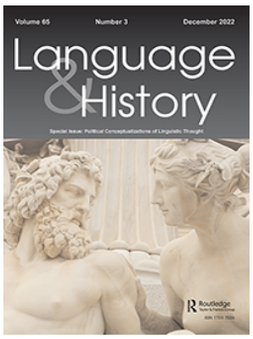

Article:
Steadman-Jones, R. orcid.org/0000-0002-2593-434X (2022) Linguistic fieldwork at the end of empire: British officials and American structuralists in Anthony Burgess' Malayan trilogy. Language & History, 65 (3). pp. 220-236. ISSN: 1759-7536

https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2122203



Language & History

ISSN: 1759-7536 (Print) 1759-7544 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ylhi20

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To cite this article: Richard Steadman-Jones (2022) Linguistic fieldwork at the end of empire: British officials and American structuralists in Anthony Burgess' Malayan trilogy, Language & History, 65:3, 220-236, DOI: 10.1080/17597536.2022.2122203

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2122203

Published online: 01 Dec 2022.

LANGUAGE & HISTORY
2022, VOL. 65, NO. 3, 220–236
https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2122203

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Linguistic fieldwork at the end of empire: British officials and American structuralists in Anthony Burgess' Malayan trilogy

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ABSTRACT

In 1959 Anthony Burgess published *Beds in the East*, a novel set in Malaya in 1957, the year the Federation of Malaya achieved independence. Towards the end of the book, Burgess introduces a new character, Temple Haynes, a professional linguist from a US university who is studying the phonology of Temiar, the language of one of Malaysia's indigenous ethnic minorities. This paper examines Burgess' depiction of Haynes and his sometimes fractious relationship with the British 'Assistant Protector of Aborigines', Moneypenny (also a speaker of Temiar). It is interesting to examine this fictional representation because it uses material familiar to students of the History of Linguistics to develop a certain picture of imperialism and decolonisation, one that shifts questions about the politics of western intervention onto the US but also worries about the personal investments of British representatives in colonised and decolonising space. Thus Burgess' text offers the reader a dramatic portrait of the practice of linguistic fieldwork as part of a particular vision of Malaya at the 'end of empire'.

KEYWORDS

Anthony Burgess; Malayan Trilogy; Temiar; field linguistics; end of empire; decolonisation; the Malayan 'Emergency'; Orang Asli; US imperialism

Introduction

In 1959, the British author Anthony Burgess published his third novel, *Beds in the East*, the final part of a trilogy set in the waning years of British rule in Malaya.[1] An interesting feature of Burgess' book is the fact that it presents a portrait, albeit a brief one, of an academic linguist at work. Burgess had a long-standing interest in the science of language and subsequently published two well-known and popular works, *Language Made Plain* in 1964 and *A Mouthful of Air* in 1992, both of which discuss (amongst other topics) the nature and priorities of Linguistics as a contemporary discipline (Burgess 1975 [1964], 1992). This interest is already evident in the novel

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[1]The three novels of the trilogy are *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959). References here are to the edition of the whole trilogy published in 1984 under the title *The Long Day Wanes*.

discussed here, towards the end of which readers are introduced to an American scholar, Temple Haynes, who is 'from some university or other' and who has come to Malaya to develop a phonological analysis of Temiar, a language spoken by one of the indigenous communities inhabiting the Peninsula's forested interior (Burgess 1984: 506). To those familiar with the History of Linguistics, Haynes is a recognisable figure – a practical, descriptive linguist trained in the techniques of mid-century Structuralism in its North American manifestation. His goal, as we are told more than once, is to isolate the phonemes of the language as a first step to 'giv[ing] the Temiars an alphabet' (Burgess 1984: 506). To this end, he works with Temiar informants, receiving them in a hut which belongs to the British 'Department of Aborigines' and using a range of visual aids to elicit vocabulary (in both singular and plural forms). Furthermore, he is also said to possess a 'van with recording apparatus in it', implying that his research is well-funded and has considerable institutional weight behind it (Burgess 1984: 507).

It is significant that Burgess' fictional linguist is American. Commentators have discussed the novel's treatment of the growth of US influence in Malaya in the 1950s but the emphasis has often been on the growing currency of American popular culture. Matthew Whittle (2016: 81), for example, alludes to Burgess' depiction of Haynes but states that, on the whole, Americans are 'notable by their absence' from Burgess' text, and that the suggestion of 'the Americanization of Malaya' arises largely from the representation of 'the growing popularity of American music and cinema'. But, although it is true that Haynes is a relatively isolated figure within the book, he plays a significant role because of the way in which Burgess places him in relation to the agents of British colonialism, one of whom, a character called Moneypenny, also speaks Temiar, although his knowledge of the language and its speakers derives from his years of colonial service and is not underpinned by an affiliation with any academic discipline. The contrast and, indeed, conflict between Haynes and Moneypenny is used as a way to sketch in a larger geopolitical process. The date is 1957, the year in which the Federation of Malaya achieved independence.[2] British officials are in the process of 'handing over' to their postcolonial successors. But at the same time, American influence is becoming ever more evident in South-East Asia and Haynes' encroachment on Moneypenny's small and particular section of decolonising space enacts in microcosm the movement from one form of imperialism to another – from British colonial rule to US intervention in an emergent postcolonial order.

[2]The modern state of Malaysia was formed in 1963. The Federation of Malaya was formed from the states that occupy the Malayan Peninsula itself.

The literature on the novels frequently emphasises the tensions that arise in Burgess' depiction of late colonial Malaya and these in part emerge as a result of the perspectives attributed to his protagonist, Victor Crabbe, a teacher who by this point in the narrative has become a senior figure in the colonial education service. Erwin (2012: 185), for example, comments upon the fact that Crabbe is associated with a 'liberal ideology' or 'an attachment to individual human beings, rather than the murderous abstraction the trilogy will identify with communism'. As a teacher in a school for the sons of Malaya's elite class, Crabbe is in a sense developing the nation's postcolonial leaders and this image of humane education for independence is set in contrast with the violence of the anti-colonial war which had been raging between the British and the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) since 1948. But the liberal viewpoint is not untroubled. Erwin (2012: 185) points out that very early in the trilogy, when Crabbe is attempting to deal with a boy who has been communicating communist doctrine to his fellow pupils, he is already wondering whether it would not be better for the boys to spend their time reading Marx rather than consuming the products of popular media: 'Liberalism is in crisis here, struggling to reconcile freedom of conscience with its own resort to power', the latter being 'disavowed as an American problem accompanied by an equally degrading American popular culture'. Liberalism's 'resort to power' involved a set of highly repressive measures intended to cut off the fighters of the MNLA based in the Peninsula's forested interior from their supporters in the general population. Hence, the straightforward opposition between 'attachment to individual human beings' and 'murderous abstraction' constitutes a problem for the narrative, a problem that is handled by considering the war only in terms of its implications for the 'private concerns' of individuals with the result that it becomes 'politically invisible'.

These considerations are relevant to the scenes involving Haynes and Moneypenny. As we shall see, Burgess' treatment of the encounter between these two students of Temiar constitutes exactly the kind of disavowal that Erwin describes. Haynes' work, it turns out, is part of a much larger campaign of anti-communist activity and is conducted with very little understanding of the Temiars and their lives – his presence among them is a 'resort to power' ungrounded in any real knowledge of the people with whom he is dealing. Moneypenny, by contrast, knows the Temiars intimately and even identifies himself with them. Thus, the 'problem' of compromised liberalism is displaced onto the American linguist whose political project seems to involve very little attempt to understand who the Temiars really are. At the same time, however, we cannot read Moneypenny as an idealised representative of the colonial order. He is eccentric and cantankerous. He loves the Temiars and the forest – that becomes clear – but his relationship with them is transforming him: he has 'native tattoo-marks' on

his body and he has internalised their beliefs to the extent that later in the book he attributes Crabbe's death to the fact that he violated a Temiar taboo while visiting the area. Thus, if the encounter between Moneypenny and Haynes figures the shift from British to American intervention in the region, neither is really represented in terms of an ideal of liberal engagement. Moneypenny is effectively leaving the British community behind and becoming Temiar, while Haynes seems to know little of the people whose language he is studying.

Whittle (2016: 47) discusses another kind of tension – or ambivalence – in the trilogy. On the one hand, Burgess argued that, since he had learned Malay, he was in a position to write in an informed way about a society 'beyond the insular world of British expatriates'. And, indeed, the novel does offer the reader well-developed accounts of Malayan characters of a kind not found in the work of earlier British writers on Malaya, Somerset Maugham, for example. However, the text does not entirely leave behind the stereotypes found in a longer tradition of colonial discourse and the humorous dimensions of the books often work to pull the representations of Malayans back in that direction. The episode with Haynes and Moneypenny tends more towards the stereotyping of the Temiars, who in Burgess' account are undifferentiated and without individuality – props in comic scenes involving the two more fully drawn characters. When Crabbe meets Moneypenny, for example, there is an element of farce to the occasion as the Temiars who are accompanying him try to manage an unruly 'jungle pig', which Moneypenny is transporting in his Land Rover (Burgess 1984: 504–506). And so the possibility of an 'attachment to individual human beings' is not developed in this section of the novel and, in fact, disappears behind Moneypenny's eccentricity and Haynes' naïve and over-confident scientism.

On one level Burgess' text works to reconcile a progressive acceptance of the rightness of decolonisation with a sense that the colonial project has not been in vain and this is why the liberal emphasis on the value of personal relationships and on the more three-dimensional representation of Malayan characters is important to the work. But this position is difficult to maintain given the realities of power – and, indeed, armed conflict – at the end of empire and the episode discussed here constitutes one of the moments when the trilogy expresses most scepticism about the nature of western intervention. Whether the trilogy as a whole finally recuperates the liberal ideology that it proposes is a complex question. Erwin (2012: 187) suggests that in a muted way it does. But in the sequence discussed here Burgess' writing is imbued with a distinctive blend of late colonial melancholy (arising from the apparent impossibility of explaining 'what it was all for') and scathing satire (produced through the absurdity of both Moneypenny and Haynes, neither of whom is a convincing figure of Burgess' idealised liberal attachment). In

this sense, the learning of Temiar operates as a metonym for larger patterns of engagement and the experiences of Moneypenny and Haynes' real-world counterparts provided productive material for Burgess' fictional encounter. In the rest of the paper, I shall examine that material and how it informs Burgess' work.

The Temiar and the empire

The Temiar appear in Burgess' narrative when Crabbe travels to the town of Mawas to investigate the death of a local head-teacher, presumably at the hands of communist insurgents. Alighting from the train in the town of Tikus, he reaches Mawas by hitching a lift with Moneypenny, who is a field officer with the title 'Assistant Protector of Aborigines'. The Malayan Trilogy as a whole shows considerable interest in colonial language learning and in the first novel we find Crabbe himself studying for the colonial examinations in Malay (Burgess 1984: 79).[3] But the story of Haynes and Moneypenny stands out because the focus in the trilogy is typically on the languages spoken by the Peninsula's larger populations and not those of aboriginal minorities such as the Temiar. Hence, Crabbe's journey to Mawas moves the reader from a linguistic context that is by this point very familiar to one that has barely been broached at all. And Moneypenny's difference from the trilogy's other British characters is immediately evident in Burgess' description – he is 'very big and boyish in khaki shorts, fair-haired, mad-eyed, almost as brown as a Malay with a child's sulky mouth and native tattoo-marks on his fine throat' (Burgess 1984: 504). He wears a Temiar amulet and becomes anxious when Crabbe unintentionally violates one of the Temiars' taboos by laughing in the presence of a butterfly, an act which elicits a warning from Moneypenny about other prohibitions that Crabbe needs to observe. The fact that Moneypenny speaks Temiar becomes apparent when Crabbe hears him shouting in 'a strange language' to the men who accompany him in his Land-Rover (Burgess 1984: 504). Thus, there is a strong sense that Moneypenny is at home in a context that is – to Crabbe – both distinctive and strange.

Burgess' depiction of this context is decidedly selective and to understand this it is necessary to know something of the background. Peninsular Malaysia is home to 'twenty-plus indigenous ethnic minorities' (Lye 2011: 24). Collectively, these indigenous groups are known as the Orang Asli, the Malay for 'original people' and a name introduced in the 1950s, the period in which Burgess' trilogy is set. They are typically understood as forming three major groups, one known as the Senoi, 'whose two main subdivisions,

[3]See Leow (2016) for a discussion of the challenges faced by the colonial state as a result of the diversity of languages spoken in Malaya.

the Temiar and the Semai, together make up the larger part of the Orang Asli population of the central highlands' (Harper 1997: 1). The Temiar are mostly resident in the states of Perak and Kelantan but with a small population in Pahang immediately to the south and they are speakers of an Austroasiatic language, which belongs to the Aslian group and hence is entirely unrelated to Malay.[4] While, as Idrus (2011: 57) notes, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reports on the Orang Asli sometimes presented them as 'a society that was cut off from the rest of the world, living far away in the jungle in their "primitive" ways', they have, over long periods, interacted with other populations in a more complex fashion. And, as Harper (1997: 8) indicates, developments in the twentieth century including both the more intensive exploitation of the forest and the beginning of the so-called 'Emergency' – the war fought between the guerrillas of the MNLA and the British – brought the Orang Asli 'closer into the orbit of state administration'. The MNLA, operating from the forests, enlisted the support of the indigenous groups, who were obviously more adept at negotiating that challenging environment:

> Using tactics of intimidation and indoctrination, the [Malayan Communist Party] depended on the Orang Asli to provide them with food and sometimes shelter and information about the Security Forces. It was reported that out of a population of 50,000, a staggering 30,000 Orang Asli aided the communist guerrillas at one point during the Emergency period [. . .]. (Idrus 2011: 61)

The British responded by attempting to sever the insurgents from their sources of support. After brutal and unsuccessful experiments placing the Orang Asli in camps, strategies involving the 'protection' of the various groups emerged and in 1954 the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance was introduced, a measure that led to the creation of designated 'areas' (for mobile populations) and 'reserves' (for settled ones), as well as the deployment of field officers like Moneypenny to manage conditions in particular locations (Idrus 2011: 63–65).[5]

Hence, this is a context in which the colonial state's 'resort to power' is very salient. But, in line with Erwin's comments, Burgess avoids acknowledging – or 'disavows' – the repressive measures that had been used against the Temiar and instead exploits Crabbe's visit to the area to develop an account of the 'private concerns' of an individual, Moneypenny, who is – in some ways – a familiar figure from the colonial archive. Throughout much of the Empire a crucial role was played by the District Officer (DO) – the 'man on the ground' whose responsibility was

[4]The most prominent expert on the Temiars and their language is currently the anthropologist Geoffrey Benjamin, whose publications on the topic are extensive. Benjamin (1976) presents an account of Temiar grammar, although he has indicated that he is currently working on an up-dated discussion. Benjamin (1993, 2012a, 2012b) are selected publications which are less specialised and more wide-ranging.

[5]See also Leary (1995) on the experiences of the Orang Asli during the 'Emergency'.

the administration of a particular area and the negotiation of connections between that area and the central government. Although an 'Assistant Protector of Aborigines' rather than a DO, Moneypenny clearly fits into that familiar pattern. He is immersed in the material realities of the local setting, practical, and linguistically competent. A trope of colonial discourse was the anxiety that the DOs – so involved with the life of a particular area – would lose their distance from local culture and eventually 'go native', a possibility that is strongly implied in Burgess' description of Moneypenny, who is acculturated to the extent that he has 'native' tattoos on his neck and flinches at violations of local taboos (Burgess 1984: 504). His engagement with the language is of a piece with this broader set of characteristics – although it seems that Moneypenny speaks Temiar well, he is not a linguist in any professional sense. His acquisition of the language is a part of the pattern of acculturation that has arisen from his close (and in terms of colonial discourse perhaps 'too close') identification with the people and territory for which he is responsible.

For some of Burgess' original readers there may have been an intertextual relationship between the depiction of Moneypenny and a text published in 1958 (the previous year) by the adventure writer Dennis Holman – an account of the life of the anthropologist Pat Noone which had brought the Temiar to the attention of a popular readership. In 1931 Noone, who had trained at Cambridge, took up a post as field ethnographer at the Taiping Museum in Perak. He worked extensively with the Orang Asli, developing a particularly close relationship with the Temiar, marrying a Temiar woman, and then mysteriously disappearing in the forest in the early 1940s. Noone's work influenced later policy on the Orang Asli since in 1936 he published a report making recommendations for their 'protection', recommendations that were adopted in 1939 in the state of Perak and then formed the basis of the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance. Holman's text does not shy away from explaining the place of the Temiar in the on-going war (or 'Emergency') and readers familiar with it might have brought this knowledge to Burgess' account. What is more, the description of Moneypenny also recalls Holman's account of Noone, which suggests that the anthropologist's 'success' with the Temiar came from 'his scrupulous observation of their customs and usage', a practice which extended to his ability to speak 'their monosyllabic language' (Holman 1958: 36–37). Hence, Burgess' descriptions of the situation at Mawas play upon Holman's text in a complex fashion, down-playing the strategic importance of the region to the British but activating readers' knowledge of the more personal story of Noone's disappearance into the 'jungle' and the old trope of the colonial official 'going native'.

'From some university or other'

As they drive into Mawas Crabbe asks Moneypenny about the American researcher who is now resident in the town and developing a script for the language. Moneypenny is vague about Haynes' affiliations: 'He's from some university or other. Under the auspices of some organisation or other'. But Moneypenny is clear that Haynes is part of a 'vanguard' – that as the British leave Malaya, nature – 'abhor[ring] a vacuum' – will fill it with Americans (Burgess 1984: 506). And, indeed, Haynes' arrival in Mawas constitutes a figurative evocation of the growth of American imperialism in the region. In conversation with Crabbe, Haynes makes the political dimensions of his activities clear:

> There's work to do in South-East Asia. [. . .] I'm concerned, as you'll have guessed with the linguistic angle. [. . .] It'll cost a lot of money, of course, but it's the best possible investment. We can't afford to let the Communists get away with it. (Burgess 1984: 509)

The post-war 'Emergency' did not end with independence in 1957. The communist guerrillas fought on against the postcolonial state, the conflict only ending in 1960. Thus, Haynes' engagement with the Temiars seems motivated by a concern to disentangle them from the insurgents in the forest. His interest is obviously not in the preservation of the empire but with ensuring that its postcolonial successor does not, to use the language of the period, 'fall to' communism. The fact that Haynes seeks to produce an alphabet for the language is also significant here since rendering marginal peoples literate is one way to expedite their absorption into the state. The two students of Temiar – Moneypenny and Haynes – represent two species of imperialism, as one of them cedes to the other. But Burgess only attributes a political motive to one of them, Haynes, and in this sense enacts Erwin's 'disavowal' of the British authorities' 'resort to power', a disavowal that is not a feature of Holman's book. In Burgess' representation, Moneypenny is an eccentric figure in the process of becoming Temiar, whereas Haynes is the representative of global geopolitical interests.

What is interesting about Burgess' staging of this development is the emphasis he places on Haynes as a representative of a professionalised academic discipline. This is already evident in Moneypenny's equivocal statement that he is 'from some university'. But it also emerges in the fact that, when Haynes talks about Temiar, he uses the technical language of Linguistics. As Moneypenny tells Crabbe, 'He talks a lot about phonemes and semantemes and bilabial fricatives'. And when Crabbe actually meets Haynes, the technical language also flows freely: '"This afternoon", [said Haynes], "I must do a little more dialectology. The real job, as you know, is isolating the phonemes, or, rather, discovering what is phonemic and what

is allophonic"'. Of course, the terms 'phonemic' and 'allophonic' are hardly cutting-edge in a conversation that supposedly takes place in 1957 but their appearance within the language of a novel stands out and speaks of a technical way of viewing language that is not present elsewhere in the book despite Burgess' own rather obsessive interest in all things linguistic. One might wonder whether the inclusion of the less common term 'semanteme' indicates something about the particularities of Haynes' training. (It originates in *Le Langage*, published by Joseph Vendryès in 1921, and appears in a trickle of US publications thereafter (See Vendryès (1921: 86)). However, it seems more reasonable to see it as evoking what Ivić (1999 [1965]: 92) describes as the 'flood of new terms ending in – *eme* for language units hierarchically higher than phonemes: tagmeme, grammeme, semanteme, episememe', a phenomenon arising from the 'strict distinction of structure levels' in the work of Leonard Bloomfield (Ivić 1999 [1965]: 89). Thus, 'semanteme' has the right connotations and, for those familiar with the subject, evokes the Bloomfieldian 'flood' very clearly.[6]

Crabbe's response to Haynes' discussion of the 'phonemic' and the 'allophonic' is frank bewilderment: '[H]e felt lost and boorish and crude. The British, he decided, had been merely gifted amateurs: Singapore had been raised on amateur architecture, amateur town-planning, amateur education, amateur law. Now was the time for the professionals' (Burgess 1984: 510). Hence, in the figure of Haynes, Burgess evokes an image of professionalised academic disciplines, including Linguistics in its structuralist incarnation, as the handmaidens of US imperialism. For Crabbe, what lies ahead is a technocratic future in which figures such as Haynes bestride the world armed with material technologies (like the recording equipment piled up in his van) and intellectual ones (like the concepts of the phoneme and its inventory of allophonic realisations). It is interesting that Burgess uses the contrasting term 'amateur' to describe British colonial practice. One might think of the etymology of this term – its connections with the Latin verb *amare* – and the notion that the amateur does things for the love of it and not for profit. Read in this way, the term implies the kind of liberal ideology that for Erwin is so important an element of Burgess' text. It suggests a mode of operation grounded in 'an attachment to individual

[6]It is also interesting that Burgess chooses the term 'bilabial fricative' in order to evoke the discourse of phonetics. In *Language Made Plain*, he writes at length about the speech sounds of the world's languages and, using material from Dickens, considers the possibility that the voiced bilabial fricative 'existed for a long time in colloquial English, especially that of lower-class Londoners'. This leads him to claim: 'Certainly, both /v/ and /w/ seem only recently to have come to the enjoyment of clear identities, though many foreigners regard them still as unnatural sounds. /v/ has no place in either Chinese or Malay; the bilabial fricative is as common in the speech of English-speaking Orientals as it is in the speech of nineteenth-century London' (Burgess 1975 [1964]: 41).

As with the term 'semanteme', it may be that not every reader will infer so much from the reference to 'bilabial fricatives' but, for those with more contextual knowledge, the association with various Asian-accented Englishes lies embedded in the text available for the reader to notice.

human beings' and hence further underlines the disavowal inherent in the representation of Haynes.

In attributing these political motives to Haynes Burgess is alluding to a discourse that was actually very salient in the post-war period. Looking to the literature of American Linguistics, one can also find connections drawn between the practice of fieldwork and the geopolitical changes that began with the Second World War. In 1967, Richard Samarin of the Hartford Seminary Foundation published *Field Linguistics: A Guide to Linguistic Field Work*. To devote a whole book to fieldwork methods is, Samarin suggests, something novel. However, such a book is needed precisely because of the growing importance of fieldwork in the preceding decades (Samarin 1967: v). Although Samarin's book was published 8 years after Burgess' novel, it is useful to read the two together because Samarin's work has a retrospective quality. Its discussion rests upon the activities of scholars who might have been Haynes' peers. It digests their thinking and draws together writing on the topic, much of it what Samarin calls 'contributions tucked away' in the technical literature published in preceding decades. His use of this earlier work indicates that Samarin does not see fieldwork as something new in any absolute sense but regards it as requiring a new attention resulting in part from global political circumstances at mid-century:

> [F]ield work is necessary if linguistics is going to be applied practically to human affairs. For example, with the eclipse of the colonial era and the rise of new nations, there is an urgent need for language planning and "language engineering." Nations need to determine how many languages are spoken within their boundaries, which ones should be used for education and other purposes, and how they are to be adapted to modern life. (Samarin 1967: 6)

Thus, Samarin invokes exactly the kind of setting in which Haynes is working on Temiar, although Burgess is explicit about the anti-communist thrust of the work in a way that Samarin is not.

Having commented on the paucity of publications on fieldwork, Samarin sketches a brief lineage of texts that cover the relevant ground and these also have a suggestive relationship with Burgess' fictional representation. First, Samarin (1967: v) points to 'two small works published over twenty years ago', namely Leonard Bloomfield's sixteen-page *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Languages* and Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager's longer *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*, both of which appeared in 1942, shortly after the US entered the Second World War (Bloomfield 1942, Bloch and Trager 1942). According to Bloch and Trager's preface, they were prepared 'at the suggestion and under the auspices of the Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies on the National School of Modern Oriental Languages and Civilizations', which is interesting because, again, that committee presented its priorities in terms of the changing role

of the US on the global stage. In a set of preliminary proposals dated 8 September 1941, for example, Mortimer Graves wrote:

> The present emergency [. . .] has brought the East closer. In some alarm we discover that we must deal with Japan, with Singapore, with Dakar, and that we lack almost completely adequately equipped students of these regions. [. . .] Badly as we are prepared for the emergency in the matter of aircraft and artillery, it is hardly too much to say that we are infinitely worse prepared for world war on the ideological front. (Graves 1941)

The production of new guides to the study of undescribed languages seemed necessary in addition to the establishment of a school of 'oriental' languages because, as Bloch and Trager (1942: 4) say, 'for many of the languages which [Americans] must now study, no satisfactory handbooks or teachers are to be found in this country'. The implication is that as US engagement with the wider world increases, Americans must be trained in the methods of descriptive linguistics. They must learn to deduce the structures of languages from direct encounters with data.

Having mentioned the works by Bloomfield, Bloch and Trager, Samarin (1967: v) alludes to two mimeographed texts published in 1946 and 1947 – Eugene Nida's *Morphology* and Kenneth Pike's *Phonemics: A Technique for Reducing Languages to Writing* (Nida 1946, Pike 1947).[7] Pike and Nida were closely involved with the Summer Institute for Linguistics, which was founded in 1934 by William Cameron Townsend, a Presbyterian missionary with a commitment to the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages. It is notable that in its early years the Summer Institute down-played its religious mission. Søren Hvalkof and Peter Aaby discuss this in the introduction to the collected volume *Is God an American?* Because of what they describe as the 'strongly anti-American and anti-ecclesiastical' perspectives of 'Mexican social movements' in the 1930s, 'Townsend and his collaborators adopted an alternative image – and represented themselves as a linguistic and cultural institution' rather than as missionaries (Hvalkof & Aaby 1981: 10). This enabled them to secure contracts to work with indigenous groups in ways that were in the interests of national governments. To quote Hvalkof and Aaby (1981: 11) the 'leadership [of SIL] has pragmatically sought to merge its goals with those of national political elites'. What this meant in practice was the closer integration of indigenous groups into the state and a consequent reduction in the potential for their territory to become a site of subversion or opposition, a dynamic that Hartch (2006) examines in detail with regard to the SIL's activities in Mexico.

When Pike and Nida published their training manuals, SIL had been operating for just over a decade and its activities were largely confined to Mexico and Peru. But during the 1950s they extended operations in

[7]See Seuren (1998: 211–213) on the Linguistics of Kenneth Pike.

South and Central America with projects established in Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Brazil. They entered the Philippines in 1953 and Papua New Guinea in 1956. All these developments were contractually agreed with the relevant governments (Hvalkof & Aaby 1981: 17–18).

The SIL was not active in Malaya in the 1950s but nevertheless something about Haynes is reminiscent of their activities. He talks about establishing what is phonemic and what is allophonic so that he can work out a system of writing for the Temiars – he might well have been trained from Pike's manual *Phonemics: A Technique for Reducing Languages to Writing*. His affiliations are never articulated. Moneypenny does not know which university he comes from and says that he is 'Under the auspices of some organisation or other' (Burgess 1984: 506). Haynes makes some remark about 'all of us who are coming out here for the first time', but when Crabbe asks, 'all of who?', simply replies 'various organisations' (Burgess 1984: 509). Hence, there is obfuscation about the identity of the body that he represents, an obfuscation which also surrounded the SIL and led to speculation about connections with the US government, the CIA and foreign commercial interests. Finally, there is the focus on bringing literacy to indigenous groups, a process which serves to tie those groups into the state and reduce the risk of political instability in the kinds of marginal spaces that they inhabited.

The fact that Burgess' depiction of Haynes so closely matches the discourses of American Linguistics as it was practised in the post-war period would not have been visible to many of his original readers. But his presentation of Haynes in these terms is important because of the way in which it makes the 'resort to power' into an American problem. There is, of course, a story to be told about the complicity between British imperialism and scholarship but Burgess refuses to make this connection and, as we shall see, has Moneypenny angrily deny the relevance of academic disciplines to what takes place in the territory for which he is responsible. Thus, Haynes becomes the representative of a technocractic approach to global politics which contrasts with Moneypenny's very personal investments in his relationship with the Temiars.

Professionalism undermined

But if Crabbe considers Haynes the exemplar of the professionalism of US intervention in the postcolonial world, to maintain this view involves overlooking certain facts. Haynes' 'professionalism' has already been undermined by a humorous scene in which we witness him trying to elicit vocabulary from informants. He is sitting in Moneypenny's office:

> On the wall hung a large sheet of glazed rag-paper with pictures on it: men, women, children, horses, pigs, houses, trains, aeroplanes, buffaloes, trees. Temple Haynes pointed at pictures in turn with a stick inviting the little men to name them. He seemed pleased to see Moneypenny. "I don't seem to be getting very far with this dialect," he said. "They keep saying the same thing. They seem to be giving everything the same name." He read off a weird word from his notebook. "That," he said.
>
> "Yes," said Moneypenny. "That means 'picture'." (Burgess 1984: 508)

This joke at Haynes' expense reflects concerns that were regularly expressed in the linguistic literature. For example, Nida (1949: 176) warns about the risks of eliciting vocabulary through gesture, his point being that an extended index finger is not a universal signal of ostension: 'It is reported that in one instance, the natives were giving the name of the finger with which the investigator was pointing. He should have stuck out his lower lip toward the objects'. Similarly, Voegelin and Robinett (1954:94)[8] warn their readers not to assume that two-dimensional representation is universally understood: 'In some areas of the world in which photography and two-dimensional representation in general have not yet appeared, pictures are a source of wonderment rather than a stimulus for response'. In this context, they allude to the experience of the SIL: 'the Summer Institute of Linguistics people in Mexico found that hours elapsed before stick-men pictures were recognized as representations of anything'. And Samarin (1967: 131–32) offers similar anecdotes although he does not specify where they have come from or when the relevant research was carried out. In one, a field worker points to himself to elicit the form for 'I' and receives the form for 'Adam's Apple'.

In Burgess' text these concerns are shaped in a way that primes the reader to respond to Haynes' political agenda. The fact that he has made this elementary error serves to detach him further from the idea of western intervention as mediated through what Erwin (2012: 185) calls 'an attachment to individual human beings'. He is so far from understanding the Temiars that he does not even realise that they are not describing the contents of his pictures. With this in mind, it might seem as if the text is building a contrast between, on the one hand, an idealised image of the British colonial officer, practical, experienced, and tied to 'his' people by strong affective bonds, and, on the other, a critical picture of a professionalised American ideologue with no understanding of the people with whom he interacts. Indeed, in a scene that takes place over an evening meal the episode initially seems to develop in that way.

Moneypenny says that he is looking forward to the return of his colleague, Barlow, who is away in Kuala Lumpur. When Barlow is back, Moneypenny will be able to spend more time in the forest. '"I can't stand

[8]Samarin (1967: 57) introduces Voegelin and Robinett's comments in his discussion of elicitation techniques.

this sort of life'", he says, referring to his existence in Mawas. "'I want to get back into the jungle. It's the only possible life for a man"'. (Burgess 1984: 513) Crabbe asks how Barlow is and Moneypenny's reply returns to the professionalisation of expertise through the mediation of academic disciplines: "'The same as ever. The nice little professional anthropologist, the sort of bloke who likes office-work"' (Burgess 1984: 513). At this point Haynes steps in to defend Barlow's professionalism. It is surely useful that the anthropologist has "'a terminology, a classificatory system, the fact that he comes with a background of intensive comparative studies"' (Burgess 1984: 513). But Moneypenny rejects this view, shouting an expletive, "'Balls"', and asserting: "'You've got to get into the jungle. You've got to come face to face with the living reality"'. He then rejects Haynes' defence of Barlow in personal terms: "'You're just as bad", [he snapped]. [. . .] "Making alphabets without knowing a word of the language"'. Once again, the text echoes the discourse of contemporary scholarship and is reminiscent of remarks that Samarin (1967: 50) makes about the "'hit and run" tactics of American field linguistics', which some critics have 'deplored'.[9] And Haynes' response seems precious in its insistence on his status as the representative of an academic discipline: "'Really", [he protested] with mildness, "I never laid claim to be a linguist. I'm a linguistician, which is rather different. I mean, what I'm after chiefly [. . .] is the phonemes"' (Burgess 1984: 514).

But if Moneypenny is the mouthpiece of this critique of US intervention, he does not come well out of the encounter himself, abusing Crabbe roundly when he tries to defend Haynes and – bizarrely – speaking as if he is the spokesman for some view of Crabbe that the Temiars purportedly hold: "'We may be far from *civilisation*", he [Moneypenny] sneered, "but we know all about you people. We don't want you, me and the Temiars. Leave us alone, that's all we ask"' (Burgess 1984: 514). He storms off to bed and, as he does so, we receive a final verdict on his behaviour: "'Bloody mad", said Crabbe' (Burgess 1984: 514).

Conclusion

This paper has pointed to echoes and resemblances between Burgess's depiction of field Linguistics in the late 1950s and accounts that appear in the academic literature. The suggestion is not that Burgess had read that literature (and, indeed, some of it post-dates the trilogy a little). But throughout his life Burgess was fascinated by both languages and Linguistics, so that it is far from implausible that he

[9]Samarin (1967: 50) suggests that such criticisms are grounded in 'an incredulity that an accurate grammar can result from a five-month exposure to a language with no speaking knowledge of it', an attitude that arises from the surprising power of the methods taught in texts like those of Pike and Nida.

encountered the ways of speaking and the methodological problems which crop up in the Mawar episode as a result of interactions with people for whom both were part of the reality of their working lives. For a scholar interested in the politics of language study, Burgess' representation of Moneypenny and Haynes is especially interesting because of his use of the experiences of professional linguists in developing a particularly despondent image of the politics of western intervention in Malaya. As Erwin (2012) shows, the trilogy is strongly informed by a mood that is found in other 'end of empire' texts. In somewhat anguished fashion, it asks the question, 'What was it all for?' but rejects any properly political answer, displacing questions about the 'resort to power' onto the post-war expansion of US influence and finding justification in personal encounters across various cultural divides. Haynes stands for US intervention in South East Asia and, as such, is rendered risible by his complete inability to understand the people who are so crucial to the anti-communist mission. But Moneypenny is not the representative of any benign English liberalism. The image of relationships blossoming across the colonial divide is only tenable if the divide itself remains in place and Moneypenny is far into the process of 'going native'. He cannot stand for the 'good Englishman' precisely because he has left his Englishness behind.

Of course, both characters could have been represented differently – Burgess' text does not communicate the 'truth' of language study in the context of decolonisation. But the very fact that he uses these two students of Temiar in his treatment of certain distinctive 'end of empire' problems leads the reader into a space of reflection on both the complicity of scholarship with imperial power and on the politics of the very relationship between linguist and informants.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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