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CHAPTER 2

Registers of Language

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1 INTRODUCTION

Language users often employ labels like "polite language," "informal speech," "upper-class speech," "women's speech," "literary usage," "scientific term," "religious language," "slang," and others, to describe differences among speech forms. Metalinguistic labels of this kind link speech repertoires to enactable pragmatic effects, including images of the person speaking (woman, upper-class person), the relationship of speaker to interlocutor (formality, politeness), the conduct of social practices (religious, literary, or scientific activity); they hint at the existence of cultural models of speech – a metapragmatic classification of discourse types – linking speech repertoires to typifications of actor, relationship, and conduct. This is the space of register variation conceived in intuitive terms.

Writers on language – linguists, anthropologists, literary critics – have long been interested in cultural models of this kind simply because they are of common concern to language users. Speakers of any language can intuitively assign speech differences to a space of classifications of the above kind and, correspondingly, can respond to others' speech in ways sensitive to such distinctions. Competence in such models is an indispensable resource in social interaction. Yet many features of such models – their socially distributed existence, their ideological character, the way in which they motivate tropes of personhood and identity – have tended to puzzle writers on the subject of registers. I will be arguing below that a clarification of these issues – indeed the very study of registers – requires attention to *reflexive social processes* whereby such models are formulated and disseminated in social life and become available for use in interaction by individuals. Let me first introduce some of the relevant issues in a preliminary way.

Individuals become acquainted with registers through processes of socialization that continue throughout the life span (see Kulick and Schieffelin, this volume); hence every member of a language community cannot identify all of its registers with equal ease, let alone use them with equal fluency. Such differences depend on the

particular life-course and trajectory of socialization of the individual speaker; for example, uneducated speakers tend to be unfamiliar with literary registers, older speakers don't know current youth slang, and scientific and technical terminologies often require years of specialized training to master. An individual's *register range* – the variety of registers with which he or she is acquainted – equips a person with portable emblems of identity, sometimes permitting distinctive modes of access to particular zones of social life. In complex societies, where no fluent speaker of the language fully commands more than a few of its registers, the register range of a person may influence the range of social activities in which that person is entitled to participate; in some professions, especially technical professions, a display of register competence is a criterion of employment. Differences of register competence are thus often linked to asymmetries of power, socioeconomic class, position within hierarchies, and the like.

A variety of registers in English and other languages have been studied and documented in recent years (see references). Some of these are known only to specialized communities of speakers, others are more widely known. Some lack official names, others have their own dictionaries. Some are highly valued in society; others (such as varieties of slang) are derogated by prescriptive institutions but positively valued by their users. Some are widely recognized as the habits of particular groups. Others – such as Standard English – are promoted by institutions of such widespread hegemony that they are not ordinarily recognized as distinct registers at all. In a common ideological view, Standard English is just "the language," the baseline against which all other facts of register differentiation are measured. Yet from the standpoint of usage Standard English is just one register among many, highly appropriate to certain public/official settings, but employed by many speakers in alternation with other varieties – such as registers of business and bureaucracy (Nash 1993), journalism and advertising (Ghadessy 1988), technical and scientific registers (Halliday 1988), varieties of slang (Eble 1996; Gordon 1983), criminal argots (Maurer 1955; Mehrotra 1977) – in distinct venues of social life.

The above discussion lays out – in a rather impressionistic fashion – several issues that pertain to the existence and use of registers in social life. Let me now offer a more precise characterization of registers, focusing on three main issues.

2   THREE ASPECTS OF REGISTERS

A register is a linguistic *repertoire* that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices. The repertoires of a register are generally linked to systems of speech style of which they are the most easily reportable fragments. From the standpoint of language structure, registers differ in the type of repertoire involved, e.g., lexemes, prosody, sentence collocations, and many registers involve repertoires of more than one kind; from the standpoint of function, distinct registers are associated with social practices of every kind, e.g., law, medicine, prayer, science, magic, prophecy, commerce, military strategy, the observance of respect and etiquette, the expression of civility, status, ethnicity, gender. Given this range, a repertoire-based view of registers remains incomplete in certain essential respects. Such a view cannot explain how particular repertoires become

differentiable from the rest of the language, or how they come to be associated with social practices at all. These features are identified by appeal to *metapragmatic models* of speech, that is, culture-internal models of actor (role), activity (conduct), and interactant relationship (social relations) associated with speech differences. I discuss this issue in section 3.

Like other cultural models, registers are *historical formations* caught up in group-relative processes of valorization and countervalorization, exhibiting change in both form and value over time. For instance, when prestige registers used by upper-class/caste speakers are imitated by other groups, the group whose speech is the sought-after variety often innovates in its own speech habits, seeking to renew or transform the emblem of distinction (see, e.g., Honey 1989; Errington 1998). Competing models of register value sometimes exist within societies as well (Hill 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000) and contribute to historical changes in register systems. At any given phase, or historical stage, a register formation involves a *social domain* of persons (e.g., a demographic group) that is acquainted with the model of speech at issue; the boundaries of this social domain may change over time or remain relatively constant, depending on the kinds of institutions that facilitate register competence in society (see sections 4 and 8 below).

The *utterance* or use of a register's forms formulates a sketch of the social occasion of language use, indexing contextual features such as interlocutors' roles, relationships, and the type of social practice in which they are engaged. If the current scenario of use is already recognizable as an instance of the social practice the utterance appears appropriate to that occasion; conversely, switching to the register may itself reconfigure the sense of occasion, indexically entailing or creating the perception that the social practice is now under way. A register's tokens are never experienced in isolation during discourse; they are encountered under conditions of *textuality* (cooccurrence) with other signs – both linguistic and non-linguistic signs – that form a significant context, or *co-text*, for the construal of the token uttered. The effects of cooccurring signs may be consistent with the effects of the sign at issue, augmenting its force; or, the sign's co-text may yield partially contrary effects, leading to various types of partial cancellation, defeasibility, hybridity, or ironic play. I discuss these issues in section 6.

Each of the above paragraphs lays out a distinct perspective on register formations that I discuss in more detail below: a repertoire perspective, a sociohistorical perspective, and an utterance perspective. All three are necessary, of course, since registers are repertoires used in utterances by particular sociohistorical populations.

But let us first consider a more basic issue. How are registers identified by linguists?

3   METAPRAGMATIC STEREOTYPES OF USE

In order to find samples of a register the linguist requires a set of directions for locating instances of language use where tokens of the register occur and a criterion for differentiating these from other types of speech that occur in the same stretch of discourse. Here the linguist must turn to the competence of language users. Traditional discussions of registers have long relied on the assumption that language users make "value judgments" (Halliday 1964) about language form, that they are able to

express "evaluative attitudes towards variant forms" (Ferguson 1994: 18). All empirical studies of registers rely on the metalinguistic ability of native speakers to discriminate between linguistic forms, to make evaluative judgments about variants.

The study of such evaluative behaviors allows linguists to distinguish a register's repertoires from the rest of the language and to reconstruct metapragmatic models of speech associated with them by language users. In the special case where a linguist studies a register of his or her native language, such evaluations are available in the form of introspectable intuitions. In general, however, linguists rely on native evaluations which are overtly expressed in publicly observable semiotic behavior. Such behavior may consist of language use: e.g., linguistic utterances which explicitly describe a register's forms and associated values; or, utterances which implicitly evaluate the indexical effects of cooccurring forms (as "next turn" responses to them, for example) without describing what they evaluate; such behavior may include non-linguistic semiotic activity as well, such as gestures, or the extended patterning of kinesic and bodily movements characteristic of ritual responses to the use of many registers. All such behaviors are metalinguistic in nature since they tell us something about the properties of linguistic forms whether by decontextualizing the forms and describing their properties or by evaluating their effects while the forms are still in play. Such evaluations tell us something, in particular, about the pragmatics of language – that is, the capacity of linguistic forms to index culturally recognizable activities, categories of actors, etc., as elements of the context of language use – thus constituting the class of metapragmatic evaluations of language.

Although such metapragmatic data are necessarily *overt* – in the sense of palpable, perceivable – they may or may not be linguistically expressed; and, if linguistic in character, such behaviors may or may not be denotationally *explicit* with respect to the properties ascribed to the register's forms. In their most explicit form, such evaluations consist of metapragmatic discourse, i.e. accounts which *describe* the pragmatics of speech forms. Several genres of metapragmatic discourse occur naturally in all language communities, for example, verbal reports and glosses of language use; names for registers and associated speech genres; accounts of typical or exemplary speakers; proscriptions on usage; standards of appropriate use; positive or negative assessments of the social worth of the register. In some cases such accounts are institutionalized in normative traditions of lexicography and grammatology; these play a different kind of role in establishing the register as a social formation and in maintaining or expanding the social domain of its users.

A register is a social regularity: a single individual's metapragmatic activity does not suffice to establish the social existence of a register unless confirmed in some way by the evaluative activities of others. Thus in identifying registers linguists observe not only that certain kinds of metapragmatic typifications *occur* in the evaluative behavior of language users but, more specifically, that certain patterns of typifications *recur* in the evaluative behaviors of many speakers. But in talking of recurrent typifications we have moved beyond individual acts of typification to the order of stereotypes of discourse.

To speak of *metapragmatic stereotypes* is to say that social regularities of metapragmatic typification can be observed and documented as data. The simplest kind of social regularity takes the following form: many persons typify criterial speech forms in the same way, for example, assigning the same metalinguistic predicates (e.g. "is

slang," "is polite," "is used by older persons," etc.) to the forms at issue. But this is a very special case. In the more general case the scheme of valorization may exhibit various forms of *sociological fractionation* – including cases where one group resists the scheme of values upheld by another (countervalorization), or misrecognizes, or ideologically distorts, such values in fashioning norms for itself (see sections 5 and 9). The assumption that a register's forms and values are modelled symmetrically by all speakers (i.e., are "uniformly shared") is often a default assumption in many works in the literature. But the extent and degree of sharedness is an empirical question that requires systematic study in each case. The very possibility of such study lies in the fact that register distinctions are evidenced in overtly perceivable metapragmatic activity. Indeed, from an empirical standpoint, metapragmatic stereotypes are not ideas in the head. The main evidence for their existence lies in overt (publicly perceivable) evaluative behavior of the kinds described above, i.e., behavior embodied in sensorially palpable signs such as utterances, texts, gestures.

This aspect of metapragmatic activity – that it is expressible in publicly perceivable signs – is not just a matter of convenience to the analyst. It is *a necessary condition on the social existence of registers*. Let us consider why this is so.

4   STEREOTYPES AND SOCIALIZATION

Since the collection of individuals that we call a society is constantly changing in demographic composition (due to births, deaths, and migrations, for example) *the continuous historical existence* of a register depends upon mechanisms for the replication of its forms and values over changing populations (e.g., from generation to generation). The group of "users" of a register continuously changes and renews itself; hence the differentiable existence of the register, an awareness of its distinctive forms and values, must be communicable to new members of the group in order for the register to persist in some relatively constant way over time.

A minimal condition on such processes is that the typifications of speech through which register values are communicated to others, and hence circulated through society, be embodied in sensorially perceivable signs. Such processes depend upon interaction between people mediated by artifacts made by people – whether directly, as in the case of conversation (here the artifact, or thing made, is an utterance), or more indirectly through the production and use of more perduring artifacts (books, electronic media, other semiotically "readable" objects) that link persons to each other in communicative behavior across larger spans of space and time (Sapir 1949). In linking persons to each other in such semiotic artifacts also link persons to a common set of representations of speech, both explicit and implicit ones, thus making possible the large-scale replication of register stereotypes across social populations.

4.1   Institutions of replication

To speak of the socialization of individuals to registers and of the replication of registers across populations is to look at the same issue from two different points of view. The latter large-scale perspective, focusing as it does on social practices and

institutions, helps explain demographic regularities of individual competence. The spread of register competence in society is linked to metalinguistic institutions of diverse types, both formal and informal ones. These differ in the principles of recruitment whereby individuals come to be exposed to the process of socialization, and hence in the regions of social (demographic) space to which individuals competent in the register typically belong. Let us consider some examples.

Prescriptive socialization within the family plays a critical role in the early acquisition of many registers. In the case of honorific registers – registers associated with decorum, etiquette, and deference (see Agha 2002) – metapragmatic activity that prescribes appropriate use occurs commonly in most societies (see, e.g., Morford 1997; Smith-Hefner 1988). In the most transparent cases such acts are formulated as denotationally explicit injunctions to the child as addressee; but other, more implicitly prescriptive activity – such as jocular accounts of defective speech (Agha 1998), the implicit "modeling" of speech for bystanders (Errington 1998) – occurs as well. By communicating register distinctions to children such metapragmatic activity expands the social domain of register competence from one generation to the next within the family unit.

Processes of register socialization continue throughout adult life as well. One cannot become a doctor or a lawyer, for example, without acquiring the forms of speech appropriate to the practices of medicine or law, or without an understanding of the values – both cognitive and interactional – linked to their use. In these cases the process of language socialization typically involves extended affiliation with educational institutions, such as law school or medical school, through which individuals acquire proficiency in the use of profession-specific registers of the language. Overt prescription plays a role here but other types of more implicit metalinguistic activity occur routinely as well (Mertz 1998). Once acquired, proficiency in the register functions as a tacit emblem of group membership throughout adult life and, in cases such as law or medicine, may be treated as an index of achieved professional identity.

In societies with written scripts and mass literacy a variety of normative public institutions – such as educational institutions, traditions of lexicography and grammatology, school boards and national academies – serve as loci of public sphere legitimation and replication of register stereotypes over segments of the population. The effect is particularly marked for prestige registers such as the Standard Language. When effective, such methods may result in the growth or rise of a register formation in society by extending a more or less uniform competence in a prestige register over relatively large segments of the population. Yet processes of register dissemination and replication are inevitably constrained by principles that limit the participatory access of individuals to criterial institutions (e.g., mechanisms of gatekeeping in elite schools). Hence, in practice, register stereotypes and standards are never replicated perfectly over a population of speakers.

4.2   Social asymmetries

All speakers of a language do not acquire competence in all of its registers during the normal course of language socialization. In the case of registers of respect and

etiquette, only individuals born into privileged circumstances tend to acquire competence over the most elaborate locutions. In the case of registers of scientific discourse competence over technical terminologies typically requires years of specialized schooling. In the case of registers associated with particular venues of commercial activity (the stock exchange, the publishing house, the advertising firm) proficiency in specialized terms is usually attained through socialization in the workplace. In many societies, certain lexical registers function as "secret languages" (thieves' argots, the registers of religious ritual, magical incantation, etc.) since their use is restricted to specialized groups by metapragmatic proscriptions against teaching the forms to outsiders.

Thus, two members of a language community may both be acquainted with a linguistic register, but not have the same degree of competence in its use. Many speakers can recognize certain registers of their language but cannot fully use or interpret them. The existence of registers therefore results in the creation of social boundaries within society, partitioning off language users into groups distinguished by differential access to particular registers, and to the social practices which they mediate; and through the creation and maintenance of asymmetries of power, privilege, and rank, as effects dependent on the above processes.

5   STEREOTYPES AND IDEOLOGY

I observed earlier that registers often have an ideological – hence "distorting" – character. How does the "ideological" aspect of registers relate to the notion of stereotype discussed above? Now, to say that stereotypes of register form and value exist is merely to say that socially regular patterns of metapragmatic typification can be observed and documented as data. Such models are not "false" or "incorrect" in any definitional sense. The question of whether a system of stereotypes is ideological – in the sense of "distorting" – is empirically undecidable if an order of internally consistent stereotypes is viewed in isolation from all other observable facts. Yet register systems are typically found to be ideological formations – in several senses – when subjected to further kinds of empirical analysis. Why should this be so?

I observed earlier (section 3) that the activity of formulating hypotheses about register stereotypes employs many diverse kinds of data. *There is no necessity that the results of these data should be wholly consistent with each other for all speakers.* Indeed the logical basis of the claim that some order of stereotypes is ideological is that two sets of metapragmatic data imply the existence of distinct models. I now describe a few varieties of ideological distortion that are very common in languages of the world. I turn to ethnographic examples in the next section.

The first type of case involves the ideological character of *competing valorizations.* In so far as register systems vary society-internally particular socially positioned models may contrast with each other as alternative systems of normativity. Each is ideological from the perspective of the other in so far as it gets the (normative) facts incorrect. Why do competing models of normativity coexist in societies? Two kinds of reasons are very common. The first is merely a result of the asymmetries of replication noted above: individuals differ in their access to institutions through which register competence is reproduced over historical populations (e.g., some are born in elite

families, attend elite schools; others lack these opportunities). Another reason is that systems of normative value invariably serve the interests of some speakers, not others; they are therefore subject to manipulation, differential allegiance, and society-internal competition. These factors often play a critical role in the sociohistorical transformation of register systems.

A second ideological aspect of registers derives from the open-ended possibilities of *functional reanalysis*. Registers are open cultural systems in the sense that once a distinct register is culturally recognized as existing within a language, its repertoires are susceptible to further reanalysis and change. For example, when prestige registers spoken by privileged groups are emulated by others they are often perceived as "devalued" by speakers of that privileged group; the group frequently innovates in its speech, creating hyperlectal distinctions within prestige forms. In the case of repertoires of youth slang, which change very rapidly, forms that were once "cool" soon become passé and are replaced by new emblems of in-group identity; in this case, competence over "current" repertoires is frequently reanalyzed as a system of inter-generational positioning. Every such reanalysis is a "distortion" of a prior stage of the register that now constitutes a new system of enactable values. When the products of such reanalyses coexist synchronically within societies they contribute to systems of competing valorization – alternative models of normativity – in the sense noted above.

A third reason that stereotypes have an ideological character is that stereotype judgments typically underdifferentiate the semiotic orders of *lexeme* and *text*. Native judgments about registers are often formulated as models of the pragmatic values of isolable words and expressions (e.g., that some words are inherently polite, some not). But since lexemes are never experienced in isolation from other signs in interaction, the effects of co-textual signs (i.e., signs cooccurring with the lexeme) may on a given occasion of use either be congruent with or, by degrees, may cancel the stereotypic effects of the lexeme in question. Register distinctions can thus be manipulated interactionally to achieve effects which – though dependent on the stereotypic values of particular lexemes – are, at the level of text, significantly at odds with such values. Common examples of this are cases such as the use of female speech by males, the use of honorific language to enact veiled aggression, the use of technical terminologies not to do technical work but to tell jokes about their users. In all of these cases the stereotypic values of a register's lexemes are implemented in discourse – they make certain personae recognizable through speech – but the devices in question are contextualized by other framing devices so that the overall effect of entextualized usage departs significantly from the stereotypic effect of the lexemes troped upon.

I now turn to a range of examples that illustrate the issues discussed above.

6   ENTEXTUALIZED TROPES

One sense in which registers are ideological constructs is that the range of effects that can be implemented through the contextualized use of a register is always much larger than the range of effects reported in explicit stereotypes of use. The reason is simple. When we speak of contextualized use we are no longer speaking of effects

implemented by the register's tokens; we are concerned rather with the effects of an array of cooccurring signs of which the register token is a fragment. This larger – often multi-modal – array of signs itself implements semiotic effects that *may or may not be consistent* with the stereotypic values of the text-fragments that we recognize as the register's forms. Let us consider some examples.

6.1   Gender indexicals

In many languages differences of speech are enregistered as indexicals of speaker gender. The fact that the structure of these repertoires varies enormously from language to language is entirely unsurprising once we see that the unity of the register phenomenon derives not from aspects of language structure but from a metapragmatic model of language use.

Table 2.1 illustrates a phonolexical register of gender indexicals. In the Native American language Koasati, a phonolexical alternation between forms of *-s* and its absence distinguishes stereotypically male and female speech in indicative and imperative forms of the verb. Haas (1964) observed that language users readily formulate metapragmatic accounts linking form contrasts to speaker gender and employ such accounts in socializing children to the register: "parents were formerly accustomed to correct the speech of children of either sex, since each child was trained to use forms appropriate to his or her sex" (1964: 230). When fully socialized, however, adults are entirely aware that the register comprises a model of performable persona, one that can be manipulated in various ways: "Members of each sex are quite familiar with both types of speech and can use either as occasion demands." I return to this point below.

Table 2.2 illustrates a register of gender indexicals in Lakhota, whose formal repertoires are rather different. In this case the metapragmatic typifications offered by native speakers are highly comparable to the Koasati case (viz., "male" vs. "female" speech); but the *object repertoires* of the register (the forms that are objects of native typification) involve contrasts of sentence-final clitics rather than contrasts of verb stem.

Table 2.1   Phonolexical registers of speaker gender in Koasati

Gloss	A	B	Phonological alternations
(a) Repertoire contrasts			
1 'I lifted it'	lakawwilí	lakawwilí	—
2 'you are lifting it'	lakáwč	lakáwč	—
3 'he will lift it'	lakawwā̆ˇ	lakawwáˇs	-ā̆ˇ ~ -áˇs
4 'I am lifting it'	lakawwı̆l	lakawwı̆s	-ı̆l ~ -ı̆s
5 'don't lift it'	lakawčı̂n	lakawčı̂ˇs	-ı̂n ~ -ı̂ˇs
6 'he is lifting it'	lakáw	lakáws	-áw ~ -áws
	↓	↓	
(b) Metapragmatic stereotypes	"female"	"male"	

(*Source*: Haas 1964)

Table 2.2   Lexical registers of speaker gender in Lakhota

Illocutionary force	A	B
(a) Repertoire contrasts		
Formal questions	hųwe	hųwo
Command	ye	yo
Familiar command	nitʰo	yetʰo
Opinion/emphasis	yele, ye	yelo
Emphatic statement	kʃto	kʃt
Entreaty	na	ye
Surprise/opinion	yemą	yewą
	↓	↓
(b) Metapragmatic stereotypes	"female"	"male"

(*Source*: Trechter 1995)

In both cases – indeed, in all cases of the enregisterment of gender – the unity of the phenomenon derives not from a particular feature of grammatical structure but from a model of expected or appropriate conduct; and, in all cases, actual behavior may or may not conform to the model. But how is behavior that is contrary-to-stereotype construed by interlocutors?

Whereas folk models of language use typically link isolable pieces of language to variables of context, the actual use of a register's forms – its textual implementation – connects tokens of the register to other cooccurring signs by relations of contiguity or copresence; such surrounding material, both linguistic and non-linguistic in expression, forms a semiotic co-text that is itself construable. The construal of contrary-to-stereotype usage is mediated by features of co-text. The most transparently intelligible case of men uttering women's speech (or vice versa) occurs when the register is framed co-textually by a reported speech construction. Such constructions denotationally distinguish the utterer from the character reported, thus allowing men to utter women's speech, and vice versa, without taking on the characterological attributes of the other gender: "Thus if a man is telling a tale he will use women's forms when quoting a female character; similarly, if a woman is telling a tale she will use men's forms when quoting a male character" (Haas 1964: 229–30).

There are cases, however, of much more implicit framing by co-textual signs that give contrary-to-stereotype behavior a tropic significance; here the co-textual frame of the register token allows the usage to be construed as implying a metaphoric persona for the speaker. In the following Lakhota case, the utterance is produced by a man who unexpectedly sees his two-year-old nephew at his house one evening. The man uses male speech in the initial exclamation of surprise but switches to female speech in the segment in which he calls out to the child:

(1) Gender tropes in Lakhota (Trechter 1995: 10)

wąlewą	hiyu	wele:	'Look who's come!'
male: interjection: surprise	he: came	female: assertion	

The man's use of female speech is tantamount to an interactional trope, the performance of an affective, caring persona stereotypically associated with women speaking to young children. The usage is partly inappropriate (i.e., inappropriate to stereotypes of male speech) but construable in co-textual terms as conveying warmth, affection, and care toward the child. The construal of the utterance as a meaningful trope by someone – as involving speaker's warmth, affection, or other maternal qualities, for example – requires more than knowing facts of cultural enregisterment (viz., that *wele* is a female form); it requires access also to features of a participation framework (viz., that a man was speaking to a two-year-old; that the little child has turned up unexpectedly) that are readable from the semiotic co-text of utterance at the moment of speaking. Under such conditions, the usage, though contrary-to-stereotype along the dimension of speaker indexicality, is both meaningful and effective vis-à-vis its interactional frame.

6.2   Professional registers

Many register contrasts are stereotypically associated with forms of professional conduct, such as the law, medicine, and so on. Although the official rationale for the use of the register may have little to do with the performance of particular roles and relationships, the mere fact of register differentiation in language – that distinct registers are associated with distinct practices – generates paradigms of social identity linked to speech forms. Hence for audiences familiar with the register a competent display of its forms makes palpable a recognizable persona of the speaker and a typifiable mode of interpersonal engagement with interlocutors.

A classic early study of such a case is Ferguson's 1983 account of "sports announcer talk," a variety of speech used by sportscasters in radio and television broadcasts. The commercially routinized use of the variety involves a particular kind of electronically mediated setting in which the sportscaster has direct visual access to a sporting event, which unfolds concurrently with the broadcast, and the audience is a large, spatially distributed collectivity that may number in the millions. The dissemination of sports talk through the electronic media is a form of institutional replication that can expand awareness of the register as well. An avid sports fan has more than a passing acquaintance with this variety of talk. Moreover, anyone who is acquainted with the register – not necessarily a sportscaster – can employ the register in acts of strategic manipulation of roles and identities in a variety of ways.

The following illustrates the use of the register by two eight- and nine-year-old boys who employ sports announcer talk as a way of reframing their own game-playing activities. During the course of games like ping-pong and basketball the boys switch to the register of sports announcer talk in a spontaneous manner. In the excerpt the two boys, Ben and Josh, indexically depersonalize their current play activity by using last names in describing each other's actions; they also employ many of the devices noted in table 2.3 to inhabit the persona and mantle of a sports announcer. In this turn-by-turn engagement the players use the register competitively, as part of "the game."

(2) Tropes of speaker identity or persona in English (Hoyle 1993)

Josh: So eleven eight, Hoyle's lead.
        Hoyle serves it!

Ben Green cannot get it ... over the net
and it's twelve eight Hoyle's lead now.
Ben: Hoyle takes the lead by four.
Josh: [fast] Green serving.
        [fast] Hoyle returns it.
        THEY'RE HITTING IT BACK AND FORTH!
Ben: Ach-boo:m!
Josh: And Ben Green hits it over the table!
        And it i:s thirteen eight.
        Hoyle's lead.

Table 2.3   Some features of 'sports announcer talk'

- Omission of sentence-initial deictics (e.g., anaphors, determiners) and present-tense copula:
  e.g., *[It's a] pitch to uh Winfield* *[It's a] strike. [It's] one and one*
- Preposed location and motion predicates:
  e.g., *Over at third is Murphy. Coming left again is Diamond*
- Preponderance of result expressions:
  e.g., *He throws for the out.*
- Epithets and heavy modifiers:
  e.g., *left-handed throwing Steve Howe ...; Larry Milburn, 3 for 4 yesterday, did not face ...*
- Use of the simple present to describe contemporaneous activities:
  e.g., *Burt ready, comes to Winfield and it's lined to left but Baker's there and backhands a sinker then throws it to Lopez*

(*Source:* Ferguson 1983)

In the stretches of talk where the sports announcer register is used there is clearly a second-order game going on – quite distinct from the ping-pong itself! – a game which is played entirely through talk, and whose object is to control representations of the first-order game in a persona more authoritative than the boys' own. When problems arise within the ping-pong game itself (e.g., scorekeeping disputes, arguments about the rules, external events that interfere with the game) the boys switch back to everyday speech, thus abandoning the sportscaster persona in favor of the now more pressing concerns of the first-order game (see Hoyle 1993 for further details). Hence the switching back and forth between sportscasting and everyday registers corresponds to a switching between imaginary and real identities keyed to specific interpersonal ends within this complex bout of "play."

7   FRAGMENTARY CIRCULATION

The young boys who employ the register of sports announcer talk in the above example do not do so consistently or with a full command of its niceties. Indeed the fragmentary nature of their usage – particularly the switching back and forth between everyday and sportscasting registers – constitutes the particular kind of multi-leveled play in which these two individuals are engaged. Yet when registers are used in a fragmentary way in public sphere discourses such fragmentary usage can have broader sociological consequences too.

When a register that is regularly employed in one social practice is deployed in a partial or fragmentary way in another, such a usage may confer some legitimacy – a peppering of prestige – upon its speaker/author, particularly when the target audience is unfamiliar with authentic uses of the source register. The use of statistics by insurance salesmen, or of terms from psychology in popular "self help" books, has something of this character. But such fragmentary use may also have consequences for the competence of the hearer or reader. Thus watching courtroom dramas or war movies on television does equip the audience with a smattering of legal and military terminology – enough perhaps to recognize some terms and expressions, to engage in language play and jokes – though not usually enough to write a legal brief or, thankfully, to mount a military campaign.

Systematic access to register distinctions requires much more careful methods. The data of military terminology in table 2.4 were gathered through a study of military documents (Lutz 1990). How was the analyst able to find the corpus? By employing native metapragmatic classifications, including terms for speech varieties and their users, as a set of directions for finding published samples of military discourse – Pentagon manuals, defense department contracts, course catalogs at military academies, and the like – where elaborate uses of this written register occur. For most English speakers only a fragmentary exposure occurs – mostly through forms of popular media, fiction, and the like – that may acquaint ordinary speakers with the existence of the register, and even a passing familiarity with some of its forms; e.g., *surgical strike* and *collateral damage* are now widely known, especially given media coverage of recent wars. Yet most of the forms in table 2.4 are unfamiliar and perhaps ludicrous to the Standard ear.

Hence even to speak of "competence" in a register requires a distinction between *types* of competence. I said earlier that no speaker of a language fully commands more than a few of its registers; we may now observe that most speakers of a language are aware of the existence of many more registers than they fully command, that is, they can passively recognize a much larger range of registers than they can actively (fluently) employ in their own speech. Hence, for many registers, the *competence to recognize* the register's forms has a wider social distribution (i.e., is an ability possessed by many more persons) than *the competence to use* its forms. Such asymmetries of competence may even function as principles of value maintenance under certain

Table 2.4   American military register

Pentagon lexicon ("Militarese")	Standard English
aerodynamic personnel decelerator	parachute
frame-supported tension structure	tent
personal preservation flotation device	life jacket
interlocking slide fastener	zipper
wood interdental stimulator	toothpick
vertically deployed anti-personnel device	bomb
portable handheld communications inscriber	pencil
pre-dawn vertical insertion	a night-time parachute drop
manually powered fastener-driving impact device	hammer

(*Source:* Lutz 1990)

conditions. In the case of certain prestige registers (e.g., forms of upper-caste/class speech) the register is widely recognized in society, but spoken fluently by very few persons. The fact that it is positively valued by a group larger than its fluent speakers may create conditions where the register, now a scarce good, becomes a sought-after commodity – even one that can be purchased for a price, through schooling, elocution lessons, and the like (Honey 1989).

8   REFLEXIVE PROCESSES: STATIC VERSUS DYNAMIC MODELS

In a review of the early literature on registers Douglas Biber observes that "most register studies have been atheoretical" (1994: 36), tending to employ static taxonomic and descriptive schemes rather than principled definitions. Recent work has focused more on reflexive semiotic processes and institutions (Silverstein 1996; Agha 1998, 2002; Irvine and Gal 2000) through which register distinctions are effectively maintained and transformed in social life. Let me now comment on the way in which the reflexive approach to registers advocated here improves upon and moves beyond the limitations of earlier, more static approaches.

The term "register" was first coined by T. B. W. Reid in the course of a discussion of functionally significant differences in language use. Reid proposed that differences of utterance-form involve differences of "register" whenever distinct forms are viewed as appropriate to "different social situations" by users (Reid 1956). Although the intention behind the definition was to illuminate forms of action – e.g., Reid speaks of "systems of linguistic activity" as his larger space of concern – Reid's formulation remained incomplete in several respects: it lacked a theory of how speech was linked to "social situations" in the first place, how such links were identified by the analyst, and how register use could meaningfully extend beyond the special case of "appropriate use." I have observed above that the link between speech and situation involves a metapragmatic model of action (section 2); that its recovery by analysts is based on the study of socially situated evaluative data (3); and that the significance of utterances is inevitably a matter of patterns of entextualization, some among which trope upon the model itself (6).

Some of the early difficulties – particularly anxieties about "the discreteness of registers and the validity of register boundaries" (Ferguson 1982: 55) – derive from Reid's choice of terminology itself. The term "register" is a pluralizable count noun of English that formulates a suggestion about the social phenomenon that it denotes – a default Whorfian projection, or implication about denotatum (see Silverstein 1979; Lee 1997) – that is fraught with difficulties: the pluralizability of the term implies that register-s are collections of objects – like button-s and pebble-s – that can be identified and enumerated in an unproblematic way. Yet unlike collections of pebbles the registers of a language have a differentiable existence only in so far as – and as long as – they are treated by language users as functionally recognized partitions within the total inventory of its expressive means. The countable-and-pluralizable view of registers has other misleading implications, for example, that each register is a closed set of forms, that each member of the set is endowed with "inherent" pragmatic values, and so on.

Now every register does involve a repertoire of forms. But the boundaries of the register depend on the social-semiotic processes described earlier. A register exists as a bounded object only to a degree set by sociohistorical processes of *enregisterment*, processes by which the forms and values of a register become differentiable from the rest of the language (i.e., recognizable as distinct, linked to typifiable social personae or practices) for a given population of speakers. From the processual perspective sketched above it should be clear that worries about the discreteness of register boundaries are fruitless and misplaced since there exist in every society social-semiotic processes through which various kinds of boundaries and limits associated with registers can be reset in regular ways. Relative to such processes, every register exhibits various kinds of growth and decline, expansion or narrowing, change or stabilization. Three dimensions of register change are particularly noteworthy, as indicated in table 2.5.

The repertoire characteristics of a register, dimension A, include features such as repertoire size, grammatical range, and semiotic range (see section 10). As registers become centered in formal metadiscursive institutions – such as national academies, schooling, traditions of lexicography, the work of corporations – the repertoire of the register may grow over time, such elaboration resulting in part from processes of institutional codification.

Changes in pragmatic value, dimension B, are cases where the stereotypic effects of usage undergo a degree of functional reanalysis and change. When Standard Languages arise out of regional dialects – such as Parisian French or London English, to take familiar European cases – the derived national Standard no longer effectively marks speaker's locale but comes to index the non-specificity of speaker's place of origin. In most societies, and for the majority of speakers, regional dialects are acquired first through socialization in the family, and the national Standard acquired later through formal institutions such as schooling. Hence competence in the Standard language commonly becomes emblematic of additional attributes, such as speaker's class or level of education; such attributes sometimes function as status entitlements – facilitating access, for example, to select social circles, higher-wage employment, upper echelons of government service, and other privileges (see Honey

Table 2.5   Some dimensions of register organization and change

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A. Repertoire characteristics
- Repertoire size: number of forms
- Grammatical range: number of form-classes in which register forms occur
- Semiotic range: types of linguistic and non-linguistic signs associated with the register's use (lexical, prosodic, kinesic)

B. Range of pragmatic values
- Stereotypes of user, usage, setting of use
- Positive or negative values associated with the register

C. Social domain(s) of the register
- Categories of persons that can recognize (at least some of) the register's forms
- Categories of persons fully competent in the use of the register

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1989) – that are less accessible to those speaking non-Standard varieties of the language.

These changes are often linked to changes in the social domain of the register, namely dimension C in table 2.5. Formal institutions often play an official role in expanding competence over prestige registers of a language – through programs that expand literacy, primary education, or specialized training for particular professions; however, other more informal and seemingly disinterested types of institutional mechanisms invariably play a role as well. Specific genres of public media (including entertainment genres) serve as carriers for many kinds of popular registers, serving to expand their social domains over particular populations. In the case of Anglo-American teenage slang, genres such as pop music, the movies, teen lifestyle magazines, and the like have, since the 1950s, made possible the creation of national teenage slangs which have forms that are common to youth populations in many different geographic locales (Hudson 1983).

Thus although dimensions such as A–C can in principle be characterized for any register, any such account is merely a sociohistorical snapshot of a phase of enregisterment of linguistic features for particular users. Changes along these dimensions are often linked to one another. Indeed, as the social domain of the register (C) changes – e.g., as in the social expansion of scientific registers of chemistry or medicine in recent times, or through the disappearance of once firmly institutionalized forms of discourse, such as alchemy – both the repertoires and the stereotypic effects of their use are inevitably transformed.

9 SOCIOLOGICAL FRACTIONATION

The above considerations should make clear that registers are social formations, but not necessarily *sociologically homogenous* formations. To say that they are social formations is to observe that metapragmatic stereotypes of speech that are criterial in the identification of registers *have a social domain*, that is, are replicable across some population of evaluators. But register stereotypes rarely have a maximal distribution (i.e., are rarely invariant for *all* speakers of the language). In many of the most interesting cases competing models of aspects of a register coexist within the same society, each potentially ideological or distorting from the perspective of the other.

The simplest type of such case is when two different stereotypes associated with the same form have different social domains. In the case of honorific registers, for instance, it is commonly observed that two speakers will identify the same form as honorific but will specify different conditions for its appropriate use. Now, both kind of evaluations – that a form "is honorific" and that it "is used under such-and-such conditions" – are metapragmatic typifications of the form's pragmatic values. The point at issue now is that both may be socially regular – may function as stereotypes – but for *different* social domains of evaluators.

Let us consider an example. Speakers of French readily agree that the second-person pronoun *vous* is polite in pragmatic effect (and that *tu* is not specifically polite); this, then, is a metapragmatic stereotype about the lexeme *vous*, one having a wide social domain. The persons who assent to the lexeme stereotype can be divided into sub-groups with respect to various standards of appropriate usage. Janet Mor-

ford shows that a particular pattern of *vous* usage – "having your children say *vous* to you" – is held to be unacceptable by lower-class speakers; it is described as snobbish, a way of putting on airs (Morford 1997). In contrast, upper-class speakers view this way of usage as a sign of the family's refinement and class position. In this case, pattern of usage as a sign of the family's refinement and class position. In this case, stereotypes of lexeme value are the same for the two groups: both agree that the stereotypes *vous* is polite. But stereotypes of appropriate use by children diverge by social lexeme *vous* is polite. But stereotypes of appropriate use by children diverge by social class; these differences are reanalyzed as emblems of contrastive family status.

Such a reanalysis of variation-in-use into emblems of group status frequently reveals something of the larger social processes that connect groups to each other. The case of Egyptian Arabic, as reported by Alrabaa (1985), is particularly instructive in this regard. Alrabaa's study is a questionnaire-based investigation of stereotypes of use associated with the informal and solidary pronouns *inta / inti* 'you (m./f.)' and the more formal pronouns *ḥaḍritak/ḥaḍritik* 'you (m./f.); polite'. At the level of stereotypes of speaker persona, upper-class and lower-class youths offer different models of usage that are, moreover, mirror images of each other. Upper-class youths claim to use the solidary/informal forms, which they believe lower-class speakers to use; and lower-class speakers lay claim to more polite/formal lexemes, which they perceive as upper/middle-class usage. A comparison of stereotypes of self and other usage thus reveals that each social group ideologically formulates a self-positioning modeled on perceptions of the other. Upper-class youths are motivated by an ideology of egalitarianism to adopt what they perceive as "the system of 'the people' (*al-sha'b*)." Lower-class users are motivated by a more stratificational ideology, an emulation of "what they presume to be the middle-class values" (Alrabaa 1985: 649).

A particularly important source of such folk stereotypes in modern societies is the circulation of representations of speech and speakers in genres of public sphere discourses, including the mass media. Alrabaa gives us a glimpse of the processes relevant to the Egyptian case: "In off-the-record comments during our interviews, both older and younger upper-class informants did often express a conviction that lower-class informants would be 'looser,' less formal, etc. This upper-class belief is also reflected in many movies and television comedies, which frequently present a stereotype of the bawdy, raucous lower-class character who addresses all listeners as *inta / inti* = [German] *Du*, [French] *tu*" (p. 648).

An awareness of the fact that stereotypes of usage differ society-internally often motivates tropes of identity that play upon such stereotypes. Thus in the French case

Table 2.6 Egyptian Arabic: positional stereotypes of self and other

	Group₁: Upper-class youths	Group₂: Lower-class youths
Stereotype of self-report	claim to use solidary *inta/inti* forms	claim greater use of the formal *ḥaḍritak/ḥaḍritik* pronouns
Stereotype of others' usage	say that lower-class speakers use the *inta/inti* forms	say that upper/middle-class speakers use the *ḥaḍritak/ḥaḍritik* forms
Ideological positioning	egalitarian (self-lowering)	stratificational (self-raising)

(*Source*: Alrabaa 1985)

above – where the pattern of interactional text "using *vous* for one's parents" is stereotypically viewed as an emblem of upper-class families – Morford reports the case of an upper-class individual who, when seeking to enter politics, asked his children to switch from *vous* to *tu* in addressing him in public; the goal here is strategic, an effort to perform a more demotic image of his own class origins in the electoral process (Morford 1997).

A parallel case – now involving age and generation, rather than class – is reported in Swedish by Paulston (1976). In the period in which the study was conducted (*ca.* 1970), the use of the polite pronoun *ni* was already undergoing reanalysis and replacement by the use of informal *du* in many social situations. In address among strangers, the use of *ni* still remained the norm for older, upper-class speakers; the use of *du* in this setting was expanding but associated largely with younger speakers. Awareness of the stereotype allowed a range of interactional tropes, such as the following: "Even some 70-year-old upper-class ladies find it agreeable to be addressed as *du* in the street; they say it makes them feel younger" (1976: 367). The capacity of the usage to make someone "feel younger" is a direct consequence of the existence of a culture-internal stereotype associating *du* usage with young people. The stereotype provides a framework for evaluating the unexpected usage and yields the trope of perceived identity as a performed effect.

10 SEMIOTIC RANGE

My final remarks concern the semiotic range – the range of semiotic devices that exist as elements – of a register's repertoires. Linguists have long been interested in the linguistic signs that belong to a register's repertoires. Yet since registers involve cultural models of speech pragmatics (e.g., that a particular speech repertoire is appropriate to a type of conduct) such models are easily extended to accompanying non-linguistic signs. Hence a register's linguistic repertoires often comprise only a part of its semiotic range, the range of devices deployed routinely and appropriately in its use.

Registers of oral discourse differ from written registers in the kind of semiotic range possible. In written registers of scientific prose, for example, various forms of non-linguistic (pictorial, diagrammatic) display cooccur with the use of specialized terminologies, a feature of scientific discourse that influences its lexico-syntactic conventions as well. A variety of non-linguistic devices – photographs, typography, specialized uses of color, serial arrangement, other visual signs – cooccur routinely with distinctive linguistic repertoires in many other written registers, such as those of commercial advertisement (Toolan 1988), "compressed English" (Sinclair 1988), newspaper headlines (Carter 1988), invoices and service contracts (Bex 1996), and others.

The semiotic range of *spoken* registers is typically linked to the kinds of displays that are possible in face-to-face interaction. In the case of registers of honorific speech (Agha 2002) the utterance of honorific expressions in many languages is felt to be most appropriate when accompanied by particular forms of physical and material display, such as prosodic and kinesic activity, bodily comportment, dress, artifactual display, seating arrangement, order of rising and sitting down, and the like

(Duranti 1992). Part of the reason that stereotypes of use (including norms of appropriate use) that are associated with linguistic signs are often extended to non-linguistic signs is that metapragmatic terms used by language users to formulate specifically metalinguistic accounts may also be used to formulate more broadly metasemiotic accounts. Thus when we look across languages we find that terms such as "politeness," "refinement," or "respectability" are often used to articulate and prescribe norms of utterance; but these terms are used for non-linguistic activities as well, such as lowering the head, bowing, putting palms together, dressing appropriately, and so on. For example, the Thai term *mâi suphâap* 'impolite' is predicable of utterances and kinesic activity but also of physical objects: "casual sandals and revealing or immodest women's clothes … are called *mâi suphâap* 'impolite' and symbolize a lack of concern and respect for authority" (Simpson 1997: 42).

Such classifications generate likenesses between otherwise disparate signs – clothing, gesture, speech, etc. – by linking all of them to norms of politeness. All of these signs can, moreover, cooccur with each other in social interaction. The fact that sign repertoires in different channels receive a unified (or at least overlapping) metasemiotic treatment has the consequence that certain kinds of socially valued language are felt to be used most felicitously and appropriately when accompanied by certain kinds of non-linguistic displays. Consider the following example from Javanese:

> A complicated etiquette dictates the way a person sits, stands, directs his eyes, holds his hands, points, greets people, laughs, walks, dresses, and so on. There is a close association between the rigor with which the etiquette of movement is observed and the degree of refinement in speech. The more polite a person's language, the more elaborate are his other behavioral patterns; the more informal his speech, the more relaxed and simplified his gestures. (Poedjosoedarmo 1968: 54)

Cases of this kind involve a type of *cross-modal iconism* whereby forms of polite speech are treated as resembling signs of other kinds – paralanguage, gesture, body comportment, artifactual accompaniment – in interpersonal significance. Such likenesses do not exist naturally or inertly, of course; they are actively motivated by metasemiotic discourses and practices of various kinds.

In the Javanese case the ethnometapragmatic terms *alus* 'refined, polite' and *kasar* 'coarse' are central to such norms of deference and demeanor. The term *kasar* 'coarse' is used to describe semiotic behaviors of many kinds, including a register of lexemes (table 2.7) and one involving prosodic patterns (table 2.8).

The forms of the *kasar* lexical register are grasped by native speakers in terms of highly negative stereotypes of use and user: "*Kasar* words are always considered vulgar. They are not usually used by the upper class. Even lower class people usually use them only in anger" (1968: 64). The contrasts are therefore conceptualized – particularly by upper-class persons – as differentiating a system of speaker-focal demeanor indexicals, i.e., as forms that make palpable characterological attributes of speaker. The term *kasar* is also associated with prosodic contrasts that index similar speaker attributes (see table 2.8); specific values of a range of prosodic features, including speech tempo, volume, and dynamic range, are treated as instances of

Table 2.7   Javanese *kasar* 'coarse' vocabularies

	Gloss	Ngoko 'ordinary'	Kasar 'coarse'
Nouns:	eye	*mripat*	*mata*
	mouth	*tjangkem*	*tjatjat*
	stomach	*weteng*	*wadhoq*
Adjectives:	dead	*mati*	*modar*
	pregnant	*meteng*	*mblendheng, busong*
	stupid	*bodho*	*gablag*
Verbs:	eat	*mangan*	*mbadhag*
	copulate	*saresmi*	*laki*

(*Source*: Poedjosoedarmo 1968)

Table 2.8   Javanese *kasar* 'coarse' prosody

	Alus 'refined'	Kasar 'coarse'
Tempo:	slower	more rapid
Volume:	softer	louder
Dynamic range:	more monotonous intonation	greater extremes of intonation

(*Source*: Poedjosoedarmo 1968: 55)

kasar 'coarse' behavior, and gradiently opposed values along each dimension of contrast as *alus* 'refined'.

Hence from the standpoint of this cultural scheme *kasar* 'crude, coarse' demeanor is exhibited by *both* lexemes (table 2.7) and prosodic patterns (table 2.8). The term *kasar* is now a metasemiotic construct used to typify otherwise disparate phenomenal behaviors. Such behaviors are now likened to each other – grouped together – under a metasemiotic classification, one which brings diverse object-signs, such as prosodic and lexical forms, under characterological rubrics, such as coarseness, that are indirectly associated with caste and class distinctions (see also Irvine 1990).

11   CONCLUSION

I have been arguing that the phenomenon of register inevitably involves models of enactable behavior linked to performable signs of various kinds. Although my main concern has been with registers of language I have argued that such models are easily extendable to non-linguistic signs by the same general processes through which they come to be linked to language in the first place. Whether the object-signs are linguistic or non-linguistic, or both, the metasemiotic processes through which awareness of register classifications is formulated and disseminated invariably involve language use as part of the total process.

I have observed also that registers are historically changing systems that are shaped by processes linking groups to each other in social space. In some cases the social

domain of persons acquainted with the register is tightly delimited by institutional processes; other registers have a more amorphous social distribution. Thus to understand the social existence of a register requires some clarity not only about the metapragmatic models that typify its forms and values but an understanding also of the social processes through which such models are institutionally disseminated across social populations.

Finally, the actual use of a register may fully conform to the metapragmatic model associated with its repertoires (e.g., when a legal register is used appropriately within a court of law) or it may not. In the latter case a range of tropes of personhood, enacted conduct, relationship to interlocutor, and the like, are mediated by the model itself and can be played upon – even manipulated – through contextualization by accompanying signs. This type of flexibility in use is one of the most interesting features of register systems and hence a point that I have illustrated with numerous examples in the discussion above.

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