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Social Indexicality in French Pronominal Address

This article examines the socially significant meanings generated through the use of the French second-person singular pronominal address forms, tu *and* vous. *The enduring complexity of this address system derives from the coexistence of two orders of indexical relations, which link particular patterns of pronominal usage with various contextual dimensions. Speakers' strategic use of pronominal forms and beliefs about the uses and users of language are emphasized as crucial to understanding the logic and evolution of such systems.*

The complexities of the French pronominal address system have long fascinated and perplexed observers and participants of this linguistic community. Although there are just two simple forms used for singular second-person address—*tu* and *vous*—they are understood to signify a whole range of things about the context in which they are used, including the nature of the relationship between those who use them, the nature of the circumstances, and the place of individual speakers in the wider social order. Aware of these multiple meanings, native French speakers often regard this distinction as a resource that allows them to nuance in various ways their speech and interaction. As one commentator has observed:

> *Tu* and *vous* give the [French] language a richness, a freedom of play that languages with a single [second-person pronominal address] form do not know. The passage from one [form] to the other defines modes of relationship between human beings, establishes hierarchies, allows one to show respect in just the right

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> amounts, to measure distances, to maintain them, or, on the contrary, to abolish them. [Weil 1983:66, my translation]

For those who master the intricacies of this address system, the T/V distinction is not only a valuable communicative resource but also a sign of the resilience of French in the face of anglophone hegemony.

From certain points of view, however, it would seem that the French pronominal address system is losing its long characteristic complexity. In metropolitan France today, one often hears French speakers claim that the use of the polite *vous* is on the decline, that French society is moving toward "a generalized use of *tu*" (*un tutoiement généralisé*), or more simply, that "now everyone says *tu* to one another." As the author of an etiquette guide noted, in a breezy tone no doubt designed to make her perspective seem perfectly up-to-date, "We live in a very *tu*-oriented period. From the National Assembly to groups of young people, *tu* reigns everywhere!" (Verly 1957:92, my translation). In the face of this apparent "reign" of *tu*, some French speakers even predict that in another 50 years or so, *vous*—as a pronominal form for singular addressees—will no longer be used.[1]

The notion that French society is moving toward "a generalized use of *tu*" may be understood as a popular formula for describing two related shifts in patterns of pronominal address. First, this notion expresses native speakers' sense that the use of *tu* in both private and public contexts has become broader and less explicitly restricted than what they know or believe to have been the case in the past, particularly among elites and those who aspired to join them. Second, it conveys their sense that stabilized asymmetrical *tu/vous* usages have become less common and that pronominal address has thereby become less explicitly oriented toward marking differences in social status. As we shall see, contemporary patterns of address and the longer-term historical evolution of such patterns are more complex than popular notions about the "generalization of *tu*" suggest. Nonetheless, this formula is frequently encountered, no doubt in part because it resonates with the belief that in French society today social interactions are much less rigidly keyed to social distinctions than was the case in the past.

Indeed, these shifts in patterns of pronominal address are commonly invoked as crucial signs of a broader transformation of standards of civility that has occurred in tandem with the postwar "modernization" of French society. Norms of behavior associated with the prominence of "traditional" elites are seen to have given way to seemingly more casual and less status-conscious modes of conduct, to an informal and egalitarian style of interaction known as "la décontraction."[2]

Many people feel rather ambivalent about what the emergence of this new civility may signify. On the one hand, la décontraction is seen as a form of social progress: as a means of diminishing social barriers and of fostering more "warm" and "authentic" relationships with others and, by its very prevalence, as an indication that considerations of status or authority have become less relevant to many ordinary social interactions. On the other hand, however, these pointedly informal modes of conduct are sometimes

decried as an unfortunate development: as evidence of a decline in decency or "politeness," as a sign of a loss of "authenticity" in social relations, and ultimately, as a threat to the communicative capacity of particular aspects of social conduct. In either case, pronominal address is seen as one of the key means by which these developments have occurred, and the "generalization of *tu*" is often cited as evidence of such progress or decline.

These shifts in patterns of pronominal address in France are of scholarly interest from an ethnographic point of view, as well as because they challenge us to reconsider several more general analytical and methodological issues. Pronominal address systems (including and extending beyond the French tu/vous system) are widely recognized as linguistic features that in various ways mediate and signal the nature of social relations, occasions, and identities. Particularly influential in this regard has been Roger Brown and Albert Gilman's now classic analysis (1960) of "T/V systems" in several European languages, which proposes that the meaningful nature of pronominal address in these contexts can be accounted for in terms of the principles of "power" and "solidarity."[3] In spite of its influence, the "semantic" approach adopted by Brown and Gilman has gradually come to be seen as being in certain respects inadequate for understanding the process by which multiple social meanings are generated through the use of such address systems. Particularly problematic are the notions that pronominal address largely reflects a static order of relationships defined in terms of macrosociological categories; that single instances of address use are unambiguously meaningful in and of themselves; and that the social signification and evolution of these address systems may be accounted for without regard to the full range of metapragmatic frameworks in terms of which native speakers understand any such address system.

Subsequent work on these and other systems of deference and honorification, on the role of language ideology in linguistic change, and on the indexical functions of language has suggested ways in which these analytical issues may be better dealt with.[4] Adopting the more broadly semiotic perspective associated with these more recent analyses, I seek here to describe contemporary patterns of pronominal address among speakers of "standard" French in the Paris metropolitan area, in relation to the longer-term development of this address system, while avoiding the problems associated with the "semantic" approach, as well as the possible biases of native speakers' perspectives on the evolution of pronominal norms.

The inherent complexity of the French pronominal system resides, as we shall see, in the fact that it involves what Michael Silverstein (1992, 1996) has termed two distinct yet related "orders of indexicality": first and most straightforwardly, the capacity to "index," or point to, the relative formality of settings and occasions, as well as degrees of deference and/or intimacy between speaker and addressee; and second, the capacity to signal certain aspects of an individual speaker's identity within the wider social order. In order to understand how these various sets of values become relevant to social interactions and how such values have evolved over time, it is necessary to take into account elements of language ideology, the particular

beliefs that speakers commonly express about the uses and users of (their) language.

These beliefs, as we shall see, crucially mediate between particular uses of the tu/vous system and the contextual dimensions that are thereby made relevant to those interactions. At the same time, shared notions about how and by whom the tu/vous system has been and is now used constitute an implicit interpretative framework, which may ultimately skew speakers' and analysts' understandings of this address system and its evolution. One of the key analytical challenges is thus to recognize the importance of speakers' assumptions about language, as part of the metapragmatic frameworks that govern their language use and interpretation of linguistic practices, without, however, ignoring the extent to which those perspectives may be shaped by particular biases or interests (see Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:57–58).

On the basis of this understanding of the pragmatics of pronominal address and the development of indexical values within this system, it will be possible to see what, if anything, has changed in the use of *tu* and *vous;* what such changes or continuities indicate about the nature of contemporary social relations; and why the notion that the familiar *tu* is inevitably replacing the polite *vous* is understandable but misguided.

Making Sense of *Tu* and *Vous*

Like other address systems, the tu/vous system has both referential and pragmatic functions: not only do *tu* and *vous* pick out or designate the addressee, they also "index," or point to, particular aspects of the social context in which this act of reference occurs. It is primarily this pragmatic function—the social indexicality of tu/vous usage—that is at issue here.

A number of studies have helped clarify how pronominal terms of address derive their social meaning from the context in which they are used.[5] Brown and Gilman's analysis of "the pronouns of power and solidarity" in several European languages (1972[1960]), while not the first of such studies, has been among the most influential. They argue that pronominal address in the languages studied varies in accordance with "the objective *relationship* existing *between speaker and addressee*" (1972:252, emphasis added), as it is defined in terms of two key considerations: the relative "power" and/or the degree of "solidarity" that exists between the two parties. Where one person has some form of power over another (by age, wealth, rank, etc.), address is asymmetrical, with the superior person saying T but receiving V in return (1972:255–256). Where what counts is the relative degree of like-mindedness or commonality of interests between speaker and addressee, address is symmetrical: to the extent that two parties identify with one another (due to their gender, family ties, group membership, etc.), they will use a symmetrical T, and to the extent that they differ along such lines, they will use a symmetrical V (1972:257–258). In the process of characterizing these two "semantics" or sets of norms, Brown and Gilman propose a model of their historical development.[6] They also recognize that extensive use of the T or the V form appears to be linked to

certain *characteristics of the speaker*, notably, social class and political orientation.[7]

The sheer elegance of Brown and Gilman's analysis—based as it is on the notion that this complex domain of practice may be accounted for in terms of two key principles—was no doubt an important part of its influence on subsequent studies of pronominal address and other sociolinguistic phenomena.[8] Yet the very simplicity that made their analysis so appealing initially has gradually come to be seen as a limitation. From the perspective of the present analysis, there are two main sets of concerns.

First, the "semantic" approach fails to recognize the extent to which social relationships and other aspects of the social context are not simply reflected by but are indeed defined in and constituted through language use. Rather than assuming that speakers have from the outset a clear sense of the context, we need to see that it is often the very terms that both speakers use in the course of an interaction, and the patterns of symmetry and asymmetry that thereby ensue, that point to or help define the nature of their relationship or other features of the context. These contextual dimensions may include not only macrosociological variables (or criteria that exist independently of any given interaction, such as age, gender, social status, kinship, group membership, etc.), but also interactional variables, or considerations that relate to the specifics of the speech event, such as the setting of the speech event, the topic of discourse, the presence of certain bystanders, or a speaker's disposition toward an addressee (see Agha 1994:278–279; Friedrich 1986).

Second, there is the issue of the locus of meaning. Certain aspects of Brown and Gilman's analysis suggest that any single instance of using T or V is unambiguously meaningful in and of itself.[9] As subsequent work on address phenomena has emphasized, however, the meaning of any given usage depends on the emergent understanding of the particular contextual dimensions involved that develops in the course of social interaction, in large part through the symmetry or asymmetry of forms and of rights to set forms, as well as sometimes through participants' explicit commentary on such usage or invocation of such principles (see Agha 1994; Friedrich 1986; Paulston 1976; Silverstein 1996). To account for the significance of T/V usage as an index of particular features of the immediate context, we need to focus on the paired exchanges of forms that occur, the patterns of symmetry and asymmetry which they entail, and the multiple—interactional as well as macrosociological—dimensions of the context which may be relevant to specific interactions.

Yet there is also the question of how distinctive uses of any given T/V system (what Brown and Gilman call "expressive styles") effectively signal the existence of enduring characteristics on the part of the speaker. In order to understand the functioning of these (second-order) indexical values, it is essential to recognize how particular beliefs about the uses and users of language mediate between certain uses of the T/V system and their contextualization as indices of speaker identity (see Silverstein 1992).

This analytical task is facilitated in the present case by the fact that native French speakers are usually keenly aware of the social indexical values of

pronominal address; they instinctively and often explicitly recognize the various kinds of social significance generated through the use of *tu* and *vous* in relation to particular contexts.[10] When they talk about pronominal address, they often describe their own or others' language use as inherently "strategic" or oriented toward the achievement of particular goals. Their accounts of strategic use of the tu/vous system can help clarify the indexical values of these terms, insofar as they make explicit both the perceived "norms for 'proper' use" and the specific effects that are sought or achieved through particular uses of these terms in given contexts (Errington 1985:296). Nonetheless, native speakers' awareness of the strategic aspects of this or any aspect of language use needs to be examined carefully, for this emphasis on strategy—insofar as it stresses the value of individual tokens of *tu* or *vous* or the intentions of individual speakers—may actually obscure the complex social significances produced through use of the pronominal address system.

Given these considerations and the questions that guide this inquiry, it was necessary to take into account a number of different kinds of sources. First, in trying to come to a better understanding of the emergence and evolution of various social indexical values of *tu* and *vous*, I have drawn on broader language histories and prior studies of the French pronominal address system (Braun 1988; Brown and Gilman 1972; Brunot 1967; Bryan 1972; Drown 1979; Maley 1974; Nyrop 1925; Sherzer 1988; Vassallo-Villaneau 1991). Other forms of written commentary on tu/vous usage—as they appear in etiquette guides, professional handbooks and publications, travel guides, literary texts, and the popular press—have also been consulted for the insights that they offer about linguistic norms and the social significance of particular patterns of pronominal address at various periods.

Most of the other data discussed in the present analysis were collected in the course of extended field research conducted for the most part in the Paris metropolitan area between 1988 and 1991.[11] These include what Errington calls "data of use" (1985): observations of the linguistic forms used by particular speakers in relation to particular addressees (including myself) in particular contexts, and of the broader interactions that occurred in relation to such instances of pronominal address. They also include "data of mention": accounts of usage that were reported by native French speakers either spontaneously or in response to my queries, in the context of interviews and of more informal conversations. These accounts of particular instances of ordinary and "strategic" pronominal use help clarify the indexical values of *tu* and *vous*. In addition, speakers' descriptions of the norms and patterns of pronominal address that they believe to have prevailed among previous generations or that they recall from earlier points in their own lives, whether accurate or not, reveal the particular representations of "the past" that inform their perceptions of the evolution of linguistic practices and of the significance of particular aspects of present usage. By drawing on the historical and written record, on observations of current use and on metalinguistic statements about pronominal use in the past and the present, we may begin to understand what has effectively changed, or remained constant, in the use and value of *tu* and *vous*, and

what may explain the current tendency among French speakers to expect the eventual "triumph of *tu*."[12]

Toward a "Generalized Use of *Tu*": Perceptions of Change in Pronominal Address

While the distinction between T and V in Latin and other languages that developed from it was originally simply a question of number (T for a single addressee, V for more than one), it gradually acquired the capacity to convey several more socially relevant contextual features as well. According to many accounts, the use of the V form to address individual figures in positions of power or authority, and the corresponding asymmetrical use of T to connote an addressee's relative inferiority, emerged first.[13] With time, distinct class-based patterns of address also developed. By the 17th century in France, while commoners tended to use a symmetrical *tu* with their peers, elites often adopted a symmetrical *vous* among themselves (most consistently in public, status-marked situations). Extensive use of *vous* thus came to be seen as a sign of good breeding or elegance on the part of the speaker.

Given its association with the maintenance of social privileges and asymmetries, the use of the plural *vous* to address singular subjects was briefly called into question during the French Revolution. Yet the campaign to institute a symmetrical use of *tu* between all individuals ultimately failed.[14] Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century, asymmetrical patterns of address (involving not only *tu* and *vous* but also third-person honorifics, titles, kinship terms, and proper names) were commonly observed in interactions between parents (or other adults) and children, masters and servants, employers and employees, supervisors and subordinates, elites and commoners, European settlers and members of colonized populations.

At the same time, however, considerations of the relative intimacy or distance between interlocutors became increasingly relevant to pronominal usage. In elite milieus, where a symmetrical *vous* had been adopted between and even within generations as a mark of these speakers' refinement, use of the familiar *tu* gradually came to be seen as appropriate to certain (if not all) relations between family members and close friends. While members of the bourgeoisie had traditionally said *tu* to their servants and *vous* to their children (out of disdain for the former and respect for themselves), by the late 19th century many had come to say *tu* to show affection for their children and *vous* to distance themselves from their servants (see Weil 1983:68). Nonetheless, the use of the familiar *tu*, particularly in public, by anyone who wished to be seen as "respectable" was still subject to certain restrictions.[15]

Indicative of this ambivalence toward the use of *tu* (at least among those who aspired to set norms for "proper" usage) is the following passage from an etiquette guide published in 1937:

> In general . . . the use of *tu* between two people indicates their extreme familiarity. . . . In friendship . . . to use *tu* and let oneself be called *tu* is to open the private

> doors to one's heart and personality. Now, in a man or woman who is scrupulous *[délicat]* or well-mannered, these doors should be very hard to open and thus should open very rarely, only for a lucky few. Otherwise, they will be like the doors of public places, which swing back and forth, and no one will find any particular charm in going through them.
>
> So many people who have never seen or taken the time to know each other call each other by their first names after a first "car ride" together! After the second, they call each other *tu!* . . . In this way, they deprive others—who until then enjoyed a *tutoiement* [use of *tu*] that they thought was justified by a very long, sincere relationship—of the attraction of this distinction. Indeed, for a sensitive person, what value can there be in the handsome proof of deep friendship which *tutoiement* is, if one can obtain it so easily?
>
> If you want to be seen as well-mannered, then be "very hard to address as *tu*" *[très dur à tutoyer]*. [Saunier 1937:11–12, my translation]

If the use of *tu* was to be restricted, it was thus for fear of the impact that frequent or "indiscriminate" use of the familiar pronoun could have not only on one's relationships with others but, just as importantly, on how one's own status and refinement were perceived by others.

Such arguments in favor of a highly restrictive use of *tu* would seem, however, to have lost a good bit of their force over the years. As noted above, French men and women today often observe that "now everyone says *tu*." As evidence of such change, they frequently point to shifts in patterns of address within families. The symmetrical or asymmetrical use of *vous* across or within generations (between parent and child, older and younger siblings), and the symmetrical use of *vous* between spouses or fiancés in public have largely been replaced by symmetrical use of *tu*. The symmetrical *vous* that was formerly adopted between in-laws has likewise been replaced in many cases by a symmetrical *tu* within the same generation, and sometimes by an asymmetrical (or even in rare cases, by a symmetrical) use of *tu* across generations. Likewise, the asymmetrical use of kinship titles across generations has in some cases been replaced by a symmetrical use of first names.

Evidence of the tendency toward a "generalized use of *tu*" is also drawn from more public realms. Many of my consultants reported that symmetrical *tu* is now commonly adopted between people of commensurate status, particularly when it becomes apparent that they will be interacting over some period of time. Symmetrical *tu* is thus often used in interactions with coworkers, neighbors, fellow parishoners, and people seen frequently in the context of leisure, community, or social activities. Comparing such usages with their own memories and experience of having used a symmetrical *vous* in similar contexts at earlier points in their lives, adults often conclude that the use of symmetrical *tu* is now much more readily and quickly established.

In addition, certain asymmetrical patterns of address have come to be seen as contrary to the relations of affection that are supposed to characterize family life and prescholastic educational institutions, as inimical to the spirit of collaboration that ideally marks modern organizations, and as contrary to the egalitarian ethos that signals the achievement of a mobile,

democratic society. Some consultants reported, for example, that although they could clearly recall their parents or grandparents having done so, they would never say *tu* but expect to be addressed as *vous* when speaking with people of more modest social origins (domestic servants, tradespeople in their employ, subordinates at work, etc.). Although such asymmetrical uses of the past have in fact often been replaced by symmetrical use of *vous*, this aversion to asymmetries in pronominal address is likewise commonly invoked as evidence of the contemporary tendency toward egalitarian social conduct.

As indicated above, people often feel ambivalent about what these changes in patterns of pronominal address may signify. On the one hand, the less restricted use of *tu* and the declining frequence of explicit asymmetries in pronominal address are taken as signs of social progress: just as freer use of the familiar *tu* is thought to foster greater openness and warmth between those who adopt it (symmetrically), the preference for symmetry in pronominal terms is taken as evidence that a more egalitarian sensitivity has developed. As one woman, a housewife and mother in her early fifties, put it,

> I think we're going toward a generalized use of *tu*. It's part of a general movement toward less ceremonial and more relaxed relations. . . . I believe it's essentially a form of progress. The use of *tu* gives you a certain liberty that you don't have with *vous*, a certain freedom to exchange things with others.

On the other hand, the wider use of *tu* is sometimes interpreted negatively, as evidence of a decline in decency or a loss of intimacy. "With *tu*, it is easier to forget about being polite," observed one elderly woman, who was proud to recall how she and her late husband had used "the polite *vous*" in public and who was pained to admit that her own grandchildren now address her as *tu*.

In becoming widespread, *tu* is also thought to have lost its meaning as a sign of true intimacy. One man, a senior executive in a large firm, clearly regretted the "banalization" of *tu* in the workplace, though not solely for the reasons that one might expect, given his professional position:[16]

> At work, everyone calls each other *tu*. . . . There is a negation of certain barriers, a refusal of authority. There are differences in knowledge and competence, but they are denied. . . . This use of *tu* does not at all indicate true familiarity. And it doesn't really help people have better relations with others. . . . I think there is more apparent proximity but fewer real relations . . . less true exchange and sharing of things, fewer relations that can admit the existence of conflict.

From this perspective, there is something fundamentally "false" and misguided about adopting a symmetrical *tu* in contexts where differences in people's capacities and responsibilities do exist. Note, however, that it is not so much the firm's hierarchy as it is a notion of authenticity in social relations that is being defended here.

What this suggests is that the seeming "generalization" of *tu* may not just be threatening to those whose identity is tied up with their own extensive

use of the polite *vous* or who want to be addressed as *vous* in recognition of their own authority or status. It may also be threatening insofar as the less discriminate use of *tu* seems to disregard the difference between relationships of varying degrees of intimacy. Indeed, even people who are generally inclined to see the less restricted use of *tu* as a form of social progress sometimes point to problems and disadvantages engendered by such behavior, just as they recognize the advantages of using *vous* in certain contexts. It is thus not clear what the significance of these shifts in patterns of address might be: whether they represent a gain or a loss of intimacy or authenticity; whether they diminish the politeness of certain interactions and the refinement of certain speakers or increase the decency and dignity of others; whether they, in such ways, weaken or enhance the communicative power of the language and its speakers.

As these consultants' comments suggest, when native speakers talk about what they think is happening to patterns of pronominal address, they tend to focus on the use of particular terms: they stress what they see happening with *tu* (and to a lesser extent, with *vous*) rather than talk about the patterns of symmetry and asymmetry that emerge in the exchange of terms or recognize the extent to which the value of terms depends on how they fit into more complex interactions. As discussed above, however, we must move beyond this focus on single instances of use, even when such representations characterize native speakers' metapragmatic awareness. Recognizing that pronominal address is an inherently relational phenomenon, whose meaning derives from the cultural mediation of the two-way flow of signals between people who alternatively occupy the roles of speaker and addressee, we need first to consider the broader patterns of symmetry and asymmetry that characterize contemporary use of the tu/vous system.

Patterns of Symmetry and Asymmetry

In spite of the apparent increase in the symmetrical use of *tu*, one still frequently observes instances of the two other basic dyadic forms: symmetrical *vous* and asymmetrical tu/vous or vous/tu usages. Symmetrical *vous* is in fact still the normal starting point for public interactions between adults who have no prior relation. It is commonly used between strangers or people who see each other rarely. It is also used between people who know and see each other on a regular basis but want to show respect or deference, or to keep a certain distance one with respect to another: these might include neighbors, coworkers, salesclerks and customers, parents and their children's teachers or caretakers, doctors and patients, employers and employees, people who occupy different ranks within an organization, and so on. People who otherwise address one another as *tu* may also adopt a symmetrical *vous* to mark the formality of certain circumstances, such as legal proceedings or professional evaluations. All such usages indicate that, while there may indeed be an emergent preference for symmetry in pronominal address, it can be expressed as much through the use of *vous* as through the use of *tu*.

In addition, there remain certain asymmetries in pronominal address, both in the terms used and in the attendant right to initiate a switch in terms. Although the symmetrical use of *tu* among consanguineal kin—particularly between parents and children, and among siblings—is now widely considered the norm, one still observes some asymmetrical uses between generations, such patterns generally being perceived either as traces of "traditional" styles of upbringing, or as evidence of a family's desire to signal its belonging to the upper or upper-middle classes. Even more common are asymmetries that occur between in-laws of different generations: for even when parents-in-law address their sons- or daughters-in-law as *tu*, to show their affection for them, the latter often feel obliged to say *vous* in return, either out of respect for age or out of a consciousness that they do not belong to this group of consanguineal kin.

Asymmetries in terms also occur where marked differences of age or of function, along with other considerations of maturity and respectability, imply a difference in status: an older woman, for example, can say *tu* but expect to receive *vous* from a school-age child; or the director of a school or firm might very well say *tu* to one of his younger staff members while being addressed as *vous* in return. Asymmetries are also frequently observed in everyday interactions, as artifacts of speakers' efforts to switch from one term to the other or as a reflection of their uncertainty about where they stand with respect to each other. In some cases, stabilized asymmetries may also be explained with reference to the personal preferences or habits of individual speakers.

In addition to such asymmetries in the terms themselves, there is also evidence of what Brown and Gilman termed a "residual" asymmetry, which is revealed through the right to initiate a switch from *vous* to *tu* (1972:261). This right is generally assumed to be the prerogative of the party that is in a relatively superior position, in terms of age, rank, kinship status, or given his or her role as host or hostess of a gathering. So even when a symmetrical *tu* is rather quickly established, the way in which two speakers shift to this new pattern of address may well reflect differences in their status or roles.

While many of my consultants acknowledged that elite and literary discourse was historically marked by frequent shifts between *vous* and *tu*, they tend to see such expressive shifts as a thing of the past.[17] Nowadays, pronominal shifts are typically seen as events that should occur only once in the course of a relationship and that should entail moving from a symmetrical *vous* or an asymmetrical pattern to a symmetrical use of *tu*. Once one has indicated one's willingness to be on *tu* terms with someone, it is thought to be quite offensive to revert to the use of *vous*.

What one observes in practice, however, is that pronominal shifts of this sort are not always accomplished in a clear and immediate fashion. There is sometimes a period of uncertainty when speakers alternate between *tu* and *vous* or avoid using either term, while trying to assess the other party's preferences and expectations. Moreover, given the implicit preference for symmetry in terms that exists in many contexts, the success of any such initiative depends on whether the first "pair-part" is ratified by the second

pair-part, whether the initial use of *tu* or suggestion that it be adopted is then affirmed by the other party's subsequent behavior. When this ratification does not occur, the speaker who initiated the switch may either explicitly discuss the matter, so as to make the justifications apparent and all the more compelling, or quickly revert to *vous*, a move that one of my consultants described as "swallowing a precocious use of *tu*." Such backward moves are often, however, not without consequences for people's relationships. One woman explained, for example, that when her attempts to switch to *tu* with someone fail, she reverts to *vous* but tends to expect less from her interactions with that person. As she put it, "If that person is so uptight that she can't say *tu*, then there are probably many things we couldn't discuss."

Contrary then to the popular notion that French society is moving toward a "generalized" use of *tu*, the use of *vous* in symmetrical and asymmetrical exchanges is far from being eradicated. What one observes nowadays is not an absolute preference for *tu* but rather an emergent preference for symmetry in terms, which may of course lead to a symmetrical use of *vous* as well as of *tu*. This preference for symmetry is manifest in the dynamics of pronominal switching and in the relative rarity of stabilized asymmetrical usages. Asymmetrical exchanges of terms nonetheless do occur and are readily justified when clear differences of age, rank, kinship status, or personal dispositions are recognized. In speakers' efforts to switch from *vous* to *tu*, differences of status and disposition may also become evident through each participant's roles and responses. For all of these reasons, we need to look beyond the apparent "reign of *tu*" to recognize the varied patterns of pronominal address that still occur, and the multiple dimensions of the context that are in fact indexed through such usages.

Contextual Dimensions and Orders of Indexicality

Although the French pronominal system involves only two basic grammatical forms, there are multiple dimensions of the communicative context which may potentially be invoked by use of these forms. In the largely urban and middle-class milieus where this research was conducted, the relevant dimensions include a range of macrosociological variables: the relative age, gender, authority, social or socioeconomic status, kinship status, and group membership of the parties to an interaction. They also include interactional variables, namely, the nature of the setting, the topic of discourse, and the emotional tone (i.e., the degree of proximity to or distance from an addressee that either one or both speakers want to convey through the use of a particular term).[18]

Recognizing the existence of these multiple dimensions is important because it helps us to understand that any given utterance of *tu* or of *vous* is not clearly and unambiguously meaningful in and of itself. Yet rather than simply acknowledging the multiplicity of such dimensions, our task is to grasp the nature of the relations that effectively exist between these grammatical forms as they are used and the specific aspects of the context to which their use points.

To do so, we must recognize, first, that indexical signs may relate to the context in which they are used in two distinct ways. As Michael Silverstein (1981) has observed, when an indexical sign points to an aspect of the context that is already independently known, then it *presupposes* that contextual dimension; but when it brings attention to or calls into being a particular dimension, then it *entails, creates,* or potentially *transforms* that context. In other words, *tu* or *vous* may point to dimensions of the context that already and unproblematically are assumed to exist or, in the very act of indexing, may bring about or change people's understanding of what dimensions are relevant to an interaction.

The presupposing character of pronominal forms can be seen in any number of usages that appear as self-evidently appropriate, either because they are based on manifest characteristics of the interactants or the circumstances or because such usage has already been established in prior speech. For example, a retired man who was working on a doctorate in history told me that, in the seminars he attended, pronominal address was "essentially a question of age": although all the students were "in the same situation," two young people were likely to address each other as *tu*, while between a younger and an older person and between two older people, *vous* would automatically be used. From his perspective, the use of a particular term in these circumstances was understood to presuppose something about the age of interactants (their absolute youth or maturity, and the presence or absence of a significant age differential). When speakers describe a particular usage as one that is "automatically" or "immediately" adopted, this often indicates that some dimension of the context is being presupposed.

By contrast, some uses of pronominal terms of address are highly creative or transforming of the context to which they point. Such uses typically involve a switch from one form to another, or at least the use of an unexpected term. For example, if two acquaintances have been using a symmetrical *vous* with each other and one begins consistently saying *tu*, this use is understood to imply a revaluation on her or his part of the context or of the relationship that exists between them; most often, it is taken as a sign of the sympathy or sense of affinity that he or she has developed with respect to the addressee, though sudden hostility may also be signaled in this manner. What such acts transform (when successful) are not only the pronominal forms henceforth employed but also the interactants' understandings of the contextual dimensions that are invoked by the new pattern of use. The capacity of indexicals effectively to bring into being or to change specific dimensions of the context depends, however, on the interplay of "pair-parts": the transformative effect of the first pair-part depends on its being ratified by the second-pair part.

In the second place, we must recognize that indexical signs may point to different aspects of the context of their use. That is to say, not only are there multiple dimensions of the context that are potentially signaled by the use of *tu* and *vous*, but there are distinct "orders of indexicality": complex, overlapping "structures of values" that mediate between the linguistic forms and the contextual dimensions (Silverstein 1996). First-order indexicality refers to the capacity of signs to point to relevant aspects of the

immediate context of their use. As first-order indexicals, *tu* and *vous* point to the nature of the relationship between speaker and addressee, revealing the extent to which each party is entitled to signs of deference and/or of intimacy from the other.

As first-order indexicals, *tu* and *vous* may also point to the nature of the setting, defining it as relatively informal or formal, private or public. For example, two attorneys who know each other well and ordinarily use a symmetrical *tu* may switch to symmetrical *vous* when they encounter each other in court, as a way of acknowledging the "official" nature of the setting and of what occurs there. As native speakers readily observe, the use of the more reserved *vous* in such a case (where symmetrical *tu* has otherwise been established as the expected usage) is understood to index the official, formal character of the circumstances and, specifically, not to imply any shift in the speaker's assessment of her or his relationship with the addressee.[19] At the same time, because what is often involved in marking the formality of certain settings is acknowledgement of people's positional identities (see Irvine 1979), and insofar as such positions are also conveyed through the symmetry and asymmetry of pronominal terms and of prerogatives to set them, address that is ostensibly oriented toward marking the nature of the circumstances may also draw attention to the relative status of parties to such an interaction. Whether focused on the nature of the setting or the relationship between speaker and addressee or simultaneously on both, this first order of indexicality is in some sense the most basic structure of social values informing the use and interpretability of these linguistic forms. As such, it is manifest in one way or another in all uses of *tu* and *vous*.

There is, however, a second order of indexicality, where signs are understood to reflect the status of those who use them, within a folk order of beliefs about who uses what kinds of forms in what particular ways (see Silverstein 1992). Hence, among French speakers, the frequent or distinctive use of *tu* or *vous* in certain contexts is interpreted as an indication not only of the nature of the setting or the relationship between speaker and addressee, but also of the status or characteristics of the speaker. Yet if signs may be interpreted as pointing to the enduring attributes of those who use them, it is only because there are identifiable ideologies, or definite sets of beliefs within a linguistic community that explain "the indexical value of the forms in terms of schemata of social differentiation and classification that are independent of the usages at issue" (Silverstein 1992:316). In order to grasp the full significance of French pronominal address, it is thus necessary to probe native speakers' beliefs about who uses the resources of this system in what characteristic ways and to show how such considerations effectively mediate between language use and its contextualization.

Characteristic Uses of *Tu and Vous*: Status, Political Orientation, and Age

As indicated above, extensive use of *vous* has long been associated with upper-class status or aspirations, while extensive use of *tu* has historically

been seen as characteristic of commoners. The use of *vous* as a singular term of address was introduced at the upper end of the social spectrum and was cultivated by the nobility and then by the bourgeoisie to set themselves off from the masses (see Brown and Gilman 1972; Maley 1974; Nyrop 1925). Although *vous* is now commonly used in many circumstances by people from all class backgrounds, certain marked uses of *vous* are still readily perceived as indices of the speaker's social status.

In particular, the use of *vous* among consanguineal kin is recognized as an ostensibly elite custom. As one woman put it, "The use of *vous* within the family is sociologically marked: you find it in a certain 'privileged' social class, those with long, hyphenated names—the 'de So-and-so's.' " Indeed, the use of *vous* among consanguineal kin (asymmetrically, from members of younger generations to their parents or other members of older generations, or symmetrically across and within generations) is so readily associated with elite status-marking that this or other patterns of pronominal address were often invoked to convey a sense of a particular family's place in the social order. For example, one woman, a lawyer in her late thirties, who had always lived in Paris but spent summer vacations as a child at a family estate in the provinces, described her paternal relatives in the following way:

> My father's whole family were *notables* (locally important figures) and landowners.... It was a very conventional family, and my aunts and uncles still are....
>
> Of course, in that family, everyone said *vous* to everyone. And my cousins still do; that is, the children say *vous* to the parents.... It used to be extremely widespread among the upper middle classes [for children to say *vous* to their parents]. Now it is a form of snobbishness to have your children say *vous* to you.

Nicely mirroring these notions about which social groups characteristicallly make extensive use of *vous*, another woman, a researcher in her thirties, explained why her own family could only have used a symmetrical *tu*:

> My family comes from very lower-class origins. On my father's side, these were families who lived with seven children in two rooms, out in the country... with little money and very few things.... We are sons of serfs, if you like; that's where it [our use of *tu*] comes from. In the lower-class French peasantry, nobody said *vous*.
>
> Saying *vous* to one's father and mother is very specific. Since the revolution, everybody knows it; it's aristocratic, it's the upper middle classes who want to be aristocrats.... So when someone says that people say *vous* to their parents, it suggests a social climate which is that of the upper classes.
>
> It is impossible to think that in my family, people could have said *vous* to each other; it's just not imaginable.... There are certain customs that completely separated the different social stations, including for children to say *vous* to their parents.... For us, in our minds, that is for rich people.

Etiquette guides have also reminded readers of the indexical value of the use of *vous* within the family. Author Berthe Bernage observes, "Many families, remaining loyal to an old tradition, want the children to say *vous*

to their parents. This way of speaking has a respectful elegance that is very refined *(de très bon ton)*. In the aristocracy, *vous* is often used as well by parents in addressing their children" (1949:179). While Bernage does not promote any particular usage, she leaves no doubt as to the effect that the use of *vous* within the family could be expected to have.

Of course, the indexical value of such a use of *vous* may also have, or be assumed to have, negative consequences. One older couple recalled how some friends of theirs, who had taught their children to say *vous* to them, encouraged their offspring to begin addressing them as *tu* when the father entered local politics. As a large proportion of the population that he would be representing were lower-middle-class shopkeepers and employees, the candidate was reportedly concerned that his children's addressing him as *vous* would make him seem "too bourgeois." This again suggests that terms of address may not only signal the nature of the relationship between speaker and addressee but also point to the speaker's status in the wider social order.

Beyond the private sphere, extensive use of *vous* is also associated with people who occupy higher positions in the hierarchies of firms and other organizations. In such contexts, people in positions of authority are generally addressed as *vous* by their subordinates, or at the very least, it is they who are accorded the right to initiate any use of the familiar *tu* in interactions with lower-ranking persons. While asymmetrical exchanges of pronominal address terms do still occur, the emergent preference for symmetry seems often to compel role superiors who are addressed as *vous* by their subordinates to be respectful of them in turn, by maintaining a symmetrical *vous* (or by initiating the switch to symmetrical *tu*). Such formalities are, by contrast, often thought unnecessary at lower levels of the hierarchy, where symmetrical use of *tu* among colleagues of the same or different ranks or functions is more common. These patterns of address are most manifestly based on the first-order values of paired exchanges of terms as indices of interactants' relative intimacy or deference entitlement. Yet since the sustained symmetrical use of *vous* in such contexts occurs more often in interactions involving at least one high-ranking person, it also acquires this second-order value.

While extensive use of *tu* (in and beyond the private sphere) was once associated with the lower classes, this notion seems to have lost much of its resonance. This is no doubt in large part because symmetrical use of *tu* within and beyond the private sphere has become commonplace among middle- and upper-class speakers and has indeed become positively valorized in such milieus, as a sign of a speaker's capacity for intimacy, youthfulness of spirit, and commitment to the ideals of a democratic society. At the same time, the negative values of rusticity or lack of refinement once attributed to members of the lower classes (who were thought to inhabit what Friedrich [1986] calls "a quasi-T universe") appear sometimes to be transferred to even more marginalized segments of the population: among members of the white majority, one sometimes encounters the notion that immigrants, particularly those from North Africa, readily—and some claim, "too readily"—say *tu* to others.[20] This then suggests that immigrants

and their offspring may in a certain way be expected to take up the role once attributed to the French working classes, as the sector that is thought to "prefer" *tu*, to the point of indiscretion.

Certain uses of pronominal address terms are also taken as an indication of a speaker's political ideology or orientation. Here again, there are beliefs, based in historical precedent, that link the use of *tu* with progressivism and the use of *vous* with conservatism. During the French Revolution, partisans of the nascent republic argued that *tu* should replace *vous* in all address to singular subjects (see Brunot 1967:689–696; Maley 1974:32–34; Nyrop 1925:235). Their arguments often stressed, in typical Enlightenment language, that the use of *tu* was "true to nature," whereas using the originally plural *vous* in speaking to one person was "human artifice."[21] Along with the title "Citizen" (Citoyen), *tu* was also promoted as the term unpretensiously used by commoners, among brothers and between equals, whereas the use of *vous* and of titles (even the common "Monsieur" and "Madame," as well as hereditary noble titles) was associated with the maintenance of social privileges. In brief, *tu* was seen as the pronominal form that embodied the egalitarian and fraternal ideals of the new regime. Although revolutionaries' efforts to impose *tu* as the language of progress met with only partial and short-lived success, the notion that a ready use of *tu* is a sign of a speaker's commitment to progressive causes remains.

This belief was evident, for example, as one woman in her late thirties explained the significance of her parents' conscious efforts to address their friends and associates as *tu:*

> My parents said *tu* to their friends. . . . For them, this *tu* was very important. It signified a familiarity, a direct relation with others. . . .
>
> Both came from very bourgeois or aristocratic families, where *vous* was used, where there were hierarchies, and so on. They wanted to break off completely with all that. Their families were on the Right, but my parents situated themselves resolutely on the Left; they became active in progressive Christian militantism. . . .
>
> They wanted to be on *tu* terms *[à tu et à toi]* with people. . . . It was part of their political claims. . . .
>
> During the French Revolution, everyone said *tu* to each other. Saying *tu* was a way of recognizing that one was for the revolution, like the comrades of the Communist Party today. The Left has always favored the people's ways of doing things *[la marque populaire]*. It has a tradition of using *tu*, as the mark of equality and fraternity among people.
>
> Since the revolution, things have gone back and forth between the use of *tu* and the use of *vous*, but it [the choice between *tu* and *vous*] is played out at an ideological level. Saying *vous* can be the mark of being in favor of a society divided into classes, while saying *tu* identifies you as being on the side of an evolution. . . . Nowadays, the use of *vous* has a clear ideological meaning, that you are tied to traditions.

Note, in this explanation of the "ideological" value of an extensive use of *tu* or *vous*, how certain criteria overlap with one another. The use of *tu* seems appropriately favored by the Left because it has long been adopted in relations between equals but also because it is identified with "the people,"

the commoners whose struggle for liberty is seen to have ushered in the modern democratic order. The extensive or marked use of *vous*, on the other hand, seems inevitably associated with the Right, because it has historically been used to signal hierarchical relations and power differentials and because it is connected with elites' efforts to maintain their privileges. In other words, being on the Left implies identifying with the historical experience of the lower classes and therefore adopting, to some extent, their ways, while those on the Right are expected to associate themselves with the experience and traditions of the upper classes. The overlapping values of an extensive use of *tu* or of *vous* strengthen this association.

Particular patterns of address are also associated with speakers' age, or more precisely, with the dispositions attributed to broad segments of the age hierarchy. It is widely assumed that young people readily adopt *tu* and that older people are comfortable with an extensive use of *vous*. This assumption first of all reflects the notion that the norm of an extensive use of *vous* is gradually being replaced by broader and less discriminate use of *tu*. The tendency to associate the use of *tu* with youth and of *vous* with maturity no doubt derives as well from the implicit notion that symmetry in pronominal forms is preferable. That is to say, because older people are often automatically addressed as *vous* and the youngest of young people as *tu*, it is assumed that they in turn prefer to use such terms.

These assumptions about people's preferences are then sometimes invoked to make sense of certain marked uses: because older people are associated with a frequent use of *vous*, anyone who insists on using or being addressed as *vous* in a context where the use of *tu* seems reasonable may be seen as "old" or "old-fashioned" *(vieux jeu)*; just as an adult who readily says *tu* and insists on being addressed as *tu* in circumstances where *vous* is considered more natural may be perceived as trying to appear "young at heart" *(faire jeune)*. Note that the characteristics that are singled out here are not so much the fact of having any definite number of years, but rather the degree of "youthfulness," understood generally as a way of describing someone's perceived openness to others and willingness to relate without the trappings of positional identities, a disposition that is thought to decline with age.

It can thus be seen that all of these beliefs about which categories of people tend to use the resources of the tu/vous system in what distinctive ways subtly reinforce each other in endowing each of the pronominal terms with particular values. Hence, *vous* repeatedly appears as the term connoting—on the part of the speaker—high status, refinement, reserve, and conservatism (particularly when it comes to relinquishing privileges of status or rank); as such, it is seen as most apt for the ethos of an explicitly and unapologetically stratified society. *Tu*, by contrast, is figured as the term that signals on the part of a speaker a certain simplicity and openness to others, a lack of pretension, and a commitment to egalitarian relations; as such, it is seen to embody the ideals of a modern democratic society. These notions about the nature of these linguistic terms, and about the characteristics of the speakers who use them in certain ways, reinforce one

another and help shape speakers' understandings of the pragmatic effects that may be achieved through particular uses of these terms.

Strategic Uses of *Tu* and *Vous:* Fostering Intimacy

Speakers of French are aware of the indexical values that *tu* and *vous* may have when used in particular social contexts, and it is precisely this awareness that motivates their strategic use of these terms.[22] The kinds of effects that speakers seek to achieve through particular uses of *tu* and *vous* often have to do most explicitly with defining or transforming the nature of the setting or the relationship between speaker an addressee. There are also strategic uses of pronominal address terms that, relying on the second-order values of *tu* and *vous* described above, seek or serve to call attention to the status or identity of the speaker, in and beyond any particular context of communication.

In describing strategic uses of *tu* and *vous*, my consultants often emphasized the intimacy or distance vis-à-vis their interlocutors that such uses help them to establish. In contexts where *vous* has already been used or would seem perfectly natural, the conscious use of *tu* (or an explicit proposal that symmetrical *tu* be adopted) is generally seen as a means of helping create or recognize the emergence of a more intimate and amiable relationship or atmosphere. One middle-aged housewife pointed out, for example, that when she and her husband host monthly gatherings of students from their Catholic parish for dinner and discussion at their home, she greets them with kisses on the cheek and immediately says *tu*, in order to establish an atmosphere of confidence and intimacy. "I do it intentionally," she explained, "It's nicer, and it encourages them to say things that they would not say elsewhere."

The effectiveness of such usages depends, however, not on the intentions behind or meaning inherent in any single instance of use but rather on the pattern of paired exchanges of terms that develops in the course of an interaction and the understandings that interactants come to about what is thereby being indexed. Indeed, the strategic uses envisioned by one person do not always succeed. Telling in this respect is the situation reported by Isabelle, a then-39-year-old psychoanalyst in a public health clinic, concerning her failed efforts to switch from symmetrical *vous* to symmetrical *tu* in her interactions with a younger female intern. As she described it:

> I felt that we could call each other *tu*, because she's nice, she's young, and I'm not old, I'm not even 40 yet. So after we had worked together for a day, I said, 'We could call each other *tu*.' . . . She said, 'Yes, si vous voulez, [if you like],' and she continued to call me *vous*. . . . So we fell back into a hierarchical relationship.
>
> But I'm not so old! Five years ago, I worked with another intern, and we called each other *tu*. My life has not changed that much in five years.

The intern's insistance on addressing Isabelle as *vous* thus made her acutely aware that she was not as young as she liked to think of herself. This use of *vous* could be interpreted as a first-order indexical, signaling the age differential that separated the two women.

More to the point, however, the intern's consistent use of *vous* also indexed the difference between the two women's authority and professional status. By interpreting the intern's unwillingness to switch to *tu* as motivated essentially by their difference in age, Isabelle downplayed the relevance of the differences in their professional status and suggested that she herself was not attached to such distinctions. Yet the fact that it was she, the established professional, who proposed that they switch to *tu*, as well as the intern's polite but negative response and Isabelle's own admission that the ensuing asymmetry recast their relationship in hierarchical terms are evidence that this difference of status continued to be relevant to their relationship and interactions.

The significance of pronominal address terms is thus not inherent to any one instance of use but derives from the way such usages are interpreted as part of a broader pattern that points to particular aspects of the context. While each participant may try to (re)define that pattern and the emergent understanding of what it points to, he or she is effectively constrained by the conduct and interpretation of the other party and by the norms and understandings that each of them implicitly or explicitly adheres to.

Strategic Uses: Maintaining Distance

Just as *tu* is deployed in an effort to foster or create intimacy, *vous* is strategically used (in contexts where the use of *tu* would be feasible) to signal reserve or to maintain distance vis-à-vis an addressee. One man observed, for example, that although he readily says *tu* to most of the other residents of his building who are close to him in age, he makes a point of saying *vous* to one neighbor, whom he suspects would not hesitate to impose on him in various ways if he were less reserved. In a similar way, Véronique, a woman in her midthirties who operates a licensed bookstall along the Seine, pointed out that although she is on *tu* terms with all the other booksellers who work near her stall, she systematically says *vous* to the man whose stall is next to hers, for she profoundly disagrees with his political opinions and "racist" attitudes. Using *vous* with this man is for her a way of "marking the distance" that exists between them. It has this effect, however, only insofar as he likewise addresses her as *vous*. As Véronique acknowledged, if he were to start to call her *tu*, she would feel compelled to switch to *tu*, to avoid putting herself in an inferior position with respect to him.

Not surprisingly, examples of conscious uses of *vous* to mark or maintain distance vis-à-vis others were frequently drawn from people's experience of work and professional relations. Jean, a technician in an automobile factory, reported that he and other supervisors readily say *tu* to workers who are French nationals: "It would come across badly if we said *vous*; they would take it as an insult."[23] The supervisors, however, tend to stick with *vous* when addressing workers of North African origins, for they believe that these workers "too readily" say *tu* and that if they are on familiar terms with them, the latter will not comply with directions. Saying *vous* (which implicitly commands the use of *vous* in return) is, in other words, a way of

"marking the distance"—both professional and cultural—that they feel exists between themselves and these workers. What sustains this policy of consistently saying *vous* to immigrant workers is the discriminatory assumption that they, as a category of speakers, do not master the nuances of the tu/vous distinction adequately enough to be included in a more variable pattern of use.

Odile, a middle-aged doctor, likewise explained that through her daily contacts with nurses, ambulance drivers, and other categories of hospital personnel, she has come to appreciate the importance of using *vous* in professional relations between people with different functions:

> At work, I am really attached to using *vous*. . . . It provides a certain distance that is necessary at work. There was a young doctor I once worked with. When he started, I told him, 'You *[tu]* had better be careful with the ambulance driver; you must keep an eye on him.' But he [the doctor] began right away to say *tu* to the driver; he was very familiar and friendly with him. Later on, he had to ask to be transfered, because he was unable to get the driver to do anything.
>
> The use of *tu* makes things difficult. . . . If everyone does his work, there's no problem. But as soon as you have to supervise or give orders to someone, if it's someone you've become too familiar with *[quelqu'un qu'on tape sur le ventre]*, there are real disadvantages.

As the term that introduces emotional distance between speaker and addressee and invokes the existence of positional identities, *vous* is thus perceived to facilitate the task of overseeing others. *Tu*, on the other hand, being understood to reduce that distance and to invoke personal identities, presumably puts superiors at risk of being challenged.

Yet people who make such arguments about the usefulness of *vous* for professional relations are sometimes rather self-conscious about what such preferences may suggest about them as individuals. Cognizant of the many contextual dimensions that could seem to be invoked by their use of *vous* with coworkers, they are eager to clarify what their own intentions are. On the one hand, they often justify such uses of *vous* as being respectful and ultimately in the interests of their subordinates. For example, Daniel, a lawyer in his forties, who had previously been on *tu* terms with several other interns in his firm, tried to explain to me why he had assiduously said *vous* to a younger female intern whom he described as "a little crazy" and "very easily excited":

> We stuck with *vous* because I sensed that she might have mixed things up: the relations between an employer and an employee, between a father and a child, and who knows what else. Using *vous* keeps relations distant. It helps avoid confusions. It allows you to maintain a form of distance that is sometimes useful for both people. [The relation between a lawyer and an intern] is of course a form of the relation between employer and employee. . . . Saying *tu* in such a case makes for a mix of hierarchical and friendly relations.

Such mixes are in fact tolerated, as Daniel acknowledged, when the superior feels confident that the inferior will not behave in an overly familiar fashion.

But as Jean too suggested, it is role superiors' lack of confidence in their subordinates' capacity to discriminate between situations where familiarity is welcome and where it is to be avoided that makes them feel compelled to stick to *vous*. To downplay this judgment of their subordinates, it is tempting for role superiors to suggest that their preference for *vous* derives as much from their concern for the emotional well-being of their subordinates as from any desire to protect their own interests.

On the other hand, those who uphold the use of *vous* in such circumstances are aware of how this preference may, at a second order of indexicality, signal something about their own status and disposition. Before describing this situation, Daniel had already pointed out that the use of *vous* between parents and children is a mark of "traditional" styles of upbringing; that firms where the use of *vous* predominates are considered "traditional" and "stuffed shirt" *(collet monté)*; and that at least among people of his generation, a speaker's extensive use of *vous* suggests that he or she is not committed to progressive political ideals. By recalling other instances in which he readily adopted *tu* and stressing the exceptionalness of his decision to stick with *vous* with this particular intern, he thus tried to make it clear that he himself was neither "traditional" nor overly attentive to distinctions of rank.

Strategic Uses: Juggling Indexical Values

As the foregoing examples suggest, pronominal address strategies that are ostensibly focused on defining the setting or the relationship between speaker and addressee may simultaneously serve to convey something about the status of the speaker. This connection between the first- and second-order indexicality of *tu* and *vous* is nicely illustrated by one final account of strategic address in the workplace, which shows how efforts to calibrate relations with others may become an element of a speaker's efforts to reposition him- or herself within a macrosocial space defined, in part, in terms of differential patterns of pronominal address. This complex series of interactions were reported to me by Michel, a special education teacher in his late forties, who works in a school for emotionally disturbed children.

According to Michel, an egalitarian ethos has predominated in this and similar institutions since the 1960s, when a theory known as "institutional pedagogy" introduced the notion that personnel should be treated equally and encouraged to develop a variety of functions. Many of the school's personnel—particularly the teachers and the secretarial and maintenance staff—address one another as *tu*. Two of the three attending psychiatrists also use a symmetrical *tu* with the other staff members, and all three psychiatrists and the school's director (who is also a psychiatrist) use *tu* among themselves.

There are nonetheless a few departures from the institution's implicit norm of symmetrical *tu*. The director says *tu* to everyone but receives *vous* from all staff members who are not fellow doctors. One of the psychiatrists, who only recently began to work at the school, says *vous* to his subordinates and is addressed as *vous* in return; the symmetrical *vous* with subordinates

was also adopted by another psychiatrist who had formerly worked in this school. Most notably, Michel has gradually come to feel that it is appropriate for him to say *tu* only to his fellow teachers. In speaking to staff members from other categories, he now tries to stick to *vous*, even when he is addressed as *tu*.

With the cleaning woman, for example, Michel acknowledged that there were at least three reasons why he could justifiably say *tu* to her: she is young, she occupies a low position in the school's professional hierarchy, and the institition's "communitarian spirit" supposes that "everyone should say *tu* to everyone." Nonetheless, Michel insists on addressing her as *vous*, for he dislikes the fact that she spends a good bit of time talking with some of the other teachers rather than doing her work. By addressing her as *vous*, he means to reintroduce some "rigor" into relations that he feels have become too lax and to clearly "mark the distance" between her (and the teachers who also converse rather than work) and himself. While his consistent use of *vous* with the cleaning woman distances him from her at the first order of indexicality, it simultaneously helps distinguish him from his "less rigorous" colleagues, at the second order of indexicality.

Michel has also maintained a symmetrical *vous* with the secretary to the director, Madame Bert, for as he explained to me, "We do not have the same function, and I do not see her regularly." Madame Bert, however, became so bothered by Michel's use of *vous* that she raised the issue with him. According to Michel, she pointed out that, since she was on *tu* terms with all of the other teachers and "even with two of the doctors," there was "no reason" why she and Michel should not also adopt a symmetrical *tu*. By invoking the internal hierarchy and the fact that even some of Michel's superiors were willing to be addressed as *tu*, she suggested that his sticking to *vous* was unjustified. Although Michel "authorized" her to address him unilaterally as *tu*, Madame Bert (revealing her commitment to the principle of symmetry) claimed that she could not switch to *tu* unless he also did so, and they have thus continued to use a symmetrical *vous*.

In subsequently justifying his position to me, Michel stressed that his use of *vous* with Madame Bert was intended simply to mark the difference between their roles within the institution:

> I do find her warm and friendly, and open, though she sometimes says things about the children that are commonsensical and prejudiced. By using *vous*, I mean to indicate that I have a responsibility that is different from hers, not superior however. . . . She and I have cordial relations, . . . and I think she understands that my use of *vous* is a form of esteem and recognition of her role as the director's secretary and that, by the same token, I don't have the same function and I want her to respect me in my role.

By emphasizing the warmth and cordiality of their ties and denying any claim to superiority, Michel thus tried to make it clear that his use of *vous* was not intended as a personal affront and implied no judgment of the secretary's worth or status. Yet in spite of his efforts to present the difference between their roles as a neutral distinction, his characterization of her

attitude toward the school's clients suggests that the differences in their training and roles are indeed significant. In brief, both his argument for and hers against the use of *vous* indicate that, even in such an ostensibly egalitarian environment, such differences are readily hierarchized.

In fact, Michel's decision to use *vous* with those who had other roles in the institution is linked to his desire to enhance his own professional standing. Michel has participated over the past few years in several professional and continuing education programs outside of the institution, in order to acquire the skills that might enable him to move into a supervisory position. At the same time, he has become highly conscious of how his use of pronominal terms within the institution might help to redefine his status. Inspired by what he called the "classy" and "very professional behavior" of the psychiatrist who had first broken with the implicit egalitarianism by systematically saying *vous* to the teachers, Michel decided to try to create the same aura of professionalism around his own work and persona, by limiting his own use of *tu*. As he put it,

> This policy of using *vous* is a professional strategy of revalorization, a way of showing that I am changing or "raising" my status to one that is almost on the same level as that of the doctors.

By saying *vous* to anyone whose position in the school was different from his, Michel thus meant to draw attention to the specificity and value of the teachers' role. Yet it is not by chance that using *vous* seemed to be the best means of doing so: for not only had *tu* been "banalized" by its widespread use within the school, but *vous* stood out within and beyond the institution as the form connoting high status on the part of those who used it.

At the first order of indexicality, Michel's use of *vous* with certain coworkers thus defined their relationship as relatively distant in terms of several potential variables: the extent to which they actually work together, the nature of their institutional function, and of their attitudes toward the clients. His use of *vous* could of course have pointed to other aspects of those relationships, to their relative rank in the institutional hierarchy, or the degree of personal sympathy he felt for his addressees; for this reason, both he and Madame Bert tried to establish precisely what his use of *vous* meant at this level. Yet as Michel's comments suggest, he was well aware that pronominal address also involves a second level of indexicality, where his marked use of *vous* could potentially reflect back on him, making him look just as "rigorous," "classy," and "professional," as the psychiatrist who had first set the example.

As aware as speakers may be of the indexical values of these linguistic forms, the effectiveness of such strategic uses is thus potentially limited in several ways. As first-order indexicals deployed with the intention of marking or modifying the nature of the circumstances or the relationship between speaker and addressee, *tu* and *vous* derive their meaning from the patterns of exchange that occur over several turns. Speakers' intentions notwithstanding, no one instance of pronominal address usage is unambiguously meaningful in and of itself. Likewise, as second-order indexicals,

tu and *vous* can be effective means of achieving certain ends only to the extent that their characteristic degree of use is interpreted through particular metapragmatic frameworks, or beliefs about who typically uses the tu/vous system in what characteristic ways. Here again, it is not individual intentions that make them meaningful, but the interpretability of specific uses according to broadly shared notions about the way language functions and is used within this speech community. Finally, we note that, even as speakers aim to achieve certain effects on one aspect of the context, they may be confronted with other effects that are simultaneously produced as well: in seeking to maintain a distant relationship with an addressee through the use of symmetrical *vous*, they may inadvertently suggest that they are politically conservative; or by trying to index their own commitment to progressive ideals through an extensive use of *tu*, they may feel compelled to invoke their upper-middle-class class origins, so as to counter any assumption that they say *tu* because they "know no better." In other words, the two orders of indexicality are potentially (and often actually) simultaneously at play in any given instance of pronominal address, making it all the more difficult for speakers to control the effects that their use of this system may have.

Single Instances of Use: Elements of Linguistic Ideology

We may still wonder why it is so tempting to attempt to locate the meaning of these linguistic terms in single instances of use. The tendency to focus on isolated usages is evident in many of the foregoing descriptions of an individual's strategic pronominal address: recall how *tu* is portrayed as being "nicer," as a signal that "encourages" people to open up or renders certain actions—such as the exercise of authority—"difficult." Recall, too, how *vous* was described as a signal that "marks" or "creates" a certain "distance" between speaker and addressee, that helps "keep relations professional," that shows "esteem and recognition" for the role that an addressee plays or "revalorizes" the particular competence of the speaker. Such descriptions, embedded as they are in accounts of purposive action, make it seem that it is single instances of pronominal use that achieve such effects.

If we think about these situations, however, it becomes clear that the imagined or intended effectiveness of all these strategies is based on the assumption that pronominal address would be symmetrical (at least as concerned the terms themselves). Indeed, it is not any one use of *tu* or of *vous* that is "nicer," "problematic," or "useful," but the symmetrical use of *tu* or of *vous* insofar as it occurs in and iconically projects the relevant aspects of a particular context. We have already seen what the effect was when the intern with whom Isabelle, the established professional, wanted to be on *tu* terms refused this overture and stuck with *vous*. Similarly, we can imagine what the effect might have been if the "easily excited" legal intern working for Daniel, the attorney, had slipped into saying *tu;* or if Madame Bert, the secretary at Michel's school, following through on his suggestion, had indeed begun unilaterally to address him as *tu:* the ensuing asymmetries,

for as long as they lasted, would surely have troubled the meanings that these speakers were able to attribute to their own use of the tu/vous system in these situations.

While native speakers do sometimes explicitly acknowledge the importance of symmetry and asymmetry for the effectiveness and meaning of their strategic uses of this system, they often emphasize instead the impact that their own choice and deployment of terms is likely to have: "If I say *vous* (or *tu*), it will have such-and-such effect." And in the effort to grasp the pragmatics of language from "the native point of view," we are just as frequently tempted to reproduce this agent-centered view of the significance of pronominal address in our analyses. To avoid falling into this trap, we need to recognize how the particular linguistic ideology that is evident in the kinds of metalinguistic commentary presented here helps sustain the notion that single instances of use are meaningful in and of themselves. We can see these beliefs about how language works operating at at least two levels.

First, as we recall that T/V systems have both referential and social indexical functions, it is important to see what happens on the denotational plane, where the distinction between T and V forms acquires part of its value. As Silverstein (1996) suggests, based on his classification of the various kinds of denotational categories that may be used for referring to things, in languages with T/V systems the T form tends to be perceived as the "basic, neutral" form at the level of denotation (i.e., in terms of the kinds of entities that it picks out as its referent: one being). By contrast, insofar as the denotational category to which the V form corresponds is understood to exist at a definite remove or distance from the denotational category of the T form, the V form is seen as inherently more apt figuratively to signal "distance" on the indexical plane. Hence, *vous*, the second-person plural in purely denotational terms, being understood "literally" to pick out a more "elaborate" referent (more than one being), is implicitly perceived as the term that has the capacity to signal distance vis-à-vis an addressee or reserve in public, official circumstances. What motivates this perception of the contrasting value of T and V forms is indeed a particular view of language, one that privileges reference over other functions, seeing denotational categories (or perceived contrasts in markedness at the denotational level) as the grounds on which indexical values are based. By defining the value of the two pronominal terms in contrast one to another, this view of language also encourages speakers to focus on single instances of use.

Second, we can see this linguistic ideology operating in French at the indexical plane, in the ways in which extensive use of *tu* or of *vous* is understood as the sign of certain characteristics on the part of the speaker. While this kind of indexical effect in fact depends on the consistent or regular patterns of utterance of a given form by a speaker over a range of contexts (and on such utterances' being interpreted according to what Silverstein [1992] has termed "independent schemata of classification"), speakers tend to focus once again on single instances of use. More precisely, speakers perceive these effects—the indexing of a speaker's degree of refinement, status, political orientation, and so forth—as deriving from his

or her consistent production of T or V forms, largely without regard to how these forms enter into patterns of symmetry or asymmetry and to what they thus signal at the first order of indexicality. In both of these ways, the ambient linguistic ideology sustains the notion that the indexical value of T and V forms is fully contained within and unambiguously expressed by single instances of pronominal use.

As the evidence discussed here makes abundantly clear, however, the social indexical value of *tu* and *vous* emerges from more complex processes of intersubjective and semiotic mediation: the value of these terms at the first order of indexicality depends on how particular tokens are understood to fit into broader patterns of paired exchanges; and at the second order of indexicality, on the perceived robustness of individual speakers' linguistic conduct across contexts as interpreted in relation to cultural notions about what kinds of persons use the pronominal system in what distinctive ways.

Conclusion

The characteristic complexity of the French pronominal address system may thus be summarized as follows: First, although there are only two basic grammatical forms, these forms and their derivatives are capable of generating multiple significations about the communicative contexts in which they occur. Rather than trying to reduce the relevant contextual dimensions or the pragmatic functions of this system to some binary expression, we must recognize that they are not necessarily limited by the binary nature of the linguistic code and that their actual multiplicity is indeed a crucial part of what makes this address system so complex and so powerful as a mediator of social relations, occasions, and identities.

Second, as social indexicals, *tu* and *vous* may either presuppose the existence and relevance of certain dimensions or may actually entail (create or transform) the relevant dimensions through their very utterance. This capacity to relate in two distinct ways to the communicative contexts in which these terms are used is essential, because it suggests why pronominal address (or any other indexical phenomenon) does not merely reflect a static social order but repeatedly puts into play and potentially transforms the categories in terms of which social relations, occasions, and identities are defined and redefined.

Third, the pronominal address system is characterized by the existence of distinct orders of indexicality, or structures of values that mediate between linguistic forms and the contextual dimensions that are invoked by their use. At what we have identified as the first order of indexicality, the use of *tu* and *vous* is understood to point to characteristics of the immediate context, as they concern the relationship (degree of deference and/or intimacy) between speaker and addressee and/or the nature of the circumstances (degree of formality and/or publicness). To the extent that such usage, meaningful at the first order, is additionally understood to point beyond the immediate context, to certain enduring characteristics of the speaker, then there is a second order of indexicality, which exists by virtue of an intervening set of beliefs about who typically uses the tu/vous

system in what distinctive ways. The French pronominal address system may thus be described as indexing the relative formality of circumstances, and deference and intimacy of social relations between speaker and addressee at the first order, and various more enduring social attributes of individual speakers (primarily, refinement, status, and political orientation) at the second order.

Part of the challenge of adequately describing such a complex system of form-to-context relations comes from the fact that the locus of meaning of these indexical signs is different at each of these orders. Precisely because *tu* and *vous* may be understood as pointing to so many different aspects of the immediate context of communication, the only way to grasp what they do index at this first order is to recognize how each instance of use fits into broader patterns of symmetry or asymmetry, comprised of paired exchanges of terms over two or more turns; and which specific aspects of the circumstances or of the participants' relative characteristics those particular patterns of address are understood iconically to invoke. Any one instance of use, as we have seen, is an inadequate basis for discerning what is being signalled at this order of indexicality. At the second order of indexicality, by contrast, it is appropriate to focus on multiple instances of *tu* or *vous* uttered by a single speaker with some constancy across various contexts of communication, for such are the units of meaningful practice. As we have seen, however, the second-order value of these utterances as indices of a speaker's characteristics also derives not from any one instance of use but from the interpretation of several such usages according to particular cultural schemata of classification.

Fourth, native speakers are often quite aware of the indexical values of *tu* and *vous* and use these terms in strategic ways, as means to particular ends. Their awareness of the pragmatic effects that may be achieved through the use of these terms is potentially both a help and a hindrance to us as we try to characterize the ways in which pronominal address is socially significant. For on the one hand, speakers' awareness of these effects enables them to provide extensive metalinguistic commentary, which is often full of clues as to how the use of *tu* and *vous* signals, creates, and transforms diverse aspects of the social world. On the other hand, that awareness, infused as it is with the biases of a particular linguistic ideology, may also dispose speakers to overaccentuate or to disregard particular aspects of the semiotic process: in the present case, putting too much emphasis on isolated instances of address and individual intentions, and not enough on the patterns of symmetry and asymmetry occuring at various levels and on the intersubjective and cultural constraints that limit the effectiveness of strategic uses of *tu* and *vous*. Ethnometapragmatic awareness, in other words, contributes to the complexity of T/V systems but, when approached critically (with an eye to potential bias), can also help disentangle certain aspects of that very complexity.

To return then to the initial question about what to make of the popular perceptions that French society is moving toward a "generalized use of *tu*," I would argue that there is no reason to believe in the inevitability of such a trend. There is strong evidence that, at least for the moment and within

the sector of the population studied here, the symmetrical use of *tu* has not supplanted the use of *vous* in either symmetrical or asymmetrical exchanges. Moreover, given the long history of this system, the multiple significations it has come to connote, and the acute awareness that speakers today have of these terms' indexical values and pragmatic effects, it seems unlikely that such a distinction will be lost, at least in the foreseeable future.

This does not mean that we should simply dismiss popular assertions about the apparent "triumph of *tu*." Rather, we may understand such claims as indicative of speakers' conscious experience of subtle shifts in norms for pronominal address and of their efforts to assess what such shifts entail. By identifying a tendency toward a "generalized use of *tu*," French men and women familiar with prior norms of "proper" address are trying to objectify their sense that the use of *tu* is less restricted and that symmetry in pronominal terms is prevailing (at least within the circles that likewise set the standards of good usage today). While the evidence presented here suggests that use of the familiar *tu* and symmetrical exchanges of *tu* and *vous* in certain contexts have indeed become more commonplace, it does not suggest that all significant uses of *vous* or asymmetrical exchanges have been eliminated nor that the binary code itself is gradually being replaced by a unique term. In light of this evidence, assertions that "now everyone says *tu*" can perhaps better be understood as convenient shorthands that express speakers' sense of the most salient aspects of these shifts in norms, without acknowledging the enduring complexities of pronominal address.

As for the significance of these shifts in patterns of address, this analysis indicates that things have changed less than popular claims about either "progress" or "decline" would suggest. The wider use of *tu* and the emergent preference for symmetry in pronominal terms of address do not imply that social barriers and differences have become completely irrelevant. Differences in status, identity, and personal disposition are still clearly (though perhaps more subtly) conveyed by speakers through their use of the tu/vous system: through their choice of terms; through the patterns of symmetry and asymmetry that occur both in the terms used and in the distribution of rights to initiate a switch from one term to the other; and through the extensive or marked use of particular terms that individual speakers make over a range of contexts.

The ambivalence that speakers express about the significance of these shifts in patterns of address can perhaps be understood as a function of their awareness of the complex indexicality of pronominal address. Aware of the first-order pragmatic effects—of fostering intimacy, maintaining distance, marking occasions as formal or informal, and so forth—that are potentially achieved through certain uses of the tu/vous system, speakers remain very attached to this distinction and yet suspicious of the "inauthentic" and otherwise interested uses that others make of it. Aware, too, of the different sorts of qualities—refinement, status, political orientation, vitality, and so forth—that they can signal about themselves through their use of this system, they also experience sometimes contradictory desires to embody these differing values: to be at once professionally competent (i.e., maintaining symmetrical *vous* with their colleagues) and "young at heart"

(readily switching to symmetrical *tu*), distinguished (inclined to say *vous*), and liberal (disposed to say *tu*). In other words, their acute awareness of these multiple effects and overlapping values suggests that, at least for some time to come, *vous*, like *tu*, will continue to be, just as etiquette guide author Laure Verly once described it, "a resource of the French language that it is still good to use."

Notes

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1. Such perceptions of the apparent triumph of the T over the V form are not unique to France. In her analysis of changing patterns of pronominal address in Sweden, Paulston (1976) acknowledges a similar belief in the development, since mid–20th century, of what has been popularly termed a "*du*-landslide." As she shows, however, and as I will argue here, the changes and continuities in the value of pronominal and related address terms are much more complex than such representations suggest.

2. While the concept of "la décontraction" originally referred quite literally to the relaxation of contracted muscles, since the early 1950s it has come to be used in a figurative sense, to denote casualness in social interactions: what we might gloss as "a relaxed and informal demeanor." Besides the apparent "reign of *tu*," it is commonly asserted, for example, that first names are increasingly used in place of titles and kinship terms, that dress and physical appearance have become more casual and less strictly regulated, that meals and ways of entertaining guests have become greatly simplified, that interpersonal relations in a wide variety of contexts have become more spontaneous and less explicitly oriented toward the recognition of social differences. This pointedly casual style of conduct is associated with the development, most visibly since the mid–20th century, of a broad middle-class sector and of several successive cohorts seeking to define themselves as distinct "generations," often in opposition to the presumed conservatism of their predecessors. The cultural construction of la décontraction as a distinct style of social conduct is further detailed in Morford 1995.

3. Following the Latin terms, *tu* and *vos*, out of which many European-language systems developed, address systems built around such distinctions have come to be known as "T/V systems." Brown and Gilman's analysis of T/V systems, originally published in 1960, is based on historical, literary and survey data collected for English, French, Italian, Spanish, and German. References here are to the reprint of their article in 1972.

4. Michael Silverstein's work on the indexical functions of language has inspired much of the present analysis; see in particular Silverstein 1976, 1981, 1985, 1992, 1993, 1996, n.d. On pronominal address and other systems of deference and

honorification, see Agha 1993, 1994; Errington 1985, 1988; Friedrich 1986[1966]; Irvine 1985; and Paulston 1976. On the role of language ideology in linguistic change, see Hill 1992, Irvine 1992, and Woolard and Schieffelin 1994.

5. "Context" here refers to the features of the circumstances in which an utterance is made that are relevant to understanding its meaning: the role and status of different participants, when and where the utterance is made, whether it is made in ways deemed appropriate by those involved, and what consequences, if any, the fact of its being uttered may have for subsequent interactions or understandings of those circumstances (see Levinson 1983:23).

6. According to Brown and Gilman, the power semantic developed first, as the V of deference initially addressed to the Roman emperor in the fourth century was gradually extended to other persons in publically recognized positions of power, becoming a definite feature of many European languages by the 12th to 14th centuries (1972:254–256). As the power semantic became generalized, divergent class-based norms of symmetrical address between persons of roughly equal status (V among elites, T among commoners) also developed, constituting the solidarity semantic (1972:256–258). The two semantics coexisted for some time in a state of "equilibrium," in which considerations of solidarity were a factor only in address between people of similar status. But in the course of the 19th century, as social mobility and egalitarian ideologies spread, the principle of solidarity was increasingly applied to interactions between people of differing status or power, creating conflicts between the two sets of norms (1972:258–260, 265–269). These conflicts, they suggest, were eventually "resolved" in accordance with the solidarity semantic (1972:260). Brown and Gilman's analysis thus presents the historical evolution of these T/V systems as the succession of divergent sets of norms for regulating speech in accordance with the speaker-addressee relationship, and attributes this process to diffuse changes in ideas about the kind of social relations that should prevail within a society.

7. What Brown and Gilman call "expressive styles" may also be described as linguistic registers, or distinctive ways of speaking that constitute a subset of the total possible ways of speaking that comprise any language. Their discussion of "expressive styles" aims primarily to show that they exist, by presenting the statistical correlation between the responses that interviewees gave to two sets of scaled questions, about their attitudes toward various social issues and the probability that they would say T or V to addressees with certain characteristics. As they suggest, the effect of such "styles" depends on (1) the constancy of such use or preferences on the part of a speaker across various communicative contexts and (2) the relatively consistent interpretation within a linguistic community of such usages as signs of speaker identity (1972:271–272). What is less clear from their discussion of this aspect of T/V systems is how the identification of "styles" or registers effectively occurs and what may explain the particular associations that are made between extensive use of certain pronominal forms and certain characteristics of the speaker.

8. See, for example, the prominent place attributed to this work in Agha 1994; Errington 1985, 1988; Friedrich 1986; Paulston 1976; Sherzer 1988; and Silverstein 1985.

9. In particular, Brown and Gilman's well-known diagrams of the intersection of the power and solidarity semantics (1972:259) suggest that it is essentialized characteristics of the addressee (as "superior," "equal," "inferior," "solidary," etc.) that prompt the use of T or V and that transparently indicate the value of any one instance of use.

10. French speakers' awareness of these indexical functions may be understood, as Silverstein (1981) has suggested, as related to the "semiotic properties" of this particular feature of the language: as linguistic forms, *tu* and *vous* are "unavoidably referential" as well as meaningful in pragmatic terms; they are "segmentable," or readily identified as definite pieces of speech (as opposed, say, to phonological or other variations that are difficult to isolate); and they are "relatively presupposing" (that is, they often, though not always, point to some aspect of the context that is already known or manifestly present).

The existence of what Benveniste (1966) calls "delocutionary verbs"—*tutoyer*, *vouvoyer* (and its earlier forms *vousoyer* and *voussoyer*), meaning "to say *tu*" or "to say *vous*"—may also facilitate discussion of these phenomena. As Benveniste observes, "The creation of delocutionary verbs . . . is linked to the frequency and the importance of meaningful formulae in certain types of culture" (1966:279, my translation). According to Paul Robert's *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (1992:2041, 2119), the verb *tutoyer* dates from around 1394, *vousoyer [vuzwaje]* from the 15th century, *voussoyer [vuswaje]* from around 1845, and *vouvoyer [vuvwaje]* from around 1872. Interestingly, one upper-middle-class Parisian woman whom I interviewed reported that some of her older relatives, accustomed to using *vous* among consanguineal kin as a mark of speaker distinction, differentiated between *vouvoyer* and *voussoyer*: "In that family . . . one *vouvoies* strangers and *voussoies* people that one knows." While this was the only time that I encountered such a distinction, one may easily imagine its usefulness: the existence of two distinct terms for the use of *vous* may have made it possible to distinguish between intimates and nonintimates while still signaling one's own refinement. Several other consultants recognized but did not use *voussoyer*. Most who had heard of it thought it was a more archaic or more polite term for *vouvoyer*.

11. Most of the people who served as consultants for this research were adults of various ages (born for the most part between 1910 and 1970), whose family background, education, professional pursuits, and lifestyle marked them as members of middle- or upper-middle-class milieus and who lived in the Paris metropolitan area (though many had grown up or regularly spent vacations in other parts of France or the former French empire). Much of my research over two ten-month periods involved observing, recording, discussing the nature of social conduct, and interacting with people in a wide variety of settings, including the primary and secondary homes of a network of some 20 middle-class families, the neighborhood where many of them and I lived, several local Catholic institutions, schools, workplaces, and other public spaces, in and beyond Paris.

12. Because I am particularly concerned to demonstrate the multiple contextual dimensions that may be invoked by the use of *tu* and *vous* and the kinds of beliefs about language use and users that inform the second-order indexical values of these terms, this discussion draws extensively on metalinguistic commentary.

13. For more detailed accounts of the historical development of the T/V distinction in Latin, French, and other European languages, see Brown and Gilman 1972, Brunot 1967, Maley 1974, and Nyrop 1925.

14. Ferdinand Brunot cites the speech of one citizen who welcomed the return of the tu/vous distinction by proclaiming (in terms strikingly similar to those used by Sylvie Weil, in the opening citation above): "The difference between *vous* and *tu* is an inexhaustible source of [national] riches. . . . Respect is something that is naturally shown toward certain beings; it is thus not necessary to think about abolishing the sign of it." And as Brunot himself concludes, "The French people, at the same time as they cherish equality, love titles and distinctions" (1967:694, 696).

15. For example, even as it became common for husband and wife to use a symmetrical *tu* in speaking to one another, it was not uncommon, well into the 20th century, for couples from elite milieus to adopt a symmetrical *vous* with each other when in public, including in the presence of servants or guests in their own home. Fiancés from "respectable" milieus were also encouraged to use a symmetrical *vous* in public, for fear that their use of *tu* might create suspicions that they already had sexual relations with each other (see Nyrop 1925:237).

16. Having grown up in what he called a "modest" rural milieu and for years been an active participant in progressive political and community organizations, this man had almost exclusively used *tu* all his life with his family and friends and still readily used *tu* in such contexts.

17. Maley (1974:12–23) gives evidence of the frequent alternation of T and V forms within a given context in Latin-based languages during the Middle Ages and suggests that these fluctuations in pronominal address may have been governed by the emotions a speaker felt toward an addressee and/or by considerations of their relative status. Maley also points out that some alternations between T and V forms occurred as a way of dealing with the constraints of versification imposed by particular genres of poetry.

18. This set of variables nearly replicates that identified by Paul Friedrich (1986) for 19th-century Russian T/V usage, with the exception of one principle: relative age within the same generation, which does not seem relevant to this segment of the contemporary French-speaking population. Note that systematic class-based differences in the use of the T/V system, which are similar to those that Friedrich identifies as deriving from the variable "dialect," are treated in the present analysis as second-order indexical phenomena insofar as they are mediated by distinct sets of beliefs about who uses the resources of the pronominal system in what distinct ways. The patterns of pronominal address described here, as well as this set of contextual dimensions, should of course be understood as applying specifically to this segment of the contemporary French-speaking population; other norms and dimensions may well be observed elsewhere.

19. This indexing of settings is an aspect of T/V usage which Brown and Gilman do not examine but which suggests again that it is the context, widely conceived, and not the characteristics of the addressee as referent, that matters for pronominal address.

20. These assumptions no doubt reflect in an odd way the heritage of colonialism, where the colonized were often automatically addressed as *tu* but were expected to say *vous* to European colonists. Brown and Gilman report that in 1957 Robert Lacoste, a high governmental official in Algeria, called for his fellow Europeans to abandon this practice (1972:266).

21. In 17th-century England, Quakers and other proponents of Plain Speech criticized the use of "you" to any singular addressee on similar grounds (the distinction made in Old English between thee/thou and you/ye being of course another example of a T/V system). See Silverstein 1985.

22. By strategic use, I mean any way in which these pronominal forms or their grammatical derivatives are consciously employed as means to some end other than mere reference to an addressee.

23. Interestingly, Jean reported that he and his fellow supervisors switch to symmetrical use of *vous* with people whom they otherwise address as *tu* in certain circumstances, such as during work-related evaluations and in the presence of their own hierarchical superiors. Such switches are understood to mark the formality of the context but not to imply any change in the speaker-addressee relationship.

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