

Tonya Kaushik

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Dr. Doina Kovalik

## Outline

Derpmann (2009) provides an overview of the moral theories of solidarity and cosmopolitanism, focusing on defining the terms and comparing the social obligations of each. He reviews literature from the fields of ethics and politics rather than linguistics. The first part of the article offers a general outline of solidarity and the obligations associated with it in comparison to cosmopolitanism social obligations. The second section uses the example of the European Union to describe changing attitudes of solidarity and cosmopolitanism, and the third section describes the merging of modern notions of solidarity and cosmopolitanism. Derpmann concludes that solidarity and cosmopolitanism are not mutually exclusive terms; rather, the social obligations they describe can be complementary.

## Comments

Derpmann's (2009) article "Solidarity and Cosmopolitanism" was challenging to read, primarily because it is not a typical linguistics article but an comparison of two philosophies from ethics and politics. His treatment of solidarity goes beyond our brief examination of the term in our linguistics courses. When we discussed classic linguistics studies by Labov (1966) and Trudgill (1974), we defined solidarity in simple terms: a feeling of belonging to a group or community. We discussed how those feelings can be reinforced by similar pronunciations and lexical choices. Derpmann expands on the basic definition of solidarity and includes the moral and political aspects of social obligation. This conceptualization goes beyond a person changing his speech patterns in order to sound more like his neighbors in order to linguistically mark his belonging. Instead, Derpmann's version of solidarity, a concept that eventually evolves into a cosmopolitan respect for all humanity, requires a person to change the entire focus of his existence – a person can use local speech patterns but must look beyond his local community and

feel a strong moral obligation to participate in a global society where everyone is equally responsible for (and to) everyone else.

From a linguistics perspective, it seems that this change is unlikely to happen. Yes, people should care more for the “greater good,” but we will still have accents and other linguistic traits that others can use to divide us. Trudgill’s (1974) and Chesire’s (1978) studies on class-based speech differences indicate that people can be stigmatized by the way they speak, even if those differences help form bonds of solidarity within their social class. In Derpmann’s view, linguistics is irrelevant; solidarity gradually grows into a cosmopolitan outlook where everyone feels morally obligated to help those around him. As we have studied, however, linguistics can also mark relationships of power. Brown and Gilman’s (1960) studies on the use of *tu* and *vous* found that solidarity can be achieved through the use of second person pronouns if interlocutors both use *tu* or both use *vous*. However, that solidarity becomes a power struggle when one person, usually a superior, expects to receive the formal *vous* form and responds with the informal *tu* to his subordinates. This distinction goes against the simple definition of solidarity we have been using thus far, and it implies that regardless of the desire for humanity to work together, the language we use often serves to separate people into classes rather than unite us in solidarity.

#### Excerpts

1. “Both ‘solidarity’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ describe ideals of human thought and action. ... Obligations of solidarity imply the concern for a particular delimitable community, while cosmopolitanism contains an unconfined orientation towards humanity” (p. 304).
2. “[T]he norms of solidarity are *formulated* as legal claims and in universal terms, but they *find application* only to the members of a defined nation or state. This form of solidarity

may originally be based on the commonality of culture and language, but it has widely been replaced by formal citizenship” (p. 306).

3. “Cosmopolitan forms of solidarity do not extend to the universal moral community, but still transcend ethnic or national delimitations and thus emphasize the inclusive, rather than the exclusive component of solidarity. These obligations have to compete with close communal as well as strictly universal obligations” (p. 314).

### Questions

1. What are some ways you have changed your own speech habits in an effort to increase feelings of solidarity with a group?
2. What are some strategies teachers can use to help their ELL students feel more at ease in the ESL classroom? What are some tips for building classroom solidarity?
3. Since English does not have pronoun distinctions between formal and informal “you” like the *tu* and *vous* of French, what are some other ways English differentiates between formal and informal speech? How does pragmatic knowledge help English speakers build solidarity?

### References

Derpmann, S. (2009). Solidarity and cosmopolitanism. *Ethical Theory & Moral Practice*, 12(3), 303-315.

Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd. Oxford University Press.