

from Linguistic Ecology to Ecology of Language to Ecolinguistics

Voegelin to Haugen to Halliday

Voegelin & Voegelin: linguistic ecology

- ◆ Voegelin and Voegelin said that “in linguistic ecology, one begins not with a particular language but with a particular area” (1964; cf. Haugen, 1972: 328), and this emphasized the importance of the **place** or the **environment** or the **situation** of a language.
- ◆ This ecological perspective encouraged linguists to describe languages in terms of their areas and situations of use. However, the **focus** remained on languages.
- ◆ Language was viewed in terms of **human geography**: How did the environment (qua speakers’ geography) affect language?

Haugen's social "environment"

- ❖ Haugen elaborated a richer "ecology of language" by saying that "the true environment of a language is **the society that uses it** as one of its codes. Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e., their social and natural environment. Part of its ecology is therefore **psychological**: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another part of its ecology is **sociological**: its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication. The ecology of a language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit to others." (1972)

Language in Society

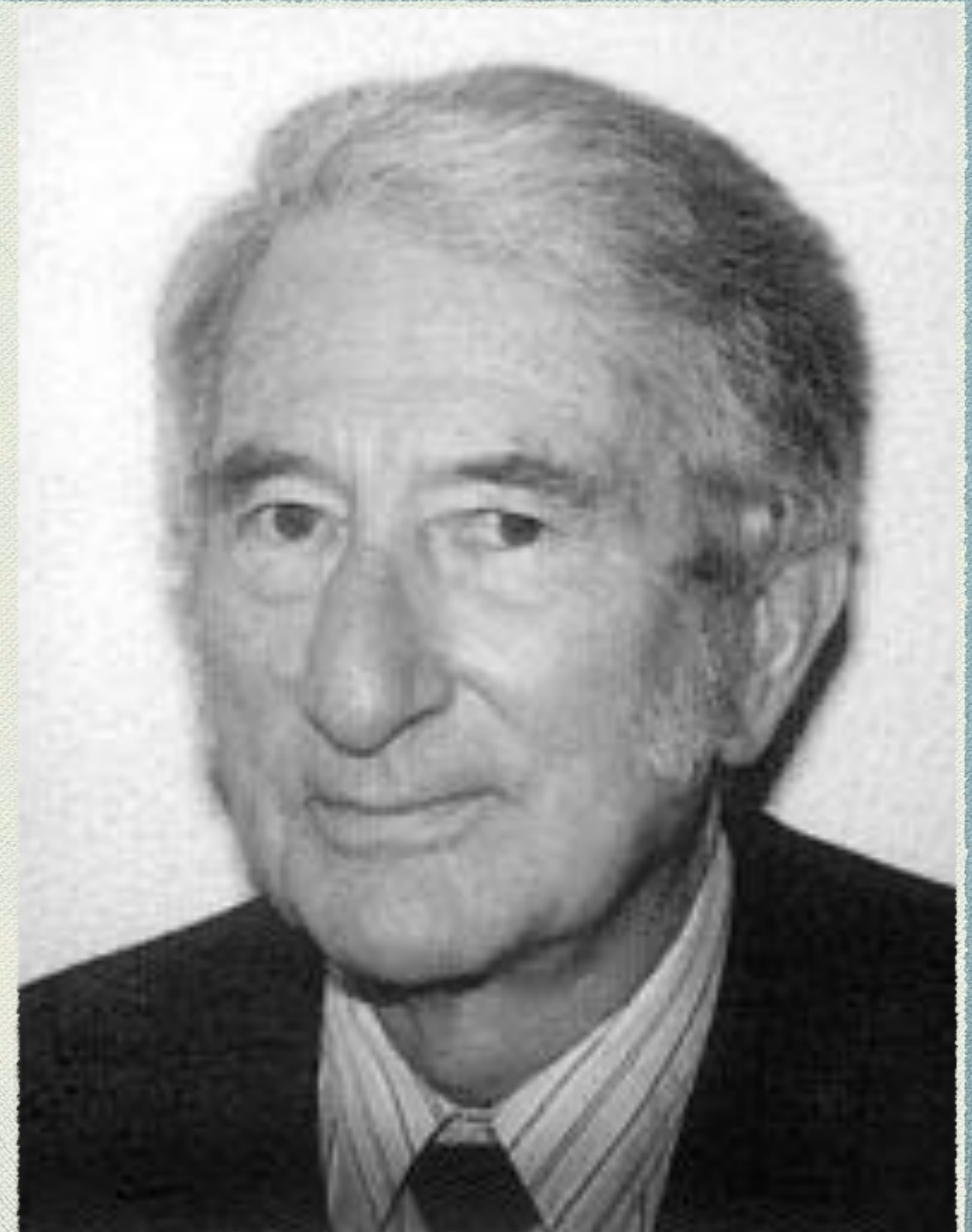
- ◆ Haugen's ecological questions about language help us to understand how languages function and change in their social environments.
- ◆ Haugen's perspective helped us to understand how language can change society and how society can change language.
- ◆ The individual psychological aspects of language helps us to understand how language changes one speaker at a time.

Halliday goes beyond society

- ◆ At the 9th World Conference of Applied Linguistics in 1990, Michael Halliday delivered a keynote paper entitled “New Ways of Meaning: the Challenge to Applied Linguistics” which claimed that “classism, growthism, destruction of species, pollution and the like [...] are not just problems for the biologists and physicists. They are problems for the applied linguistic community as well”; and Halliday encouraged linguists to **care about the environment in which language occurred** by asking questions such as: Do linguistic patterns, literally, affect the survival and wellbeing of the human species as well as other species on Earth?

Halliday's "ecolinguistics"

- ◆ Halliday's perspective encourages us to realize that linguistic effects are not limited to the social environment.
- ◆ The physical environment can also affect language.
- ◆ Language can even affect the physical environment.



Stibbe's new normative perspective

- ◆ Halliday is optimistic that we can change our world by changing how we talk and think about it: “We are not the prisoners of cultural semiotic; we can all learn to move outside it. But this requires a positive act of semiotic reconstruction. We are socialized within it, and our meaning potential is derived from it.” (1978: 140)
- ◆ Arran Stibbe, founder of the International Ecolinguistics Association, took Halliday's recommendation to heart. Stibbe has written: “Ecolinguistics is the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment. It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life.” (2014)

