

# HONORIFICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of linguistic categories in establishing and maintaining social relationships and, thus, in maintaining and renewing patterns of culture and society is of fundamental interest to anthropologically oriented studies of language. Within this broad area of concern, the last two or three decades have seen especially detailed studies of the linguistic means of marking relationships of honorification—relationships involving social status, respect, or deference between communicative interactants. The subject matter has been approached from a number of different perspectives. It is generally agreed, for example, that a logical precondition on the occurrence of honorific phenomena is the existence of intersubjectively shared codes of behavior available to interactants as such. Yet the way in which such codes are best described, the way in which they are invoked or appealed to by interactants, the extent to which they are susceptible to strategic manipulation, and their place within the larger nexus of preconditions on discursive interaction—as an order of meaningful activity—are matters of some dispute and debate. Indeed, the literature here reviewed is characterized not only by a substantial variability in research goals and agendas but also by a range of methods used to formulate and test empirical generalizations.

This review covers studies of honorific phenomena of several types, including honorific pronouns and terms of address, politeness in language use, and honorific registers. From the point of view of their capacity to mark honorific

relationships, honorific registers are considerably more elaborate than the others, since they consist of rich repertoires of honorific items that may be used concurrently in utterances to mark deference to a variety of individuals, and sometimes to a number of individuals at the same time. For a discussion of issues related to the ones discussed here, the reader may find it useful to consult two other reviews that have appeared previously (109, 154) and one that appears in this volume (220).

## PRONOUNS AND ADDRESS FORMS

All human languages contain a repertoire of relatively localizable devices—pronouns, nouns, or noun phrases—the very use of which in designating, addressing, or referring to individuals has immediate consequences for the social evaluation of respect or deference to the individual thus picked out. A large literature on honorification by the use of pronouns and address forms is now available, including a number of studies of particular languages (5, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 22, 26, 30–32, 42, 43, 46, 59, 60, 94, 114–116, 119, 122, 133, 134, 138, 146, 158–160, 175, 176, 188, 190, 194, 198–200, 204, 205), as well as fairly comprehensive bibliographies of other related work (23, 164, 170, 171, 179).

The most influential single framework for the study of pronominal honorification in the literature is Brown & Gilman's (27) power-and-solidarity model of pronominal usage. Brown & Gilman's theory evaluates the historical developments in usage of the familiar two-way pronominal contrast in European languages—i.e. the T form (e.g. French *tu*, Russian *ty*, German *du*) and the V form (e.g. French *vous*, Russian *vy*, German *Sie*)—in terms of two universal and logically linked functional (or “semantic”) dimensions termed power and solidarity, applicable to all interactional dyads. Power is an inherently asymmetric relation, the ability of one individual “to control the behavior of the other” (p. 255), signaled by nonreciprocal usage of pronoun forms; solidarity is an inherently symmetric relation, based on the likeness of both individuals by membership in the same social group, such as family, religion, school, or profession (p. 258), resulting in reciprocal usage. Brown & Gilman argue that although the solidarity semantic was once applied in European societies only when the power semantic was undecidable or irrelevant, it has prevailed over the power semantic in modern societies due to changes in “social attitude”—such as the spread of egalitarianism.

Subsequent research has called into question at least three critical assumptions underlying Brown & Gilman's theory: 1. that pronoun choice primarily reflects macrosociological relationships; 2. that social ideologies influence usage uniformly across society, independently of differences in the positional

identity of speakers; and 3. that linguistic change is a dependent order of phenomena caused by independent changes in social mind.

Wales (208), for example, questions the validity of any direct, unmediated linkage between social ideology and linguistic patterns (see also 3, 136, 157), arguing that many mutually opposed ideologies about interpersonal relations have continued to exist in England but are simply not reflected in pronouns of address. The argument from recent changes in social ideologies leaves unexplained the fact that in English texts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, pronoun choice exhibits considerable variability, sometimes within the same sentence. Wales argues that such pronominal shifts reflect interactional stances of individual interlocutors as well as macrosociological relationships between social dyads, thus arguing against the exclusive appeal to macrosociological factors as explanatory variables in historical change. Moreover, the generic notion of power, for example, leaves undifferentiated social variables such as rank, economic class, and social status (see also 84, 85, 189, 203, 217). Wales suggests that the spread of *you* over *thou* in English was not the result of any generalized victory of egalitarianism over a power semantic in the crucial period between 1540 and 1640. Social stratification had, if anything, intensified because of the seismic growth of London's population. The change was due partly, she suggests, to a heightened social awareness in the English middle class at the end of the sixteenth century; the middle class aspired "towards the habits of polite society" (208:119) whose speech they sought to emulate. Wales argues, moreover, that the spread of *you* over *thou* in English also involves a language-structural dynamic. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, *thou* appears to be the marked form; it also takes the overt verbal ending *-est*, while *you* does not; the disappearance of English verb endings in all but the third person singular may have constituted a language-structural force toward change, leading to the disfavoring of the *thou* V-*est* construction, and eventually of *thou*.

The argument that actual usage cannot be explained by macrosociological variables alone has been made most insightfully, perhaps, by Friedrich, in a detailed study of pronominal usage in nineteenth century Russian literary texts (63). Friedrich shows that the choice of pronoun forms in Russian is sensitive not only to macrosociological variables (e.g. age, generation, sex, kinship status, group membership, and relative authority), but also to speech event variables (e.g. topic, context, and affective relation between speaker and addressee). This suggests that the functional interpretation of honorific usage requires a more fine-grained analysis of social and interactional variables than Brown & Gilman's early study would suggest.

Ervin-Tripp (56) has shown that configurations of co-factors which determine pronominal choice in Friedrich's data (and in other, similar studies) cluster in certain patterned ways, describable as paths in a flowchart repre-

sensation. Building on these results, Silverstein (186) has argued that since there exist multiple such paths (or configurations of situational factors) leading to each of the two outputs, T and V, a token of either T or V is interpretable in any of several distinct ways. For example, the use of T can index that the addressee is a child, a kin of descending generation, a member of the same household, or some combination of these. The use of V can index that the interaction occurs in a status-marked setting (e.g. in a court), that the addressee is a kin of ascending generation, or older in age, etc, or some combination of these. Thus, no two tokens of T or V can necessarily be interpreted as alike. Consequently, even if an individual consistently uses T forms over an entire stretch of discourse, different tokens of T may reflect distinct configurations of situational variables at different points in the same discourse. Silverstein suggests that the data of honorific usage does not permit any kind of "social semantic" calculus at all. Rather, the norms of usage in some particular community indexically associate linguistic categories with multiple, alternative configurations of contextual factors that become apparent only in the T or V usage responding to the one at issue, confirming, as it were, or disconfirming its invoked social dimensions "in play." Any account of the contextual dimension of usage appears, then, to require a functional evaluation sensitive to: 1. the fact of the occurrence of T vs V; 2. the indexical values conventionally associated with these forms in particular speech communities; and 3. the real-time variation of symmetric vs asymmetric usage as it changes back and forth across interactional turns.

Other criticisms of Brown & Gilman's model have come from more detailed surveys of pronominal honorification in a number of languages (79, 117). In discussing a sample of some 80 Indo-European (IE) languages and dialects, Joseph (117) argues that explanations from notional-sociological and mentalist variables which treat linguistic change as a secondary, derivative phenomenon both simplify the historical facts of linguistic change and assume a greater cross-cultural provenance for the explanatory variables than the historical record suggests. Brown & Gilman argued, for example, that the use of plural V forms for a singular addressee in several IE languages can be traced back to the change in rulers from a single emperor to rule by joint emperors in the late Roman empire of the fourth century, thus leading to a change in the mental representation of grammatical person in many European societies. Joseph argues, however, that the languages in which such change has been noted were not united by any shared political contact of the sort required by the hypothesis. Joseph attributes the change to several factors, including the tendency or "slant" (a notion based on the Sapirean account of drift) across the IE family for languages to move from a synthetic to an analytic stage. As a result, the use of an independent subject pronoun becomes obligatory, rather than optional, leading to a greater prominence for number and person catego-

ries in utterances. Joseph argues that, in the context of this historical change, referentially less specific categories such as second person dual and plural forms (nonspecific because they additionally include nonaddressees within their referential domain) were extended in usage to mark deference to singular addressee by a figurative extension, the synecdoche of whole for part. Once such a form (whose literal meaning includes nonaddressee) is used deferentially for a single addressee, an analogous figurative extension occurs in many languages whereby third person pronouns (nonspecific because they refer to non-speech act participant) are used for deferential address to a speech-act participant (i.e. the addressee). Joseph argues that in every IE language where the latter extension occurs, the former extension co-exists with it, or has occurred in an earlier stage of the language.

Malsch (142) lists a number of shifts involving several noun phrase categories found in languages both within and outside the IE family, including 1. plural → singular and 2. third person → second, the latter having at least the following varieties: (a) deictic → second, (b) last name → second, (c) title and last name → second, and (d) kinterm → second (where → should be interpreted as “may be used isoreferentially in place of”). Malsch argues that models accounting for such shifts in terms of independently motivated metaphorical extensions fail to explain why such shifts sometimes occur conjointly in languages (142:412). Malsch prefers to interpret these shifts in terms of face-redressive strategies of impersonalization (cf 25), which mark “the unwillingness of the speaker to bind the addressee to the behavioral obligations of the interaction” (142:417). Although this explanation is appealing because of its greater simplicity, it is too powerful in another respect. As Joseph points out in great detail, such shifts operate conjointly only in some languages, and not in others. Explanations of such changes in terms of universal speaker strategies do not explain why speakers of all languages are not free to express such unwillingness by using all of these shifts in every historical period. It appears, therefore, that a modular account such as Joseph’s, which is based on several independent, interacting principles—markedness, semantic content, indexical focus, and historical drift—is necessary to account for the character of sociohistorical variability. Scherl (175) has proposed a similar account for the development of honorific pronouns in the Dravidian language, Tamil: “innovative forms initially arise as contextualizations of relatively unmarked forms in relatively marked positions, and then over time, enter into unmarked positions through processes of ‘analogy’” (175:2). Finally, Bogusławski’s insightful study of honorific address (22) is one of the few explicit discussions of the semantic and pragmatic criteria necessary to isolate the terms involved in such pronominal shifts.

## POLITENESS

A second type of approach to honorific behavior formulates the study of politeness in language use, in terms of culturally universal models of rational speaker strategy (see 21, 98, 99, 209, 213). Most work within this paradigm has held to an individualistic, speaker-centric perspective on discursive interaction, relative to which the existence of culturally *differing* norms—norms of behavior that are only differentially and asymmetrically locatable across socio-historical groups of speakers—is viewed either as a dependent social fact, explicable in terms of rational individual strategy, or as an independent variable exogenous to the model-theoretic explanation of behavioral regularities. Most theories of this type build on the Gricean notions of conversational maxims/principles (see 62, 76 for exceptions). Eschewing the phenomenal variability of actually observable cultural norms, these approaches appeal to abstract normative principles held to be universal logical preconditions on interaction as such. The rules and principles of politeness proposed in these terms are rational reconstructions of behavioral propensities that are consistent with the originally Kantian notion of “maxim” proposed by Grice himself, but differ in that they treat the Gricean maxims of conversation as a set of baseline regularities (observed by a homuncular rational agent) against which politeness behavior can be scaled as a kind of systematic deviation.

Lakoff (132), for example, proposed three rules of politeness of this type: (R1) “Don’t impose,” (R2) “Give options,” and (R3) “Make addressee feel good, be friendly.” Each of these rules, she argued, selects the use of distinctive types of politeness devices; inversely, insofar as speakers use such devices, they observe certain rules. Thus, in using passives and impersonal expressions, speakers observe R1 by marking a certain distance from the utterance or the addressee. Insofar as speakers use hedges and euphemisms they observe R2 (and sometimes, simultaneously, R1), giving the addressee more latitude in construal and response. And insofar as speakers give compliments, use T pronouns and affective particles, they are observing R3, building a greater sense of camaraderie with addressee. Gricean rules of conversation are a special sub-case of R1 in that efficient communication is viewed as involving inherent nonimposition on addressee. However, this analysis leaves unclear how R1-based politeness is differentiable from ordinary conversation in the Gricean sense, also belonging to the same R1 domain. Lakoff does propose two other overarching “rules of pragmatic competence”—“Be clear” and “Be polite”—perhaps for this purpose: the Gricean rules of conversation apply to the first meta-rule just as the rules of politeness apply to the second. Yet since “sometimes...clarity is politeness” (132:297), the argument provides no clear criteria for isolating “politeness” as an empirical phenomenon even in model-internal terms (cf 61).

A more elaborate theory involving "rule interaction" of this type is offered by Leech (135): Six interpersonal maxims for speakers to observe, at least five scales of tact (a special type of politeness, but only one such type, according to Leech), and four illocutionary functions are associated with politeness according to this account. But, as Fraser (61) notes, despite the elaborate architecture of rules, the theory remains "difficult to evaluate, since there is no way of knowing which maxims are to be applied, what scales are available, how they are formulated, what their dimensions are, when and to what degree they are relevant, and so forth" (61:227). Moreover, when the theory is applied to other languages, it appears to be inadequate unless a number of culture-specific norms are incorporated into the repertoire of maxims, as Gu demonstrates in his study of politeness in Chinese (71). For the case of Chinese, Gu adduces the self-denigration maxim (denigrate self and elevate others), the address maxim (address interlocutor with an appropriate address term), and the Balance Principle (if S is polite to H, H must be polite to S). But the necessity of these innovations suggests that "maxims" in Leech's sense merge with socio-historically distributed cultural norms, and are perhaps just as variegated and diverse.

Other work has pointed to additional problems with Lakoff's and Leech's notion of politeness. In a study of politeness in Hindi, Srivastava & Pandit (195) demonstrate the impossibility of directly identifying "politeness hierarchies" with grammatical constructional facts by appeal to conventional implicatures from grammatical categories alone, as Lakoff attempts to do. Whether or not a grammatical construction is considered "polite" by native speakers appears to depend on other factors as well, including 1. the particular social categories of the individuals recruited to the roles of speaker and addressee in the instance; 2. context- and co-text-dependent indexical-entailments of particular words and expressions in situated utterances; and 3. conventional social meanings of construction, as distinct from their conventional pragmatic implicatures.

Perhaps the most influential theory in this tradition is that of Brown & Levinson (25). Although this theory is far more attentive to sociocultural differences than were those of Lakoff and Leech, it programmatically rejects explanations of behavior in terms of cultural norms and conventions, attempting instead to motivate explanations in terms of certain rational capacities attributed to an idealized "model person." All competent members of society are said to be concerned universally with "face," a notion derived from the work of Goffman, though considerably simplified in the borrowing, as Werkhöfer (215:174–182) notes. The notion of face is bifurcated into negative face (the want to be unimpeded by others) and positive face (the want to have one's wants desired by others). Rather than assuming the inherent politeness/im-politeness of certain acts and stipulating a politeness principle, Brown &

Levinson assume instead that certain utterances are inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs), and they propose a taxonomy of possible strategies for performing such FTAs relative to a speaker's computation of the risk (to speaker, to hearer, or to both) of face-loss (surprisingly, they claim that *whose* face is at risk is not important). For a given FTA,  $x$ , any speaker,  $S$ , in addressing a hearer,  $H$ , can compute the weightiness,  $W_x$ , of the risk of face-loss, in terms of three variables [social distance ( $D$ ) and relative power ( $P$ ) of speaker/hearer (cf Brown & Gilman's solidarity and power), and the ranking of the impositions of FTA  $x$ ,  $R_x$ , in the culture] as the following linear sum:  $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$ . Relative to such a computation, the speaker can choose one of five strategies: 1. proceed with the FTA as "bald on record" (essentially, choosing to speak in accordance with Gricean maxims); or avoid such an inherently threatening posture by giving redress to  $H$  in terms of 2. positive politeness, or 3. negative politeness, or 4. by speaking "off record," or 5. by avoiding the FTA altogether. Relative to such a calculus of rational choice and available strategy, Brown & Levinson propose an analysis of a much wider range of utterance types than is offered by any other theorist working on politeness.

Several writers have found difficulties with this theory after evaluating it on internal grounds and subjecting it to empirical tests with different types of data (19, 20, 24, 33, 34, 57, 58, 61, 67, 71, 80, 86, 97, 100, 102, 103, 113, 120, 130, 144, 145, 172, 181, 191, 211, 212, 215, 218). There appear to be three major types of purely internal difficulties with the theory. One difficulty lies with Brown & Levinson's polemical stance regarding the exclusion of cultural norms from theoretical consideration. As Hymes (97) notes, the ranking of impositions ( $R$ ) in particular cultures is clearly a cultural-norm variable. Once introduced, however, the term disappears from actual explanations of politeness phenomena in Brown & Levinson's account, suggesting an awkward lack of fit between terminological apparatus, explicit polemic, and underlying explanatory power within the theory (97:76, 86; see also 19, 67). Some doubts have also been raised about the independence of  $R$  from  $P$  and  $D$  (61, 212), pointing to a deeper underlying problem.

The other two conceptual difficulties involve the term *strategy*. As Hymes points out, Brown & Levinson consider only individual utterances as data, largely ignoring the role of connected discourse structure as constitutive of interactant awareness of what is going on, and of the kinds of acts which might count as strategically relevant to the moment of action. Thus, the theory is really a theory of the politeness force of linguistic devices rather than a theory of strategies in any useful sense (97:78). The use of *strategy* is also problematic in psychological terms. To speak of strategic choice suggests a concern with real-time cognitive processes. But Brown & Levinson define the term as including both conscious and unconscious strategies (25:85) without being



troubled by the fact that the psychological commitments of the latter notion have never, in fact, been clarified. In their actual usage, moreover, the term is used only to describe a rational reconstruction of overt behavior; but here it is divorced from any attempt to model real-time process, a fact that has led to some confusion in the literature.

Several objections have emerged on empirical grounds as well. Some studies suggest that the foundational notions of the theory (e.g. face, nonimposition) are implicitly culture-bound notions lacking the kind of cross-cultural validity necessary for constructing a universal theory of politeness (71, 86, 100, 113, 144, 145, 181, 211, 212, 218). Matsumoto (144) has argued forcefully that the definition of face in Brown & Levinson's account tacitly incorporates certain modern European and American cultural notions that are simply inapplicable to Japanese culture. The notion of "negative face wants," in particular, defined as the desire of the individual to be unimpeded in his/her actions, does not appear to be central to Japanese politeness behavior. More important than this individualistic concern with the self's own territorial claims is the establishment of the self's position in relation to others, and the self's desire to be accepted by others by virtue of such appropriate positioning. Thus, it is not uncommon for direct, unmitigated requests (which inherently constitute an imposition on others, according to Brown & Levinson) to be construed not as impolite (as one would expect if "face" is foundational for politeness) but as polite and deferential. In Japanese society, it is interdependence, not independence, that is socially valued. Gu (71) has raised a similar objection in his discussion of Chinese notions of politeness. Under ordinary circumstances, offering, inviting, and promising are not viewed as threatening H's negative face or impeding H's freedom in Chinese society. Rather, such acts by S are considered inherently polite. Matsumoto and Gu both argue that politeness behavior cannot be reduced to instrumental considerations issuing from individualistic face wants alone. Politeness as a behavioral regularity in these cultures appears to derive its character from cultural norms that impose constraints on individuals according to their place in society (71:242). Others have attempted to formulate the role of such norms and conventions in polite discourse in terms of the notion of discernment (86, 100).

Another type of objection has come from Blum-Kulka's work on politeness and indirectness in Hebrew (19). Many politeness theories, including Brown & Levinson's, claim a direct relationship between the indirectness and the politeness of an utterance: the more indirect an utterance, the more polite it is assumed to be (e.g. 135:108). However, Blum-Kulka finds that although both Hebrew and English speakers rank hints as more indirect than explicit performatives, only English speakers judge hints to be more polite. Hebrew speakers judge hints to be less polite than performatives, even though they are judged to

be more indirect. Blum-Kulka accounts for these differences in terms of variations in cultural norms.

The relationship of variables such as power and distance to levels of politeness is not as straightforward as Brown & Levinson's theory suggests. To investigate the role of power in determining levels of politeness, Cherry (33) examines a written discourse corpus consisting of 22 letters written to the president of a university to protest the denial of tenure to a professor who is highly regarded by colleagues and students. The ranking of imposition and social distance are constant across the sample. Brown & Levinson's theory predicts higher levels of politeness with growing power differential. Cherry finds that whereas the associate professors in the sample do exhibit greater politeness than full professors do, assistant professors are actually less polite than associate professors, and graduate students even less so. Thus, increasing differences in power do not yield the monotonic increase in levels of politeness which the theory predicts.

## HONORIFIC REGISTER

Several studies have explored honorific registers in different languages in considerable empirical detail. The language-specific studies may be grouped as follows: Japanese (35, 38, 39, 41, 75, 81, 86, 90, 92, 100, 104, 105, 128, 129, 139, 141, 144, 145, 150–152, 155, 156, 168, 174, 177, 201, 206, 214, 217), Korean (93, 95, 161, 192, 193, 210), Japanese and Korean (84, 85, 143), Javanese (51–55, 66, 69, 166, 189, 202, 207, 219), African languages (106–108, 110, 111, 149, 169), Nahuatl (28, 87, 88, 118, 165), Persian (10–13, 89, 91, 123), Samoan (47–49, 148), Australian languages (8, 45, 74, 77, 78, 83), Lhasa Tibetan (1:95–98, 2, 44, 73), Ladakhi (125), Sundanese (4, 216), Madurese (197), Urdu-Hindi (112), Tongan (162), Mongolian (167), Thai (40, 127), Zuni (153), Uyghur (205), and Ponapean (65).

### *Early Studies*

Early studies led to two kinds of simplifications. First, a number of studies attempted "syntactic" analyses of the pragmatic phenomena at issue. Some studies sought to explain co-occurrence restrictions on honorific items in terms of selectional restrictions on lexemes (141, 168). But, as Loveday (139:50, 51) has argued, this approach fails to account for the flexibility of co-occurrence phenomena in honorific usage. An abstract performative-verb hypothesis (e.g. 173:42–43; 90:103–138) is similarly inadequate in generating the range of observed utterances (75:559, 560; 139:53–56). These frameworks correctly recognize that grammatical patterning is crucial in honorific speech but prove to be inadequate in motivating purely syntactic-semantic explanations for the radically context-dependent aspects of honorific discourse. Curious inconsis-

tencies between theory and practice occur. Although Harada (75) argues that honorific syntax is independent of politeness, his transformational analysis of honorification involves “syntactic” rules based on speech-event conditions on utterances, such as whether or not the referent of the subject noun phrase is “socially superior to speaker” (75:517, 518), thus confounding the methodological distinction between grammatical sentence and contextualized utterance in the transformational framework which he employs. Nor do such semantico-syntactic formulations of pragmatic phenomena as logical presupposition (cf 131) and conventional implicature adequately account for honorific phenomena: sentence presuppositions are defeasible in embedded clauses, but honorific presuppositions are not (139:52); the appeal to conventional implicature (25, 137) fails to account for the ubiquitous violation of conventional relationships in honorific discourse (139:59).

A second type of approach in early work described honorific registers as strictly status-based systems (66, 112, 148, 197, 216). Geertz (66), for example, attempted to link speech style narrowly to facts of social status in Javanese society. The proposal proved to be problematic in three important respects. First, Geertz incorrectly proposed that different arrays of respect forms are used exclusively by different social categories of speaker. Second, as Uhlenbeck points out, Geertz’s tabular representations of speech styles inaccurately suggest that “once the social relation between the speech partners is established and the choice of one of the five styles is made, one keeps to that speech style in further speech contact” (207:448). Third, Geertz relied too exclusively on elicited forms and native speaker reports about usage, and too little on the observed data of use itself, thus narrowly mirroring aspects of native speaker ideology about usage in his model of honorific use and function (183).

Brown & Levinson’s theory of honorifics (25) consists of four central claims: 1. The functional basis of honorific systems lies in the strategic use of honorifics “to soften FTAs” (p. 182), thus constituting the rational underpinnings of most, if not all, honorific systems. 2. Honorifics derive from frozen outputs of face-oriented politeness strategies (pp. 23, 179, 279). 3. These outputs are analyzable in terms of Gricean principles of conventional implicature (p. 23). 4. Interactionally, honorifics are “direct grammatical encodings of relative social status” between participants, or between participants and referents (p. 179). Note that the last claim unites the assumptions of the grammar-based and status-based theories discussed above.

Some authors have questioned the validity of the first two claims. The calculus of face does not appear to adequately explain honorific phenomena with sufficient generality, partly because the universality of Brown & Levinson’s conception of face has been questioned on the basis of cross-cultural data, and partly because honorific forms also occur in linguistic acts which do not involve face threats in any obvious way (145). Moreover, many of the

most interesting pragmatic effects in honorific discourse cannot be explained in terms of conventional implicatures—contra Brown & Levinson's third claim—especially the commonly observed creativity of honorific usage, both in violating conventional status differentials and in constituting new, sometimes fictive relationships (139:59–61, 145:213–215). Some studies have challenged the fourth central claim of the theory as well—the claim that honorific forms grammatically encode relative social status. These studies have uncovered a substantial amount of cross-linguistic data that suggest the absence of any direct, contextually and interactionally unmediated relationship between grammaticalized honorific form and pre-existing social status (2, 4, 11, 38, 49, 85).

Honorific usage appears to be independent of the notional rubric of politeness in a number of important respects. First, measures of politeness and measures of honorification appear to cross-cut each other. In comparing honorific phenomena in English, Japanese, and Korean, Hijirada & Sohn note that the same honorific expression may be polite in certain contexts, but impolite in others (85:367). Similarly, Hwang lists four Korean utterances that are, respectively, deferential and polite, deferential but impolite, nondeferential but polite, and nondeferential and impolite (95:48). Second, honorific forms belong to delimited repertoires in any language and are not open-ended in number and variety in the way Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies appear to be (100:227). Third, whereas politeness is understood inherently to be an aspect of speaker-addressee relationships, honorific systems mark deference to a number of role categories [e.g. addressee, referent, bystander (37)], and not always from the speaker's point of view (2, 4, 54). Finally, whereas politeness theories have attempted to conceptualize the pragmatic force of politeness in terms of the notion of degrees of deviation from a Gricean baseline of "ordinary" conversation, it seems clear that in languages which have elaborate honorific registers, there are no utterances which may be regarded as pragmatically neutral from a culture-internal perspective. Matsumoto (145) shows that even in the case of an innocuously information-bearing sentence like "Today is Saturday," *all* of the variant forms, when communicated, have a direct and unavoidable social consequentiality, so that none of the variants may be regarded as socially neutral. It appears that in languages containing elaborate register systems, virtually any act of speaking is evaluable for social consequentiality in a manner much more transparent to native speakers than in languages which lack such formations.

### *Social Indexicality*

A different approach to honorific phenomena may be found in Silverstein's broadly semiotic approach to the study of language structure and function (182–187). Building on earlier work by Peirce and Jakobson, Silverstein (182)

argues that an understanding of pragmatic phenomena—such as the use of honorifics—requires consideration of several interacting principles: 1. the classifiability of indexical properties of honorific devices in terms of their capacity to point to different aspects of the conditions of their production; 2. the lamination of such indexical properties with semantico-referential properties in the same stretch of utterance; 3. the degree of speaker awareness of different types of linguistic devices; and 4. the types of metapragmatic frameworks which regiment the pragmatics of speech use. I turn now to a discussion of each of these points and their implications for the study of honorifics.

First, indexical signs may be classified with respect to the relationships they contract with the very contextual variables which they index: if the sign at issue indexes some contextual variable which is independently known at the moment of semiosis, the index itself is relatively presupposing of (that aspect of) its context; on the other hand, if the indexical sign itself serves “to make explicit and overt the parameters of the structure of ongoing events” (182:34), the sign phenomenon may be said to be relatively entailing or creative or transformative of its context. The place of some honorific phenomenon on the continuum of indexical presupposition/entailment constitutes a measure of its rigidity/flexibility relative to its contextual surround.

Second, since indexical and semantico-referential properties may be laminated simultaneously in the same stretch of signal form, we would expect that certain types of differentiation along the dimension of social indexicality would be interpretable independently of any variation of semantico-referential content. This property of the total semiotic phenomenon constitutes the basis of the existence of the isoreferential speech levels—indexically differentiated ways of “saying the same thing”—that have been noted in many languages.

Third, Silverstein (185) argues that not all aspects of the semiotic phenomena at issue are equally accessible to native speakers’ awareness. In thinking about the consequences of their own speech practices, native speakers tend to be most acutely aware of referentially valued, continuously segmentable, and relatively localizable items in honorific repertoires. Thus, the cross-culturally robust notion that it is words and expressions which achieve the social effects of marking deference indicates only a partial grasp of the total semiotic fact.

The fourth point concerns the way in which indexical phenomena may be regularized (rendered rule-like, imbued with an indexical force which is constant across diverse interactional events). Silverstein argues that such constant capacity for indexical semiosis in pragmatic phenomena may be created by different types of frameworks of metapragmatic regimentation—frameworks which are metapragmatic to the extent that they regiment the very pragmatics of speech use. Such frameworks may be implicit in speech practices (e.g. the grammatical code, norms of usage in interaction), or explicitly articulated as

systems of conscious belief—matters of verbalizable ideology—about usage itself.

Since the same social-indexical phenomenon may be the object of more than one regimenting framework, we should expect—and do indeed find—interesting kinds of variance among these multiple modes of regimentation of interactional events within society (183, 185, 187). Such variance has critical implications for an understanding of the social character of honorific phenomena, particularly when the distribution of these metapragmatic frameworks is mapped onto characteristics of social aggregation or group formation within society. Both implicit norms of usage and explicitly articulated ideologies, for example, tend to be asymmetrically distributed across social divisions (e.g. clan, tribe, caste, class, lineage). The modes of dispersion of social ideologies, in particular, are influenced not only by the socially distributed character of loci of institutional legitimation, but also by the principles of recruitment of individuals to those social groups for which the ideologies in question have a constitutive role in defining group identity. There is, then, an agonistic character to the interplay of metapragmatic norms within society, leading sometimes to contest and sometimes to coercion (64, 87, 124, 126, 162, 163, 187).

The most detailed set of studies of honorific phenomena in a single language within this (or, indeed, any other unified) framework are Errington's studies of Javanese (51–54; see also 29 for a review of 54). Errington shows that speech-level differentiation in Javanese is organized around two different axes of honorification: a speaker-addressee axis, leading to a three-way differentiation of speech repertoires, termed *krama*, *madya*, and *ngoko* by natives (and listed here in descending order of deference); and a speaker-referent axis, leading to a two-way differentiation, termed *krama inggil* and *krama andhap*. Errington argues that a sign-based approach, sensitive to speaker's awareness of sign-value (in a cultural scheme of stratified value from *ngoko* to *krama andhap*), explains strategic choice as a dependent variable. Given that speakers differ with respect to their command of these repertoires, native ideology conceptualizes the speaker's ability to use higher speech levels toward a valued addressee in terms of an ethic of speaker refinement (*alus*) vs coarseness (*kasar*). Consequently, different social categories of speakers resort to different strategies: lower-class commoners attempt to speak in as high a speech-level as possible, thus attempting to "raise themselves up" by a relatively creative use of *alus* speech; however, this strategy often fails because their imperfect command of the *krama* variety yields many incorrect forms, somewhat scornfully termed *krama désa* by traditional nobles or *priyayi*. The *priyayi*, who consensually occupy the highest echelons of the Javanese social hierarchy, regard the highest level variety, *krama*, as their speech, regarding *madya* and below as out-group speech. Only for modern speakers does *madya*,

though still interstitial, become part of the single continuum of *ngoko-madya-krama*.

Thus, although all speakers vary the choice of repertoires by context, different social categories of speakers are neither capable of the same strategic choices, nor regard style shifting by others in the same way. Errington argues that notions of strategy—such as Brown & Levinson's—which are insensitive to the differential distribution and provenance of metapragmatic norms in a culture, and which neglect the point of view of socially positioned individuals in favor of claims about an abstract model person, fail to account for these critical aspects of the socially meaningful character of strategic choice (54:237–246).

Beeman's work on Modern Persian (10–13) confirms the outlines of the general picture that is here emerging. First, linguistic items may be said to possess a first-order capacity to index speaker's deferential relation to other social beings (e.g. as topic or addressee of an utterance). Second, such indexical categories are assimilated into an order of cultural normativity which unites speech behaviors across social groups, applying differently by speaker type (in the Iranian case, the norm of deference for high status individuals is one of *noblesse oblige*; for low-status individuals, a norm of duty; compare the Japanese example above). Third, the strategic use of honorifics by individuals involves the manipulation of such cultural schemes of stratified value through a manipulation of associated norms in what is now perceived as a second-order system of indexical valorizations—a scheme of *speaker stereotypes*.

Particularly interesting are the avoidance registers in Australian languages (8, 45, 77, 78, 83, 182). Silverstein (182) described the Dyirbal mother-in-law register as a relatively presupposing, nonreferential indexical formation: relatively presupposing because the use of this register is a fairly rigidly automatized consequence of the presence within earshot of a classificatory mother-in-law; nonreferential because the relevant social category of affine is a bystander-to rather than a referent-of the utterance at issue. Haviland (77, 78) shows that Guugu-Yimidhirr brother-in-law register is an indexical formation of a similar semiotic type. In traditional Guugu-Yimidhirr society, a man may never address his classificatory mother-in-law. When the mother-in-law is within earshot as bystander, a man may either remain silent or use brother-in-law language, which is used to address the wife's brothers (and sometimes the wife's father, with wife as intermediary). Although social norms rigidly prescribe such usage in the presence of a criterial affine, an individual may use the brother-in-law vocabulary in a creative or performative way in the presence of noncriterial affines: for example, in constituting a distant classificatory kinsman as closer and more worthy of deference by the use of brother-in-law speech alone.

## REGISTERS, SPEECH LEVELS, AND SOCIAL STEREOTYPES

Honorific devices may be classified into several distinct types which recur in a number of genetically unrelated languages. Pronouns and titles have already been discussed above. Within nominal repertoires, a number of languages also differentiate distinct honorific vs nonhonorific forms for inanimate nouns denoting parts of the human body, or objects which are possessions or appurtenances of honored persons (2, 49, 68, 148). Two types of referent-honorific verbs have been distinguished in the literature. The first type mark speaker's deference to the utterance topic—here used as a convenient label for “the referent of the verb's subject argument.” The second type marks the speaker's evaluation of a relationship of deference between the actor (or referent of agent noun phrase) and receiver of the action [or referent of dative or (promoted animate) accusative noun phrase], where the direction of the evaluated deference relationship is from actor to receiver. Addressee and bystander honorifics tend to be realized across a diverse range of grammatical devices as well. Moreover, many languages which employ such devices also employ a number of paralinguistic and kinesic devices, often used conjointly with them, and which are of critical importance in understanding the interactional use and functions of these forms.

The way in which such socially meaningful varieties of “saying the same thing” are united into some type of cohesive register formation seems to involve a number of factors (but see 82 for a discussion of certain inconsistencies in traditional usages of the term *register*). In the case of honorific registers, five aspects of honorific structure and use appear to be involved: 1. the types of honorific devices available; 2. the elaborateness of honorific repertoires; 3. the existence of systems of lexical conjugates which organize utterances by words and expressions into distinct speech levels; 4. differences, by social category of speaker, in the command of such repertoires and speech levels across society; and 5. the existence of native ideologies about honorific speech and of social stereotypes about types of speakers.

The simplest kinds of speech levels are defined by patterns of pronoun-verb agreement. Thus, crossed paradigms of honorific pronouns and honorific verb endings yield four degrees of respect in Uyghur (205) and five degrees in Maithili (188).

For languages with more elaborate honorific registers, speech level stratification is based on repertoire differentiation within a much wider range of grammatical classes, including noun and verb stems, adjectives and adverbs, and in some instances, case markers and adpositions. For these languages, pure speech levels are defined by cross-repertoire consistency in the use of items both within and across sentence boundaries. Sentence-internal grammatical



agreement in the simplest cases is but a pale echo of these considerably more elaborate restrictions on discourse organization through textual cohesion.

For such languages, native speakers tend to show the highest degrees of metapragmatic awareness of the linguistic structure and pragmatic function of honorific speech. In some languages—particularly where the organization of speech levels is based on extensive differentiation of lexical items—native terminologies for describing these speech levels are commonly found, and these are sometimes quite elaborate, as in the case of Javanese and Japanese (54, 105). In languages such as Korean, where relatively few noun and verb lexemes show honorific lexical alternants, and where speech level differentiation is based to a greater degree on the productive use of suffixes and adpositions, the descriptive terminology tends to be more restricted to the tradition of native grammarology, and even here there are some differences in traditional descriptions (210).

Philips (162) argues that the usual tripartite description of Tongan speech levels—commoner vs noble vs kingly speech—is a native metapragmatic construction which does not accord perfectly with native speech use, and that it tends to focus on localizable segmentable morphology in the manner predicted by Silverstein (185). The tripartite scheme is a government-sponsored idealization or simplification to which native speakers have direct access, for example, through school textbooks. But actual speech use is subject to considerable manipulation, not only in highly genred speech types (e.g. oratory, legal discourse, poetry, and prayer) but also in ordinary conversation, sometimes varying discourse internally even for the same referent. There are plenty of words (not mentioned in school textbooks) for which there are neutralizations across several levels. For some items, there are neutralizations of the commoner-noble distinction or of the noble-kingly distinction; and for others, identical words occur in commoner and kingly speech but with different referential meaning. Interesting extensions of usage also occur. Kingly speech is extended in usage to God and Jesus; noble speech is used not only for non-nobles of high social status but also for commoners, thus raising the level of formality and politeness in public discourse. Studies of changes in address forms resulting from mass ideological transformations (e.g. 60, 123) complement Philips' work by showing that government-sponsored ideologies of language use tend to focus on relatively localizable segmental morphology, such as pronouns and address forms, leaving other more pervasive structural-functional dimensions of honorific usage relatively untouched (see also 54:55 ff, 239 ff; 29:157 ff; 94).

### *Status, Deference, and Demeanor*

Three distinct aspects of social meaning—status, deference, and demeanor—appear to be involved in honorific phenomena. Shils (178) first distinguished

social status as the objective status role of an individual (defined in terms of macrosociological variables such as birth, breeding, profession, and wealth) from deference-entitlement (namely the event-specific evaluation of one individual by another with respect to worthiness of deference). Goffman (68) attempted to build on Shils' work (cf 68:note 4) by distinguishing deference (the comportment of an actor toward the recipient of an action) from demeanor (the comportment of an actor serving to express his or her own characteristics, independently of anyone else). Although Goffman's conceptions of deference and demeanor were cast in a rather individualistic framework (appealing to notions such as "a particular image of self" held by individuals, and social sanctions by society against the individual), subsequent research has shown that even individual conceptions of deference and demeanor are not *sui generis* phenomena, that they are themselves subject to the interplay of social semiotic processes that construct and valorize systems of local beliefs relative to collective ideologies (2, 124, 186, 187, 220).

The use of honorifics in all societies is constrained by the social status of individuals to whom deference is paid, but it is also sensitive to interactional variables. With regard to status, the general norm seems to be: the higher the status, the greater the degree of deference. Some studies have also shown that different macrosociological measures of social status can be ranked relative to each other in determining levels of deference. Singh (188) describes the following ranking for honorific usage in Maithili: kinship > socioeconomic status > sex > age. Nonetheless, as Singh notes, violations of these sociocultural norms also occur, based on interactional variables not interpretable in macrosociological terms (e.g. speaker's mood, social setting, a particular speaker's attitude toward a particular addressee).

Anderson (4) has offered a more detailed discussion of types of norm violation in a study of speech levels in Sundanese. Anderson concludes that speech-level differentiation has a number of interactional stance-marking functions in addition to its well-known social status sensitivity. Individuals switch to the honorific *Lemes* styles in expressing thanks and in discussing sensitive topics. When male conversants are joined by an attractive female, they switch to *Lemes* even when the woman is not of high social status. *Kesar*, or nonhonorific speech, is used to express anger, *Lemes* to deflect it (see also 38, 57, 166). Similarly, Agha (2) argues that in Lhasa Tibetan, honorific speech violations of interactionally presupposable cultural norms frequently are interpreted as various types of voicing phenomena whereby individuals take on the interested perspective of other interactants in order to achieve interaction-specific strategic goals (see also 35:443, 54:160–162).

Moreover, in all languages containing honorific registers, both social prescriptions of etiquette and the differentiation of speech levels (including impure or mixed levels) tend to be sociolinguistically distributed by social cate-

gories of speaker across several dimensions (e.g. social class, region, gender, age), yielding extremely important culture-internal measures of positional identity, interpreted as indices of demeanor. In the Korean spoken in rural Yanbian, for example, the differentiation of speech levels is higher than in the standard language. As a result, the innovative second formal grade sounds rustic to speakers of the standard language (161). Thus, in some languages, differential patterns of usage of addressee- and referent-honorifics are evaluated secondarily in terms of social stereotypes about different kinds of speakers, often asserted by natives in the form of explicit metapragmatic claims. But when such claims—for example, the claim that Japanese women are more polite than men—are studied in empirical terms, what is actually discovered about women differs, again, from what the ideology would stipulate as true of them (101, 104). Ideology provides an orientation only from the point of view of practical action, an orientation which is often “false” when articulated into claims about empirical phenomena. Yet questions of truth or falsity are not the most basic questions in matters of ideology, since, very often, such orientations may not be describable in the form of explicit claims which are falsifiable at all (e.g. beliefs about God). The more basic questions about ideologies are questions concerning their mode of emergence as social fact, their modes of dispersion through society, and their modes of institutional legitimation.

A growing body of research suggests that the relationship between lexicogrammatical honorific forms and macrosociological facts about social status is mediated by socially distributed metapragmatic norms, including beliefs about usage (24, 77, 111, 183). If such metapragmatic norms do indeed constitute an irreducible, third component of the total sociocultural phenomenon at issue, we would expect that correlations between honorific forms and status variables would tend to show up in a more robust fashion in studies which explicitly control the data of metapragmatic norms of honorification, rather than in those which do not incorporate such data into their research design. A number of such studies have been made of Japanese honorifics in particular (86, 92, 104, 155, 156, 174). These studies investigate the data of conscious beliefs about usage, not the data of usage itself.

Ogino et al (156) asked a large sample of Tokyo residents (1009 individuals, all above the junior high school age level) for their judgments about the usage of addressee honorifics for eight imagined categories of addressee. The study shows that whereas younger students admit to using few or no honorific forms, college students lay claim to a much more extensive use of honorifics, and in a wider variety of settings. This suggests the existence of social stereotypes about honorific usage which identify individuals who use more honorifics as educated and more adult and, therefore, of higher social status (see also 81, 161, 174).

In discussing the way social stereotypes about women are expressed in Javanese, Smith-Hefner (189) argues that the social domain of language use is a critical dimension of the process by which first-order facts of honorifics use may be reinterpreted in terms of second-order stereotypes of speaker refinement. In the household, women use highly deferential speech in addressing their husbands. Moreover, as caregivers who teach children the proper use of honorific forms, women frequently use their husband—the children's father—as referential target. In contrast, men in the household use honorifics to a lesser degree in addressing their wives, and tend to abstain from the role of caregiver to children. In the public realm, on the other hand, men tend to cultivate the most elaborate type of honorific speech that they can attain, whereas women, who tend to stay out of political affairs, use honorific speech to a much smaller extent. Smith-Hefner argues that social stereotypes about men and women are sensitive to the different social domains in which honorific speech is used (see also 92). The study shows that status is not simply an independent variable that drives honorific usage. To an extent, it is a dependent, ideologically informed characteristic attributed to individuals on the basis of selected aspects of their speech use. As such, it is "judged differently from different perspectives and by different individuals within the same speech community" (189:552). Citing Keenan's early study (121), Smith-Hefner suggests that politeness and status—like many macrosociological characteristics—are not fixed properties of expressions and individuals, respectively. Rather, they are attributes whose projectability to such loci involves appeals to (potentially several) independent ideological norms whose differential provenance across types of social setting is, itself, a constitutive element of the socially meaningful character of honorific speech.

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