Speech Acts and Social Learning

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INTRODUCTION

"Go ask your mommy to come to the phone."

"Is the lady of the house in?"

"Hey, Len, shoot the chart to me, willya?"

"Oh, by the way, Doctor, could you leave that chart when you're through?"

It is a standard assertion that natural languages have polysemy. Any dictionary reveals numerous examples of multiple meanings for single forms; this is the source of many jokes about inept selection of alternatives in translation. Languages can have maximal economy of forms by allowing for variation of meaning according to context. Misunderstandings are avoided because of our extraordinary ability to make our understanding vary according to the surround, both linguistic and non-linguistic. In fact, we find that the most glaring instances of misunderstanding are often just the result of a rare coincidence of context.
between two possibilities. Polysemy is an economy which seems to be advantageous to speakers, since when diversity of output is reduced search processes are simplified. In colloquial speech, forms with low semantic specificity are often preferred, such as “thing,” “guy,” “ce true,” “ce machin,” or demonstratives.

Yet why is it that while we encounter polysemy in languages, we also find considerable synonymy? It is just as common to find many ways to say the same thing as it is to find many meanings for the same form. In fact, stylistically—at least in writing—adults prefer a low density of repetition and use syntactic compressions, required anaphoric pronouns, and synonyms in order to escape repetition. This chapter will explore in detail one system of alternative ways to say the same thing and will raise questions about the social functions of such diversity. The theme, then, is symbolic diversity.

In the lexicon, we normally find several names for the same things or people. In English, this diversity is especially rich in certain topical areas, such as body functions (“urinate,” “go to the potty,” “piss,” “take a leak,” “go to the little girls’ room,” “go to the bathroom,” “be away from one’s desk,” “wee- wee,” and so on). Diversity appears in address terms for the same person, who may, on various occasions, respond to “Mommy,” “Aunt Louise,” “Sis,” “Lou,” “Dr. Leland,” “Grandma,” and “Mrs. Jamison.” It is clear at the outset that the focus of diversity in the lexicon or naming system is diagnostic of areas of cultural complexity or sensitivity.

Diversity also appears in the morphology of address, a familiar example being the system of person and number in pronouns and in inflections as a function of relations between speaker and addressee—e.g. tu/ vous, du/sie. Thus what I translate as “This one is yours” may in some languages be homonymous with “This one is his” or “This one is theirs.” Geertz (1963: 248–60) has reported on an even more elaborate set of alternations of cooccurring lexical and morphological variations, which he calls stylistemes, that can be nuanced by honorifics—all being diverse ways of saying the same thing. In Geertz’s examples, the alternations occurred within a common syntactic frame.

Linguists have noticed both the lexical and affixal systems of alternations because they assumed importance during the preparation of lexicons and grammars. The directives cited at the beginning of this
Speech Acts and Social Learning

This chapter provides an overview of the role of language in social learning. The analysis is grounded in the work of Halliday, who has argued that language is a powerful tool for social interaction and learning. Halliday's theory of languages as systems of social action suggests that language is not just a means of communication, but also a means of social interaction and learning.

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second. In other words, the child was not yet using a given expression to have several functions. "Is Mommy there?" could only mean an information question.

Gumperz and Herasimchuk (1972: 106) have provided a more elaborate example from classroom interaction (I have added names):

Teacher: ... how do you spell Ken?
Teacher: Ann, Ida is spelling it...

In terms of referential content, the teacher’s last utterance is a statement about the act of spelling, with Ida as agent, addressed to Ann. In these respects, it would contrast with:

Is Ida spelling it?
Jack, Ida is spelling it.
Bob is spelling it.
Ann, Ida is going to spell it.

There has been considerable discussion in linguistics recently about problems of focus and of what is given or new in utterances. In these respects, it is clear in the example that the agent is at issue, not the action, and this difference is reflected in the stress on the agent. But is this really an adequate characterization of what is being said?

The utterance cannot be interpreted without reference to discourse rules. Normally, in this kind of classroom interaction, the teacher and the pupil alternate utterances. In normal discourse structure, when the pupil has performed, the teacher confirms or corrects the pupil (Sinclair and Coulthard 1974). This is the primary exchange in the formal classroom, but it is violated in our example. Instead, the teacher has made a comment about the proper participants in the exchange.

The teacher’s utterance is syntactically a statement; any of the conventional semantic analyses would credit it with being an assertion of an ongoing event. But in fact Ida had said nothing. Interpersonally the utterance was a directive. It was functionally equivalent to the utterance Gumperz and Herasimchuk found a peer teacher using: “Don’t tell ‘im.”

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Speech Acts

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Speech Acts and Social Learning

utterances conventionally function as directives, never as statements. The inferential link that makes novel instances interpretable is a hearer’s knowledge of a social rule. In this case, the social rule is a general rule of turn taking in classroom conversation: the addressee of a question has prior claim to the floor, and only one person has the floor at once. This method of control simultaneously provides a directive in the particular case and alludes to the general rule.

It sometimes happens that teachers or parents make what appear to be directives without any evident wish to bring about compliance, or with an incongruous prosody. Jacqueline Housh (1972), in observing classroom directives, found an instance in which the teacher said, “We must keep our feet on the floor!” while passing by some children who were lying on their backs with their feet in the air. This utterance may in fact emphasize the second function mentioned above; it reasserts a general rule by reminding everyone that the teacher is the proper custodian of rules, even their creator. However, enforcement in this instance was of minor importance.

This example is far from unique. We have enough instances to believe that it is common, as Halliday has asserted, for utterances to be plurifunctional. Let us return to the example:

Ann, Ida is spelling it.

On the ideational axis, this sentence contrasts with other possible agents, actions, addressees, objects. On the interpersonal axis, as a directive, it contrasts with a statement which would be descriptive of an ongoing event, that is, it contrasts with the other potential realizations of the same function. It is this system of alternations for the same function which I wish to discuss in greater detail below. I shall then examine the implications for socialization of such verbal systems.

DIRECTIVES

Over a period of years I have been collecting evidence about the kinds of structural variation adults employ in accomplishing directives, including those that serve themselves and those that regulate others. These data suggest that such directives take five or more surface realizations:
1. Imperatives like “Bring me a sweater.”
2. Embedded imperatives like “Could you bring me a sweater?”
3. Question directives like “Have you got a sweater here?”
4. Statements of need like “I’m cold.”
5. Hints like “It’s a cold night.”

In some cases, a speaker may be aware of a condition but not specify a remedy. If the speaker speaks about a discomfort, but is as yet unfocused on the cure, the hearer may interpret the utterance as a directive, as we shall see. Under some social conditions, speakers may be aware of remedies but be unwilling to utter directives or even statements of need or condition. They suffer in silence rather than ask the prime minister to pass the salt.

**Imperatives**

Imperatives, if not the most common kind of directive, are certainly the most obvious. There is no way to make them ambiguous in function. But even imperatives can be modulated. Modulators include: greetings, honorific address terms, names, “please,” pitch, tag modals, and tag “OK.” One could argue that most of these, except the last two, are in fact potential modulators for any form of directive. They function as extra forms which can shift the effect of the central form of the directive and, in the case of sharp discrepancies, create a sarcastic effect. Indeed, where the situation is obvious, a name, “please,” or a modal alone can function as a directive. These features are available, like honorifics such as “sir,” as an optional extra marking to indicate deference, ingratiations, or sarcasm.

The distribution of modulators is socially defined. Where tasks normally involve imperatives—for example, where interchange of money for services or goods, or coordinated services are required—names can modulate imperatives. Blue-collar workers: “More to the right, Joe.” “Lift it higher, Bill.” “Under the hinge, Joe.” “OK, push, Bill.” In shops, “please” is sometimes used to mark higher rank or age of addressee. Between waitresses and cooks, it may mark requests for services outside the realm of normal duties. In an office study, Gardner (1968) found that physical distance increased raised pitch, postposed modals, and address terms: “Bring the file” vs. “Bring the file, would you, Rose?”
Speech Acts and Social Learning

Embedded Imperatives

Embedded imperatives are those in which the requested act is preceded by an introductory phrase, such as "Can you...", "Would you mind...", "Would you..."

Sinclair and his colleagues have pointed out that this type of directive is common in English classrooms:

An interrogative clause is to be interpreted as a command to do if it fulfills all the following conditions: (i) it contains one of the modals can, could, will, would (and sometimes going to); (ii) the subject of the clause is also an addressee; (iii) the predicate describes an action which is physically possible at the time of utterance (Sinclair and Coulthard 1974: 32).

The feasibility constraint is important. If one says "Can you swim?" in a living room, it is interpreted as an information question. Next to a swimming pool the same utterance would be interpreted as a command and followed by a splash.

In fact, many of these modal requests can only be interpreted as directives:

Hospital desk, nurse to aide:
Would you hand me Mr. Adam's chart, please?

Typist to professor:
Would you sign these this week, Professor Jones?

It is difficult to see how the directive interpretation of these items could arise, as has been claimed by Gordon and Lakoff (1971), by inference from a literal interpretation.

Another explanation for this class of instances is that they are routinely interpreted as requests within the feasibility limits suggested by Sinclair and Coulthard (1974). If this is so, any can you question that is feasible will be interpreted as a directive unless accompanied by a disclaimer of directive intent. The argument here is that given appropriate contextual conditions for a directive, the directive interpretation is automatic, unmarked, normal. Only if the situation is ambiguous, the effort great, and the spirit or the flesh unwilling will the prowess-questioning interpretation (the "literal meaning") be entertained.

Perhaps the best evidence that this apparent pragmatic neutralization is an illusion is noncompliance.
Can you bring me a Coke when you go to dinner?
No, I can’t.
Can you sign the letter this afternoon?
No, I can’t.

These answers are rude. Noncompliance with a modal imperative, like noncompliance with an imperative, requires an explanation. This is evidence that these utterances are normally interpreted as directives. We shall see that the same is not true of other forms of directives, which permit unexplained noncompliance. On the other hand, compliance with an embedded imperative permits a show of voluntariness.

Embedded questions were most frequent in addressing persons of different rank, peers in their own territory, or peers performing tasks outside their regular roles. Since imperative request forms tend to have fairly restricted conditions, they tend to cooccur with informal address terms, slang, and casual phonology.

The following quotations were collected in a research medical laboratory, where rank tends to be of great importance:

a. Hey, Len, shoot the chart to me, willya?
b. Shall I take it now, Doctor?
c. Oh, by the way, Doctor, could you leave that chart when you’re through?

The technicians in this laboratory included some who switched to a solitary relation with the doctors, or some of the doctors, when outsiders were absent. On those occasions they used utterances like (a). When outsiders were present, rank was reinvoked to select address, phonology, lexical style, and directive type, as in (b). On those occasions, the switchers were indistinguishable from their more staid colleagues (c).

This effect of outsiders was apparent in other settings as well. For example, in an office setting peers normally used imperatives to each other unless at a distance or otherwise disadvantaged. In the presence of a high-ranking visitor, however, peers used complex, highly qualified directives of the sort they would address to a superior. The outsider effect in these samples is comparable to monitoring in style; it shifts speech toward social alternatives which would have been used had the outsider been the addressee, at least when the outsider is high enough in rank.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

Question Directives

We are all familiar with common request questions which are standard forms for directives:

Hello. Is John there?
Pardon me. Do you have a double room for tonight?

It could be argued that we know these are directives because we interpret the questions literally and infer that a question about the presence of John could only be based on a desire to speak with him. On the other hand, in the production of these directives, we frequently find the forms are so normal that we use them even when we do not, in fact, need the information requested. One might, for example, watch John go into his apartment from a window across the way, and still say to his room-mate, "Is John there?" when he answers the telephone.

We have substantial evidence showing that under certain conditions questions are normally interpreted as requests and can become the normal, unmarked realization of directives.

A few examples will illustrate:

a. Professor telephones Room Permits office.
   Speaker's Intent: Getting information.
   "Do you have a seminar room for twenty, Monday nights?"
   "Just a minute. Yes I do, give me your name, department, and course number, please."
   Hearer's Interpretation: Directive to reserve room.

b. Office workers at lunch break.
   Intent: Getting information.
   "Is there any coffee left?"
   "Yeah, pass your cup."
   Interpretation: Directive.

c. Teacher to pupils in class.
   Intent: Starting lesson.
   "What are you laughing at?"
   "Nothing."
   Interpretation: Directive to be silent.

d. Caller to friend's wife on phone.
   Intent: Getting information.
   "Is John there?"
   "Yes, just a minute, I'll get him."
   Interpretation: Directive.


SUSAN ERVIN-TRIPP

Speech Acts

It can be seen that the speakers and hearers use language in terms (Erdelyi 1967) for the choice of the directive to a familiar person or to a highly ranked person (e.g., teacher or superior). The familiarization of language to the new person, then new directive form, neutralizes the directive as an order.

These speech acts are given by the audience to the speaker if a request is made elsewhere. The types of audiences the speakers use are those that bias the speaker by the ranking of the person, the presence of the person, or the social role of the person. If the speaker is in both an audience and not, the speaker selects the form.

If a highly ranked person is present, then there was a form (impersonal) or these occurring. The form was more polite and more bland. Once the level is reached, the form becomes impersonal, there is no form of the person, and the form is more impersonal. The person is far away.

e. Host to guests, midnight.
   Intent: Offering a service.
   “How about another drink?”
   “Oh, no thanks, we’ll be leaving soon.”
   Interpretation: Directive to leave.

These are a sample of common experiences we have all had in which the usual way to realize a directive is through an information question. However, this directive represents a form that potentially neutralizes the contrast between directives and information-seeking—it is a pragmatic neutralization. Speakers who are aware of this normal interpretation can avoid the directive interpretation by disclaiming it.

One can speculate on what such disclaimers might be:

a. “Would you mind telling me—I’d just like to know if there’s a room available for twenty, Monday nights.”
b. “Anna, should I make more coffee?”
c. “Let’s look at an example; for instance, what is funny about that?”
d. “I don’t want to talk to him, but is John there?”
e. (Disclaimer difficult) “While we’re getting warmed up on that topic, how about a refill?”

Disclaimers remove neutralization by denying directive intent. In each of these cases, either directly or indirectly, one makes the directive intent less plausible than its alternative. Part of the reason for the difficulty in the last case is that direct imperatives are unlikely, so that the request question becomes strongly identified as a directive. The importance of the misunderstandings identified earlier lies in the evidence they provide that the normal unmarked form coincides with the syntax of information requests in such a way that speakers seeking information in these situations must remove ambiguity by disclaimers.

It would have been possible to provide direct imperatives for each of these instances, so we must account for the fact that the request question was used instead. The best account is a characterization of the social variables associated with request alternations. The variables that have appeared so far in observational studies have included territorial location of speaker and addressee (an addressee receives fewer imperatives in his own territory), familiarity, similarity of rank and age, and relation of the directive to expected activities such as the exchange of goods for money.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

It can be expected that when we have richer data on individual speakers a selection order will become apparent, just as with address terms (Ervin-Tripp 1973: 305; Geoghegan 1973). The early selectors in the choice rule neutralize certain later variables. For example, directives to a familiar person in her own territory may be formally like those to a high-ranked person. In such a case we could say that territoriality neutralizes rank, just as status-marked situations such as trials neutralize familiarity in address terms. If familiarity precedes rank in the rule, then new colleagues who are peers are not given more imperatives than superiors.

These alternations can be seen in data for requests collected in an office by Carol Gardner (1968). We assume that place—the office—is given by a prior commitment. (Of course, actors may change location if a request is inappropriate to a place, or if necessary addressees are elsewhere. When we confine observations to one locale, we limit both the types of requests made and the personnel present in ways that could bias the more general description we seek.) In the office, if a high-ranking person was present, the speaker addressed her request to another person, using the politeness level that would have been suitable to the audience; if the service was dispensable, she kept silent. Elaine Rogers (1967a) found a similar effect of audience in a medical laboratory. The presence of outsiders or supervisory personnel resulted in a reduction of person-related requests; it also brought rank considerations into effect in both address and request forms. If the high-ranking person was the necessary addressee for the service, the most polite alternatives were selected that made the task evident, such as modal imperatives.

If a high-ranking person were not present, the next factor was whether there was pressure or tension in the office due to an extra work load. On these occasions, the speakers ignored social selectors toward their coworkers and used the more impolite forms. New coworkers received the more polite forms regardless of rank, age, or territorial considerations. Once the coworker became familiar, however, the other variables became important. If the person who was asked for a service was in her territory and the asker was not, requests became more polite and fewer imperatives were used. If territory was not a consideration, similarity in rank and age led to imperatives. These might be complicated by adding modal tags, "please," address terms, or rising pitch if the addressee was far away.
Several variables have appeared in request studies that are not evident in the studies of address, which otherwise have many parallels. Examples are territoriality, distance, the seriousness of the service requested, and whether compliance may be assumed because of the type of service, normal roles, or power relations. Some of the variables appear to involve continua, just as one might expect in the kind of cost-benefit situation that typically arises when requests for services and goods are involved. Because continua may require formal solutions different from those required by discrete "selectors," we need more detailed data. Agar's (1973) work on the choices of drug addicts seeking a "fix" raises parallel problems.

It is obvious that the specifics of a rule will vary with group and perhaps with setting. In an experiment, students making a simple request of strangers who were peers or superiors marked the rank primarily in greeting and address forms, only 15 percent complicating the request by asking such questions as "Do you happen to have a pencil?" In the office study, addresses lower in rank, like those higher in rank, received the more polite forms, but in some other studies—of doctors in a hospital and blue-collar workers on a construction site—imperatives were the norm to subordinates.

In all of these studies, some selectors appear to be prior and therefore to have the effect of "neutralizing" other social variables. In the Gardner (1968) office study, unfamiliarity neutralized rank and age differences. Neutralization of situation, social, or semantic features in ordered selection rules has important implications for analysis. A familiar example is the greeting form "How are you?" which has been called "insincere." This form involves pragmatic neutralization between greeting and information seeking. The respondent to this question need only check whether the asker is a close friend or not. If the answer is no, he need give only a routine answer such as "Fine" or another greeting, and does not have to check the actual state of his own health. For this reason, he is obligated in some social groups to make a semantic check and if the information is important—for example, if he just broke his wrist—he is expected to say so. The asker can anticipate the possible ambiguity by marking the question in various ways, thus disclaiming the normal interpretation of "How are you" as a simple greeting.

a. How are you, anyway?
b. I heard you were sick; how are you feeling now?
Speech Acts and Social Learning

The fact that the routine interchange of greetings need not imply a semantic check of health does not rule out the capacity of some speakers to think of the other meaning of the sentence, just as some speakers can think of an alternate meaning for interrogative requests, or can pun.

I pointed out earlier that, just as in the case of an imperative, the discourse effect of a modal imperative is that noncompliance requires an explanation, but that compliance can be accompanied by an appearance of voluntariness because a question can be answered. In the case of the request question, the addressee is given a very good out. The noncompliant hearer can simply interpret the question as a request for information.

a. Do you have a seminar room for twenty, Monday nights?
   No, sorry, we don't.
b. Is there any coffee left?
   No, it's finished.
c. What are you laughing at?
   Well, you see, it was funny that...
d. Is John there?
   No, he's out.
e. How about another drink?
   Sure, I'd love one.

Replies such as these effectively legitimate noncompliance and make false information easy, as in the case of discriminatory landlords saying no rooms are available, and protective secretaries who report the boss is out. The imperative forms force a noncompliant addressee to find a refusal or excuse. Consequently, they force noncompliance to be made explicit.

There is a parallel, of course, in the case of information-seeking questions which contrast with polarized questions that preformulate a reply:

a. Where is the Women's Center?
   Sorry, I don't know where it is.
b. Do you know where the Women's Center is?
   No, I don't.

To answer affirmatively to (b) without supplying the locative information would be a joke, a pragmatic pun. The second question permits noncompliance by allowing an implied fifty-fifty occurrence of nega-
tives. Noncompliance to (a) would require the respondent to admit ignorance.

In these examples, the utterances that speakers call more polite are those which allow the noncompliant addressee to reply without being explicit about his refusal. Discourse structuring is a major way of realizing politeness level. As Robin Lakoff (1972) has put it in a very general characterization, polite speech leaves the options open.

Need Statements

On the face of it, one might assume that the directive form which is minimally restricting is the statement, since in terms of discourse structuring it requires no reply at all. However, certain statements are relatively coercive.

Statements of need in which the requested object or act is made explicit are of course the most obviously coercive, especially if they are made by a person of higher rank.

a. Laboratory physician to technician:
   “I need a routine culture and a specimen. Do you mind?”

b. Doctor to hospital nurse:
   “I’ll need a 19-gauge needle, IV tubing, and a preptic swab.”

When communication is downward in rank, a direct-need statement is comparable in effect to an imperative. The directness is similar to “I’ll have Pall Malls,” which can occur when tasks are defined as including the transfer of goods and easy services only.

Some need statements are not intended as directives, although they may be interpreted as such nevertheless.

Parent at breakfast.
Intent: Thinking aloud.
“Oh, darn it. I left my paper out there.”
“I’ll get it.”
Interpretation: Directive.

Whether or not a speaker who is aware of a need frames a directive is dependent upon his calculation of the burden of cost he wishes to exact from others relative to his gain. For this reason, it is not always the case that persons who express states of need intend directives.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

I have identified a second type of statement which is common in directives downward in rank or age. These involve a vagueness of agent:

a. Office worker to a different age group of coworkers:
   Who's going to take over these files?
   Has anyone gone to Accounting this week?
   Someone has to see Dean Anthony.
   Someone has to take dictation for Professor Spellman, Jane.

b. Mother to daughter:
   This room has to be vacuumed before that man comes.

c. Doctor to technician:
   We have a few things to do over.

d. Nursery school teacher to children:
   Let's all take our naps now.

In each of these cases the addressee is the obvious agent for the required act. The act is clearly specified. However, the speaker avoids directly identifying the agent of the act, so that the indefinites become a kind of euphemism to avoid overt imperatives. In some collective "someone" instances, the absence of an agent is a device for recruiting a volunteer.

Ayhan Aksu, a Turkish student, has provided a nice confirmation of the fact that this form must be downward in rank or age. She reports the following conversation (personal communication):

Student to landlady:
"Could we put the garbage can over here?"
"Why, Ayhan, I didn't know you had a roommate!"

Aksu states that she found this misunderstanding confusing, since she had interpreted the "we" directive as more polite than the second person form.

Hints

When the directives were to seniors in rank, an aversive state description might be used, at least by adults:

a. Daughter to mother:
   "Mother, you know I don't have a robe."
   "I know."
   "Well, we're having a slumber party tomorrow night."

b. Wife to husband, who is rowing:
   "Jock! I don't want to swim right now; here, I'll turn the boat."
The statement of aversive state permits a solicitous alter to aid with a display of voluntariness. In the following cases, the state of affairs to be altered is made explicit:

- **a. Office worker to another of a different age:**
  "It's stuffy in here."
- **b. Professor to office worker:**
  "Mrs. Terry, it's quite noisy in here."
- **c. Mother to son:**
  "Toby's cage is still dirty."
- **d. Wife to husband, who is rowing:**
  "You're throwing water all over me."
- **e. Wife to husband, who is rowing:**
  "You're going to bash a sailboat."
- **f. Husband to wife, who is rowing:**
  "You're heading... go over that way."

As Sinclair and Coulthard (1974: 32-33) have pointed out, in situations where there are rules or common agreements about prohibited acts, mere mention of a prohibited act or an unmet obligation functions to frame a command.

In the following examples, the speakers' intent was directive, but there is no direct mention of either a desired act; an aversive condition, or a prohibited act:

- **a. Adult sister to brother, standing near cupboard:**
  "Oh, dear, I wish I were taller."
  "Here, can I get something for you?"
  "Yes, please, some of those green dishes up there."
- **b. Lab director to secretary:**
  "We're waiting for Dr. Klepper from Texas. I'll be gone until two o'clock."
  **Intent:** Tell him.
- **c. Coworker to another of different age:**
  "I think Sarah opened the Xerox room, Joan."
  **Intent:** Let me go make copies.

Statements that fail to specify even the needed act are good candidates for misunderstanding. Here are some examples:

- **a. Office worker to another:**
  **Intent:** Thinking aloud.
  "It's almost twelve o'clock."
Speech Acts and Social Learning

Hearer gets up and locks door.
**Interpretation:** Directive.

b. **Woman to escort:**
**Intent:** Small talk.
“It’s really cold tonight.”
“Here, take my jacket.”
**Interpretation:** Directive.

c. **Guest to hostess, who serves green tea:**
**Intent:** Small talk.
“I’ve never had green tea.”
“Oh, I’ll get you some black tea then.”
**Interpretation:** Directive.

In cases such as these, the person thinking aloud or making small talk does not really anticipate a reply at all. Consequently, the speaker is unlikely to be as aware of alternative rejoinders as a questioner who might anticipate misunderstanding of information questions as directives. Thus disclaimers are unlikely in the above instances. One can only refuse the service.

The social distribution of statement imperatives is distinctly different from that of imperatives in that they occur in two kinds of settings: (a) in work settings, where who is to do what is very clear, and the statements serve as reminders about time and condition to addressees differing in rank or age; and (b) in familial or quasi-familial relationships, when solicitude on the part of the hearer can be assumed and the service is too special to allow a direct imperative.

Statements do not require a response. The listener may or may not take up the implication, depending upon his state of attention, nurturing, goodwill, or power. Where compliance is unsure or a service is great, statements leave the greatest freedom of choice to a listener. On the other hand, if they are routine forms for standard requests in repetitive situations, there must be assumed compliance based on socialization to the role. The necessary conditions need merely to be stated for the well-trained alter to jump to. In the office studies, these forms never occurred between peers. It may prove to be the case that even in the family studies there are asymmetries of dominance reflected in the selection of indirect rather than explicit requests.

Adult directives range from explicit and slightly qualified imperatives to questions and statements formally identical to utterances that are not requests. Members learn to interpret such utterances routinely as di-
rectives when the service is feasible or is a part of their normal role and when interpersonal relations known to the participants can serve to account for the selection. The discourse constraints of statements, interro-gatives, and embedded imperatives are successively more coercive. Statements allow the listener not to respond verbally at all; interrogatives allow the noncompliant listener to reinterpret the directive as an information question; embedded imperatives allow the compliant listener to reply as if he had complied by choice. The forms also differ in the amount of inference or knowledge they require. General statements and information interrogatives require the most, since the goods or services may not be mentioned.

When the normal forms are known, deviations can be construed as indicators of social meanings concerning the momentary affect of the speaker. In addition, the participants' knowledge of potential alternative interpretations for the utterance makes pragmatic punning possible, as in the following cases, which teach the addressee by implying a different intent:

1. **Student to friend on campus:**
   "Are you going to share your candy bar with me?"
   "I don't know."
2. **Child to mother:**
   "Do you know where Daddy put the candy?"
   "Yes."

Knowing the normal interpretation and production takes time and may require learning new norms. Jenny Gumperz (personal communication) points out the following contrast:

1. **American woman shopper:**
   "Good morning. A dozen eggs, please."
2. **English woman shopper:**
   "Good morning, it's a nice morning. May I have a dozen eggs, please?"

We can suppose that the American shopping in England, who uses the more imperative form, will be construed as brusque and rude.

Social correction of adults does occur, as the following instances indicate:

1. **Customer to shopgirl she didn't recognize:**
   "I'd like some film, please, Ektachrome 35 mm."
SAN ERVIN-TRIPP

their normal role and participants can serve to intersperse statements, interjectively, more coercively, generally at all; interrogatively, at the directive as a
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following instances

Speech Acts and Social Learning

“I’m not going to give you a thing, Susan, until you say hello.”

b. Foreign client arriving in room sees repairman who has returned

for a second visit and is at work:

“Croyez-vous qu’il faut remplacer la machine?” (Do you think

we’ll have to get a new machine?)

“Bonjour, madame” (smiling as if joking).

c. Lunch-counter supervisor to customer in university lunchroom:

“You’re carrying a lot. Do you want a box?”

“Yes, do you have one?”

“I wouldn’t have offered if I didn’t.”

We know very little about the ways adults accommodate to culture

changes that require new sociolinguistic frames or the reclassification

of familiar situations. Not only children but adolescents and adults as

well are repeatedly resocialized through accommodation to new groups

which have an internal social structure that must be learned.

FUNCTIONS OF SYMBOLIC DIVERSITY

Alternations, at the level of lexicon and morphology and at the level

of speech act realization, serve major interpersonal functions. It must

be precisely because of these functions that alternations develop and

survive in language in spite of the countervailing pressure for simplicity

of form. These are some of the functions alternations serve:

a. They repeatedly assert actual or claimed features of social re-

lations without making those assertions focal or topical.

b. They can imply more extensive features connotatively through

metaphorical extension in “equivalence systems.”

c. Boundary markers and situation-identifying utterances can in-

teract with them to imply shifts in obligations.

Language is not, of course, the only means by which to assert social

relationships. Recent studies point to numerous nonverbal variables that

function in a similar capacity. For example, distance, posture (Meh-

rabian and Friar 1969), orientation of the body, eye direction (Argyle

and Ingham 1972), and touching (Henley 1973) can all be used to

assert dominance. Such features of speech as interruption rate (Zimmer-

man and West 1973), amount of speech, and intensity (Markel, Prebor,

and Brandt 1972) are sensitive to rank and sex. Zimmerman and West

(1973) found that males interrupted females and adults interrupted

children more than the reverse and were also less responsive to topic
initiation. It is not clear, of course, that complete consistency between
verbal and nonverbal channels is necessary. In general, the findings
suggest that when there are discrepancies, the information in the non-
verbal channel may be more important than its verbal counterpart.

Within discourse one may find that a common language or style is
maintained. It could be claimed that the monitoring this requires de-
mands continual control by the speaker and is a continual assertion
about social features, rather than a one-time assertion which is then
maintained for the sake of consistency. A parallel problem appears in
concord or agreement rules for number and gender. If there were a
one-time selection rule, we would find perfect agreement that was auto-
matic, the only “choice” occurring at the time of the initial selection.
But there are interesting discrepancies, which become apparent when,
for example, grammatical gender and sex conflict. In Switzerland, a
young man required to undergo military training is “la recrute.” In
newspaper reports, where editing can maintain monitoring across the
text, subsequent pronouns are feminine, but in colloquial speech the
masculine pronoun tends to slip back in.

If cooccurrence rules alone governed what follows an initial selec-
tion, we would not find shifting as a reflection of interpersonal changes.
Recent studies of bilingualism have shown that language shifting is a
continual resource either for rhetorical purposes such as contrast, em-
phasis, or for symbolizing relationships to the addressee, especially
solidarity and distance (Gumperz and Hernández-Chávez 1971), Hatch
(1973), Gumperz (in press).

In the same way, we might question whether address terms are
adopted by a single selection process at the first occasion of use. Many
of the selectors of address terms (such as adult/child, relative age,
occupational status, kinship) are external to the participants, but others
(such as felt dispensation from formality of address, collegiality, believed
relative rank, and familiarity) may be construed as having an expressive
component which varies from moment to moment (Ervin-Tripp 1973:
331–42). Address terms do change within conversations. Friedrich
(1972) has found particularly vivid examples of this in Russian litera-
ture, as have Brown and Gilman (1965) in French. In a study of
classroom interaction recently, David Day (1968) found that during an
argument the students shifted between titling, first name, and Mr. S——
to the instructor.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

In English, each occurrence of an address term reasserts claims as to relative age, rank, collegiality, and so on. In certain respects the directive system may be more refined, in others, such as occupational titling, less so. For example, a two-year-old studied in detail differentiated addresses by rank or age when giving directives. Thus although in address all nursery school children were first-named, in directives the child distinguished other two-year-olds from three- and four-year-olds. She gave no commands to the four-year-olds and employed only questions, including permission requests, such as:

a. Can have an apple, Nida, please?
b. Can have the pen, Nida, please?

to the three-year-olds she gave commands, but 4 out of 5 instances included postponed "please" or "OK." Out of a total of 100 directives only 12 had these features, so the statistical imbalance is clear.

At home, this child used repetitions and politeness modifiers in three-fourths of her directives to her father, but rarely to her mother. To test whether there really was a difference between directives to her parents, each parent failed to pour her milk. To her mother, the child said, "Mommy, I want milk." To her father, she beat about the bush:

- What's that?
- My milk, Daddy?
- Daddy, yours? Yours, Daddy?
- It's milk, Daddy.
- You want milk, Daddy?
- Milk in there, Daddy?
- Daddy, I want some, please? Please, Daddy, huh?

The evidence is clear that although the address system only gave her "Mommy" and "Daddy" and children's names, her directive system allowed her to nuance the relative ranks of addressees.

Discourse is not uniformly rich in interpersonal information for every dimension. While it is probably true that all discourse contains some social information, there is significant variation in amount. For example, some lexicons have alternatives, some do not. Geertz (1960: 249), in describing the extraordinarily elaborate Javanese system in connection with Prijapi etiquette, gave "table" as a lexical item lacking alternatives in that system. Bilingualism and diglossia are probably the strongest
cases, where nearly all lexical items have two morphophonemic realizations.

But even where the lexicon or morphology does not supply contrasts, register or style contrasts may be available. For example, in explaining a toy to younger children, four-year-olds use shorter sentences, more deictic or defining types of structures, and more imperatives than they do to age peers (Shatz and Gelman 1973). To children younger than two, prosodic and phonological features of baby talk may also be present. Thus limitations in baby talk–marked lexicon do not mean that discourse lacking those terms cannot be marked for age of addressee.

Directives are especially rich in alternations, possibly because the speaker is asking some action of the listener and must pay in social effort. (Perhaps this is why one feels irritated with an overly obsequious speaker, as though overpayment implies false coinage.) In general, the higher the cost of the goods or service, the greater the option offered the listener, so that as cost goes up one moves from imperative to request question and then to statement. In terms of formal elaboration, address and style upward in rank are more elaborate. To some extent, these effects are counterbalanced by the normality of the request to the role. If the activity usual to a task involves directing, the simpler, more imperative style may occur more often than one would expect on an analysis purely of rank.

It is important to realize that selections are available at many levels. At various points in the life cycle, options occur that commit one to communicative choices. For example, a choice to emigrate or a choice to attend school may entail language learning and therefore involve a shift in code usage. The choice to be present in certain settings or with certain participants has consequences for choice of communicative device. And even in a selected setting, one can opt for silence or omit certain content.

These choices seem to be relevant to a complete model of alternations, precisely because each of them represents certain important extremes. A person who finds himself in a setting with high-ranking participants may be unable, for example, to ask to borrow money for lunch. In a case such as this, the verbal alternatives we have proposed as being related to the cost of the exchange become irrelevant. One has to go without lunch, wait for an offer, or go elsewhere in hopes of finding other addressees more familiar or closer in rank.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

Nancy Tanner (1972: 131) and Richard Howell (1967: 93) have both shown that for speakers with a multilingual repertoire ambiguous social relationships may result in language shifts to the variety which does not force specification of relative rank. Howell observes that in Korean, where even a very small difference in age requires calling a woman "older sister," friends may select English in order to avoid such distancing. Tanner describes a preference for Indonesian over native Javanese among speakers of different social class, since in Indonesian that difference would be less apparent. "Use of krana (high Javanese) would seem incongruous to a friend and neighbor so similar in age, education, and religious philosophy" (Tanner 1972: 131).

These avoidance reactions indicate that the social information carried by the selection of particular alternatives is not automatic and neutral, but may be as much a part of a speaker’s sense of appropriate choice as how he dresses. Awareness of such choices seems to be maximized when selectors to the choice give ambiguous results, for instance when current familiarity would conflict with past rank difference.

METAPHORS AND EQUIVALENCE STRUCTURES

One can wonder at the social utility of developing elaborate linguistic indicators of social differences when those differences are in fact often apparent. For example, in many societies there are markers for the sex of addressee. Why should sex be indicated verbally when it is obvious already? Why should the fact that an addressee is an infant or a child be indicated? Even these obvious features generate selections which complicate choice.

Social alternations are rarely single sets for single social variables. The forms which signal male-female contrasts in Japanese also signal higher-lower. Thus whenever a woman speaks to a man she not only tells him he is male; she tells him he is of higher rank as well. "Equivalence structures" is a term I used to refer to these systems. The social significance of equivalence structures is that some meanings from one set of contrasts carry over to the other as a kind of metaphor. When avoidance is possible, we might expect that women would refrain from using these forms, for example by speaking English if the family is bilingual. Bi-
lingual Japanese women in this country borrow the word “husband” into Japanese; they say it is because the Japanese word means “master.”

The principal claim here is that meanings learned with respect to one set of symbols affect other, homonymous symbols. In fact, this principle extends further to include not merely lexical symbols and morpheme contrast systems like inflections, but also features such as phonological features in baby talk or in code shifting.

We have evidence that when only some expressions in a system of contrasts have real-world semantic correlates, there is generalization of these meanings to expressions without semantic correlates or to those whose meaning is ambiguous. Connotations of sex difference do generalize to gender, but under restricted conditions. The generalization is unlikely to occur if realistic attributes of objects are present which contradict the implication of the generalization, if the system includes considerable unpredictability of the grammatical gender of people or of conspicuously sex-typed animate referents, or if the formal contrast is a dead metaphor and no semantic choices need to be made on any occasion (Ervin 1962: 249–53). Gender in many languages is not a dead metaphor; it is still necessary to decide the sex of a human referent in choosing gender.²

Blom and Gumperz (1971: 294–96) have used the term “metaphorical shifting” to refer to cases in which features of predictable, situationally rule-governed shifting between languages or dialects are extended. They found that certain meaning components derived from clear-cut cases of contrast were generalized. Thus if it is a general pattern to use a village dialect to villagers and a standard language to outsiders, the solidarity-distance meaning dimension may come to be symbolized by features of the linguistic contrasts between village dialect and standard language. These contrasts become available resources for expressing nuances of relationships between villagers.

The claim here is not simply that metaphors derive from predictable contrasts, but rather that between the predictable contrasts themselves “leakages” in meaning occur. The fact that meanings have been extended may not be obvious except in marginal cases or errors, but the underlying process of meaning extension is the same as that used in metaphor.

Biased neutralizations represent a different kind of metaphorical extension. For example, it is often said that the English pronoun

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² It is clear that we do not always give more complex predictions with respect to homonymy and that we fail to envisage exceptions.

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Speech Act
system neutralizes gender for singular general reference. The neutralization is biased, however. The books say “he” should be employed for such occasions, and will then refer to both male and female antecedents. However, in common usage it is clear that there is a resistance to the assumption that “he” is neutral. It clearly is not, but is highly semantized and refers to male sex, since in genuine indefinite reference, the plural, which really is neutral as to gender, is preferred (note: “If anybody wants this spare copy they can have it”). If there is a class of persons antecedent to the pronoun the gender depends on the stereotype of the class. For example, we can say “every judge should be careful to keep her knowledge of law up to date,” “every nursery school teacher has his favorite greeting,” and “every airplane pilot should buckle her seat belt too”; and we can say “any nurse who doesn’t show up tomorrow will find he has been flunked out,” “every American president has her own style of managing the Congress,” and “in our department, each secretary has his own typewriter.”

It is clear, I think, that these pronouns are not neutral. The supposedly neutral masculine pronouns are just as jarring applied to typically feminine occupations as are feminine pronouns applied to masculine occupations; if the pronouns were neutral this would not be the case. The same, of course, is true for theoretically neutral nouns, as in “early man invented the wheel, made extraordinarily beautiful cave paintings, and developed elaborate religious beliefs.” We find it hard to envisage women in these activities, and indeed in popularized pictures of early man such as those published by Time-Life, only men are shown talking around campfires, making hand axes, butchering animals, manufacturing statues, and performing ceremonial burials. In the most extraordinary extension of the metaphor, all reconstructed early men are shown as male, and indeed at least one noted anthropologist has remarked that some errors concerning size of homonids in reconstructions have occurred because it is routinely assumed that an isolated bone must come from a male. All of this seems another variety of the kind of metaphor that Roman Jakobson spoke of when he said that “a Russian child, while reading a translation of German tales, was astounded to find that Death, obviously a woman... was pictured as an old man... My Sister Life, the title of a book of poems by Boris Pasternak, is quite natural in Russian, where ‘life’ is feminine, but was enough to reduce to despair the Czech poet Josef Hora in his attempt
to translate these poems, since in Czech this noun is masculine” (Jakobson 1959: 237). But Life and Death are abstractions without sex; early men and women were not.

How strong is this metaphorical extension of meaning features in cases where terms are extended? A good example is the address term “Father” applied to priests. There are many respects in which the metaphor is weak. In reference, the term is treated like a kin title, so we can say “Father Shukletovitch,” which would not occur in speaking to or of one’s own father (though it does occur with parents-in-law). Likewise, Sister Eugenia is modeled on the general address rule for senior kin: title + (first name). However, this particular form would never be used by members of a family. The stylistic alternates used to a father are absent: one does not call a priest “Pop” or “Daddy.” And one does not climb on his lap to plead for money or candy. Indeed, the term “father” as an address term in families is now relatively rare in this country. If not completely dead, the metaphor is at least very weak.

These examples, in which kin titles are used, remind one of the relationship and role terms such as “Baby” and “Sister” and “Little girl” used by children playing house. Many, but not all, children use kin terms rather than assigned proper names. The function of this practice seems to be that it keeps the dramatis personae clearly before the actors at all times. If a four-year-old boy is clearly called “Daddy” on numerous occasions, it is harder for him to slip out of character (though certainly not impossible). In addition to titles, many role properties go along with playing a particular part. For example, babies have to say certain things like “goo goo”; Mommies can say “honey,” but nobody else can without being rebuked. One can argue that the presence in playing house of kin titles in direct address which do not exist in actual address to kin peers implies that there are in some sense latent in the kin system. They are derived from the same general rule that says a mommy can be called “Mommy,” an aunt can be called “Aunty,” and so on. That this rule is highly productive even for same-generation cases can be shown, for example, when one spontaneously calls slightly older cousins or small children “Cousin Bill” in order to make their specific kin relation clear. One could also argue by the same principle that even if “Father” has died out in direct address, it is potentially there if people know that the referential term is Father as well as Daddy. One can argue that address terms like “Father” to
Speech Acts and Social Learning

priests or “Sister” to nuns or coreligionists have at least as much semantic force as these terms do when used in role playing.

BOUNDARY MARKING

Boundary markers, which define changes in the situation, interact with markers of interpersonal roles. For example, in a classroom, the teacher may say “Now...” as a starter for a shift to a new topic or approach. Children do not use this form to the teacher; its use seems to be confined to the person in control of the agenda. This term at once reasserts authority and itself alters the structure by cueing listeners for a change.

Greetings and farewells have a similar function. Clearly, however, like markers of sex and age, they are redundant, marking what is already obvious. Everyone knows when participants arrive and leave, so why mark the change in participants with a formality? It can happen, however, that a third party will arrive in the midst of a dyadic conversation and remain excluded. If the other parties do not acknowledge his presence, at least by eye contact, he is tacitly left out as a non-participant and will normally not be expected to take part. The greeting is an acknowledgment that the new arrival is a coparticipant equal with others. Indeed, it may be followed by information regarding the topic which appears to encourage or discourage his participation—information which otherwise would not have been given—for example, “We were just talking about nursery schools.”

Emily Post, a valuable ethnographer of prescriptive norms, reports that where it would be inappropriate to introduce someone to a person lower in rank, the new participant can be brought into the conversation through this topical invitation slot:

“Mr. Smith is suggesting that I dig up these canna and put in delphiniums” (Post 1922: 14).

In addition to defining who shall be a participant, these elements in interaction can function to identify what type of speech event is being enacted. Thus when a teacher passes from informal conversation to the onset of the class, he requires a formal signal. Such signals need not be highly explicit; they may involve a stance and a tone of voice and little more. At this moment, however, an array of rules of inter-
action proper to classrooms comes to the fore. A shift occurs in the system of possible directive forms available to pupils in addressing each other.

The examples cited by Gumperz and Herasimchuk (1972) remind us that the child who has been socialized into appropriate classroom behavior does not precisely emulate the teacher. The child’s emula- tion proceeds only so far as to include the intent (to instruct) and perhaps the content (instruction in spelling). But the effective child instructor accomplishes these ends by different means. Lacking the support of authority, the child cannot handle interruption by alluding to a rule stating that the teacher allocates the floor; this rule does not apply to child interaction. Thus we find a contrast: the adult says “Ann, Ida is spelling it,” but the child instructor says “Don’t tell ‘im.” (Gumperz and Herasimchuk 1972: 106). In this case the child must validate his claim by alluding to a different rule; only one person can be instructor at a time. And he cannot rely on the persuasive force of allusion to a rule alone, as can the teacher; he must prohibit bluntly.

INSTRUCTION AND CONTROL

I have argued that the diversity of realization of speech acts has several functions in adult speech: communicating major social relationships directly or through metaphor and marking the boundaries of situations within which rules apply. The acquisition of this system by children provides a new form of complexity in child skill and both reveals and defines social features that the child must come to know.

Our evidence so far suggests that some children begin to nuance directives very early in terms of the manifest honorifics which differentiate rank or age of addressee. They do not at first markedly conceal overtness in requests; they specify known desires. It could be argued on the basis of this evidence that there are two different types of “politeness” utilized in the directive system. One type is overt, and consists of names, tags, and imbeddings which decorate the bare command. The other type is the systematically framed question or statement which does not refer to the desired act. In some cases, these forms of request are so highly routinized as to be a kind of directive idiom. In other cases, only the listener with inferential knowledge, a knowledge of interpretive rules, can connect the statement with an act.
Speech Acts and Social Learning

Children are able, as early as three years of age, to interpret the latter kind of request if the inferential steps are available to their thought. They seem, like adults, to assume that speech is motivated and to search for intent, at least under optimal conditions of attention. Unless they are able, in addition to understanding intent, to gain information from the utterance form as to social features of speaker or addressee, we cannot assume that the possibilities of language in conveying social nuances are used. These variations in realization would then seem random. How children learn to realize variations in response to social features, or to recognize the social implications of different forms, we are just now beginning to explore.

It has been argued in the past that the presence of contrasts in the linguistic system can accelerate the child’s recognition of semantic differences; this is the theory that language can aid thought. There is a rather considerable body of literature in psychology showing that lexical learning, like other kinds of “mediators,” can indeed facilitate learning and recognition of categories. On the other hand, it has been argued by Slobin (1973: 184) that the basic categories of child language are cognitive universals, and that it is precisely because the child learns these categories without the aid of, and prior to, language that he is able to discover the coding of them. The best candidates for this assertion are of course the earliest and most universal categories.

The obvious extension to sociolinguistic alternations is that the child and the adult learn the social system in part because they seek significance for the linguistic variations they encounter. This chicken and egg controversy is not as paradoxical as it seems. That is, in daily interaction there are both clear cases and ambiguous ones. The extension of the conjugal metaphor of power to sex contrasts in Japanese conveys a repeated tacit message of the weakness of women. For children there are clear cases where they already recognize the social feature present: sex and age, for example. These can be the “instructing” cases, which first define the meaning of the alternation. In the more ambiguous cases, where similar contrasts are used, we can assume the child will search for social features that account for a formal contrast he has already found to be significant. For instance, once the child discovers differences that correlate with age of addressee in many features of language, he will see these same features extended to rank contrasts when no age differences exist. He may never be explicitly told there is a rank
difference, but the metaphor of power will instruct him that X is treated like an elderly adult and Y is treated like a child.

From this analysis one might suggest that the fact that alternation systems themselves are “polysemic” has a social utility since it facilitates this sort of extension or metaphorical learning. Another conceivable system would require a different speech act realization for every possible combination of sex, age, rank, territoriality, distance of addressee, and so on. Roger Brown (1965) had the brilliant insight that there are likely to be universal dimensions underlying these metaphors: the power semantic and the solidarity semantic may everywhere have a kind of inverse relation. The devices used to signal social distance or unfamiliarity tend also to be those used to indicate higher rank. While the “naturalness” of these transfers may make learning easier, and spontaneous generalization more likely to be right, it does not remove the necessity for learning. In the studies we have done, we have ourselves been surprised at the dimensions that affect the realization of directives; category boundaries (e.g. what is a child, what is “older”) must be ascertained. So there are plausible grounds for believing that the presence of the system of alternations in realizing speech acts not only reminds adult participants continuously of the social features of the participants, but also provides an instructional milieu for learners regarding the major social dimensions and categories of groups they join.

The speech act I have discussed in greatest detail, the directive, happens to be among the most frequent acts of young children. It is also particularly rich in structural variability. However, we assume that many other acts, such as greetings, farewells, remedies, and various kinds of accounts, may show similar diversity. The evidence that systematic organized diversity of realization exists, and that it exists in very young children, is indisputable.

What remains hypothetical until more careful experimentation is carried out are our guesses about the functions of diversity. An array of evidence has been compiled here which supports the argument that diversity has major social consequences. While it apparently violates the economy principle in communication about reference or ideation, it embodies instructional contrasts intimately tied to social dimensions, thus providing continuous information to participants in interaction about their proper roles vis-à-vis each other.
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Speech Acts and Social Learning

NOTES

1. Major portions of the empirical material in this paper have been included in “Is Sybil There?” a paper to appear in Language in Society. The data cited here are drawn from many unpublished sources, including studies of requests made by my students over several years, particularly those of Ayhan Aksu, David Day, Carol Gardner, Craig Lawson, and Elaine Rogers. My debt to John Gumperz is apparent throughout. The opportunity to write this paper was supported by the School of American Research, the Center for Advance Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

2. There is some reason to believe that gender, under conditions which retain the semantic vigor of the category, is not simply a formal feature. That is, it is probably the case that young children learning gender languages attach some semantic features to the referents themselves or to whatever constitutes the stored concept. The evidence is that (a) bilingual French speakers sometimes use gender pronouns in English for words which have gender in French, suggesting that they either retrieve the noun before the pronoun or in going from meaning to pronoun already have gender information; (b) bilingual speakers of gender languages, tested in English about the masculinity-femininity of objects and abstractions, differ from native English judges in a direction congruent with the gender; (c) there are said to be age differences favoring younger children in the acquisition of noun gender in second-language learners during the period when older learners usually learn purely grammatical features faster than younger learners; (d) children who forget or “repress” a well-learned child language later recover gender almost faultlessly; (e) when words are borrowed, the gender of the native word which best translates the borrowed word may be adopted. Sometimes whole semantic classes are affected, as in the French-Canadian preference for feminine gender for names of machines and masculine gender for cloth. Haugen has pointed out the paradox of this observation: loanwords are “used precisely because the native word escaped the speaker or because he had never heard a native word for the idea in question. There is no reason to suppose that his subconscious should have whispered the gender of the native ‘equivalent’ to him when it failed to deliver the equivalent itself” (Haugen 1953:2:449). But of course Haugen fails to consider either the possibility of semantic changes derived from gender or that word retrieval is often partial, as we all know from trying to recover proper names from memory. What all of this evidence suggests is that gender is a property of a semantic concept rather than of a word (or that gender features attach to the semantic features of a word rather than to its morphophonemic pattern).

3. Ann Bodine (1974) examined the interpretation of “un” as “them” or “him” following various antecedents and found that the proportion of “them” interpretations ranged between 86 and 99 percent for various indefinites, in contrast to 5 percent for “that stinker.”

4. Sherwood Washburn (personal communication).