will turn to Ardener's 'Behaviour Essay' instead (p. 139).

Perhaps this is as good a time as any to note that I attended Ardener's Diploma lectures for three years (1970-73). When he asked me why I kept turning up, observing that he "always said the same thing." I replied, "Maybe you do, but that's not the point. I keep learning and changing: that's why your lectures are *not* the same."

---

[10] And did, until 1974 when I received a copy of one of Thomas Sebeok's papers which caused changing the name of my work to 'semasiology' (Williams 1975: vi).