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when talk isn't cheap: language and political economy

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Perhaps one of the most durable legacies of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* is its radical separation of the denotational sign (qua sign) from the material world. This conception of the sign has endured not just because of the effectiveness of Saussure's own formulation, but probably also because it was consonant with ideas already having a long history in the Western intellectual tradition—most particularly, the separation of mind from body.¹ It was also consonant with emerging views in American anthropology and linguistics at the time. The Boasian concern for the independence of linguistic form from race and culture (given the technological emphasis common in conceptions of culture in the early years of this century) similarly led many scholars to promote the autonomy of linguistics as a discipline and to turn their attention away from the political and economic conditions of speech. Although the Boasians and their descendants included major figures and schools who focused on relationships between language and culture, they did so largely by defining culture in terms of knowledge and ideas. The obverse side of this tradition is represented by those anthropologists and other scholars who, in studying a material and political economy, ignored or played down the study of language, and sometimes even saw themselves as aligned against the "idealists" or "culturalists" who drew on linguistic models and verbal data.

Recent years, however, have seen some uneasiness with this dichotomy, and some attempts at rapprochement. Within linguistics, the consideration of language use and context has reached out to the material and historical conditions of linguistic performance. Thus, for example, linguists like William Labov portray speech as varying according to speakers' socioeconomic class and other affiliations relating to economic and political interest. The implication is that the class connotations of variants influence the direction of change in the linguistic system. From a more sociological point of view, we see in some quarters a new or renewed concern with ideology, including its linguistic articulation, in the control of material production and distribution (for example, Rossi-Landi 1983). Still, in these views, however much the world of ideas and the world of goods may influence each other, language remains firmly locked in the former—the world of ideas. Linguistic signs stand for aspects of the marketplace; they influence it but are not of it.

Although the classic Saussurean conception of language segregates the linguistic sign from the material world, this paper shows linguistic phenomena playing many roles in political economy. Linguistic signs may refer to aspects of an exchange system; differentiated ways of speaking may index social groups in a social division of labor; and linguistic "goods" may enter the marketplace as objects of exchange. These aspects of language are not mutually exclusive, but (instead) may coincide in the same stretch of discourse. Illustrations are drawn primarily from a rural Wolof community in Senegal. It is argued that linguistic signs are part of a political economy, not just vehicles for thinking about it. Only a conception of language as multifunctional can give an adequate view of the relations between language and the material world, and evade a false dichotomy between "idealists" and "materialists." [language, political economy, sociolinguistics, semiotic theory, Senegal]

Language has more roles to play in a political economy than these. And, problematic though the term “political economy” may be in some respects,² it may offer clues as to what those roles are. To recognize that the study of economy must include institutions, practices, and values, as well as goods—and that the values and interests governing much of its operation necessarily involve political processes and relations, not just the autonomous flow of markets—is to begin to move beyond the dichotomy that excludes linguistic phenomena from the economic realm. The allocation of resources, the coordination of production, and the distribution of goods and services, seen (as they must be) in political perspective, involve linguistic forms and verbal practices in many ways—as this paper will demonstrate.

The other side of the problem, and the one more central to my discussion, lies in our conception of language. In linguistic anthropology a fruitful approach began with the work of the anthropologically oriented sociolinguists Hymes and Gumperz, with their attention to speaking as a socially and culturally constructed activity. This school’s significance for the problem of language’s relationship with political economy might not be obvious from a cursory glance at some of its early texts, since the early years of the “ethnography of speaking” sometimes tended to focus on cognitive questions (for example, the concept of communicative competence) and to emphasize ideas about speaking as part of a larger, cultural system of ideas, rather more than the verbal acts themselves. But while these initial emphases were not inconsistent with the relegation of linguistics to an “idealist” camp, the shift toward a concern with speaking as a social activity opened the way to a more productive conception of relations among language, culture, and society—and, from there, the way beyond the materialist/idealist dichotomy.³

The present paper builds upon that base. It also draws upon recent conceptions of a semiotics inspired as much by Peirce as by Saussure (see Mertz and Parmentier 1985; Silverstein 1980, 1984), for we need to conceive of linguistic phenomena, and the functions of the linguistic sign, more broadly than in the usual structuralist readings of Saussure if we are to move beyond the materialist/idealist conundrum. As I have suggested above, we also need conceptions of economy and of value that are comprehensive enough to include linguistic resources and verbal activities. Toward that end, in this paper I consider a case where linguistic objects and performances are exchanged for cash and goods—a case where language’s involvement in an economy is perhaps most direct. This is a type of economic function of linguistic phenomena that, I believe, deserves an attention it has not had. It is, however, only one type of relationship between language and economy, and to be properly understood it needs to be compared with others.

Part I of this paper, therefore, lays that groundwork: it summarizes and compares some views of the relations between linguistic phenomena and economy (best thought of as political economy). I shall lay out a range of possibilities as to what those relations can be. Part II will explore a more specific topic: a comparative economy of compliments. Ethnographic illustrations in the paper derive largely from my own fieldwork in West Africa (Senegal). As Part II emphasizes, among other things the Senegalese case presents compliments that are paid for in cash—an example of linguistic phenomena as objects of economic exchange.

A major purpose of these discussions is to show that the roles language and speech can play in a political economy are not mutually exclusive. Even though some of these “roles” correspond to views already articulated in the linguistic and sociological literature, views that are sometimes seen as competing, what they actually represent are coexisting functions of language. Rather than rival theories or separate sets of ethnographic cases, they concern different dimensions of language use. Because of language’s semiotic complexity (its multiple levels of patterning, and the multifunctional nature of the linguistic sign), there are multiple possibilities for its relationship with a material world. All the types of linkage between linguistic phenomena and political economy mentioned in Part I could be found coexisting in the same community—even in the same verbal performances, as we shall see in Part II.

In outlining language's many relationships with the material world, my object is not to claim it for a "materialist" camp, or to attack the materialist/idealist dichotomy merely by inverting it. Indeed, I argue that cultural systems of ideas are crucial to an understanding of language's full range of roles in a political economy. Language is a complex social fact that can be looked at from many angles, including the economic. It is only by appreciating language's complexity that we can transcend the conundrum.

I. types of linkage between linguistic phenomena and political economy

The linkages compared here can be distinguished in several ways: according to what sign-function they emphasize (denotational reference, indexicality, and so on); according to what kind of linguistic and social diversity they encompass; and according to how they connect language with the social division of labor—as its instrument, as its index, or as part of its substance. That is, does linguistic diversity impede social cooperation? Does the variety of verbal behaviors merely index social groups, divisions, or roles formed on mainly nonverbal bases, or is the variety of verbal performance a precondition for (and thus a defining characteristic of) the social division of labor itself—as the practices constituting a social role, or as the objects of economic activity?

As I suggested earlier, the notion that signs may have an economic and political dimension is hardly new. Nor are most of the extant statements on the subject inherently faulty. They are, however, incomplete. Some reduce language to only one of its functions, for example referential propositionality.⁴ Some describe an indexical relationship but give little account of it. And most omit a consideration of linguistic phenomena as possible *objects of exchange*—exchanged against what we consider to be material objects, not only against other linguistic signs.

propositionality: signs denote objects and activities in the material world The first kind of relation between language and economy is the most familiar one: linguistic signs denote objects, the natural world, and economic skills and activities. They label persons and groups; and they refer to, and make predications about, the forces of production and the coordination of efforts. Because signs refer to the external world, a society's productive efforts can be organized and a division of labor becomes possible.

In discussing this referential function of language and its communicative implications, however, many writers both in linguistics and in the social sciences have done more than merely elaborate on these statements. Instead, some have assumed that referential communication is the *only* function of language, and that language must be uniform in order for referential communication to work. They assume, therefore, that a social division of labor depends on linguistic homogeneity, or at least is facilitated by it. Bloomfield wrote, for example:

In the ideal case, within a group of people who speak to each other, each person has at his disposal the strength and skill of every person in the group. The more these persons differ as to special skills, the wider a range of power does each one person control. Only one person needs to be a good climber, since he can get fruit for all the rest; only one needs to be a good fisherman, since he can supply the others with fish. *The division of labor, and, with it, the whole working of human society, is due to language* [1933:24, italics in the original].⁵

Notice that this discussion of the "ideal" case envisions a diversity of skills in the socioeconomic realm but not in the linguistic: "Obviously the value of language [for social cooperation] depends upon people's using it in the same way" (1933:29). Homogeneity in linguistic usage is assumed necessary to ensure referential communication. Utterances *refer* to economic skills, to their realization in acts and events, and to their coordination. Thus Bloomfield's conception of language's role in a social division of labor rests entirely on the referential function.

It would be unjust to Bloomfield to suggest that he never acknowledged the existence of diversity in linguistic skills or performances within a speech community. Indeed, he paid more

attention to this than did many other scholars of his day and later (see Hymes 1967). But the rubrics under which he considered diversity—as material to eliminate from his science of language, or as relevant only to historical processes such as “intimate borrowing”—are inimical to any serious sociolinguistic view. For the most part he saw linguistic diversity as incidental to social and regional boundaries, or as contingent upon them. The product of “lines of weakness” in communication, diversity (for him) interferes with shared reference, and thus with economic cooperation or any other aspect of community. The “literary genius” (Bloomfield 1933:46) is the only figure he mentions whose social position is actually constituted by special linguistic skills.⁶

This picture of linguistic homogeneity as basic to communication and hence to social coordination is a familiar one—as are some of the critiques of it—and I do not want to dwell on it at length.⁷ Only two further remarks are worth making here. First: although some aspects of the picture have been condemned, it has not been thrown out altogether. Sociolinguists like Hymes and Gumperz have attacked Bloomfield’s (and Chomsky’s) portrayal of the homogeneous speech community, and they replace it with a notion of the organization of linguistic diversity; but they do not wholly abandon the view that social coordination is facilitated if the parties to it share some common code. Instead, Gumperz and Hymes shift the emphasis to *interpretation*, as what is shared, rather than performance. In this way referential accuracy can be preserved under multilingual (or multi-varietal) conditions, although denotational reference is not the only function of language sociolinguists envisage.

Second: much investigation remains to be done on just *how* language facilitates coordination of a social division of labor. For example, within the linguistic system the study of directives (requests and commands) is especially relevant, because it concerns the verbal management of the flow of goods and services in an economy. The few studies we have of directives in social and cultural context suggest that, in conspicuously task-oriented situations, speech coordinating the tasks is often reduced and simple compared to speech of other kinds, or speech in other settings.⁸ (The reduction and “simplicity” of linguistic form in pidgins and trade languages originating in labor or market settings might be relevant also.) Another, more sociological aspect of linguistic involvement in coordinating a division of labor concerns how people participate in organizational discussions. For instance, a single spokesperson may represent a group and carry out the communicative tasks necessary for its coordination with other groups.⁹ In short, coordinating a material division of labor does not universally *require* a very complex system of signs held in common among all coordinated parties.

However, to the extent that a code is held in common, or at least that a semantic system is, it may also facilitate cooperation—or at least co-optation—in an indirect way: by incorporating an ideology that supports a particular socioeconomic system. The lexicon labeling social groups and economic activities, and perhaps also a system of metaphoric constructions and semantically generative principles, would presumably be the main places in the referential structure to look for this.

indexicality: signs index social groups, categories, and situations entering into the relations of production

I turn now to the second type of relation between signs and political economy—to a view that has become familiar to us under the rubric of sociolinguistics: a view of the speech community as an organization of linguistic diversity, having a repertoire of ways of speaking that are indexically associated with social groups, roles, or activities.¹⁰ In other words, there is a diversity on the linguistic plane that indexes a social diversity. Studies of correlations of this sort, especially as social dialectology, have become commonplace. Less common is any attempt to explain the correlation—why a *particular* linguistic variety should mark a particular social group, except for reasons of external historical contingency, such as the demographic one of migration of ethnic groups speaking different languages. Indeed, most of these studies either state or imply that the social diversity is formed independently from its lin-

guistic marking: for example, Labov's use of an already-existing sociological survey of the Lower East Side that provided a 10-point index of socioeconomic class, based mainly on occupation and income.

Among all these cases and their correlations, what kinds of distinctions might be useful? One possibility has been to distinguish dialects from registers—that is, to distinguish codes associated with persons and groups from codes associated with situations. This classification makes a convenient starting point, but it becomes complicated when—as is so frequently the case—a variety historically associated with one social group is adopted by another to mark a social situation. Similarly, Labov's studies of speech styles and socioeconomic class have shown how the type of linguistic variation that signals class also signals differences in style (thus, situation), in one and the same sociolinguistic process (Labov 1972).¹¹

Another approach has been to characterize "types of linguistic communities," distinguished according to degrees of internal differentiation. In an early paper by this title ("Types of Linguistic Communities," 1962) Gumperz proposed that language distance among codes in a repertoire is correlated with degrees of social complexity—social differentiation internal to the community—in an evolutionary scheme ranging from bands through "larger tribal groups" to modern urban-industrial societies (1971[1962]:105). Gumperz (private communication) no longer subscribes to this scheme and its evolutionary implications. He had suggested it at a time when (as he noted, pp. 104–105) "reliable cross-cultural information on speech behavior [was] almost nonexistent." Counterexamples now abound: compare the studies of urban social dialectology in the United States and Britain, where "language distance" between social classes consists largely in phonetic detail, with cases such as the Vaupés region in the northwest Amazon, a small-scale egalitarian social system where mutually unintelligible languages are associated with descent-group-like units in a network of marriage alliances.

Although I too discard this particular evolutionary hypothesis, a valuable aspect of the 1962 paper was its attempt to draw some explanatory link between the form of the social division of labor and the nature of its linguistic indices—in contrast to correlational studies that assume the relationship is entirely arbitrary, or entirely external to the linguistic system. With this problem in view I think it is still useful to look at the topology of linguistic differentiation and social differentiation, and to pay attention to the kind of linguistic phenomena involved. For "language distance" let us substitute some other properties of codes: their *discreteness* and their *autonomy* from other codes in a communicative system. In other words, the question is how functionally independent of one another they are, regardless of their genetic relationship and structural comparability. This might allow us to compare several kinds of sociolinguistic systems: (1) systems where the socially indexing linguistic alternants form a set of discrete usages, versus systems where they are gradient (for example, multilingualism versus differences in vowel height). This contrast concerns the alternants' linguistic form.¹² (2) Systems where the socially indexing alternate varieties are limited to a narrow semantic range, or a set of topically specific items (as with some kinds of respect vocabularies), versus varieties that can apply over a wide referential range (such as dialects differing mainly in phonetics). This contrast concerns the extent to which the socially indexing variety is simultaneously involved with the referential function. (3) Systems where the relevant codes are autonomous (at least potentially), in the sense that they can be independently described or characterized, versus systems where some codes can only be defined relative to other codes (for example, by the addition of a surface-level rule, as with Pig Latin and many other play languages, and also the gender-linked codes of some American Indian languages).

Where these alternants index social groups and roles, I would suggest that their contrasts might have some connection with a cultural ideology of role relations—such as, whether the roles they mark are thought of as essentially autonomous, defined independently of one another, or as dependent and complementary; whether a role is thought to be part of a person's basic identity, thus applying to all situations and governing what other roles he/she may take

on; and whether, in principle, the roles (or groups) are exclusive and sharply bounded, as opposed to allowing degrees of participation, or mobility and shifting among them (see Goodenough 1965; Nadel 1957).

A good example of the kinds of cases we might look at in this light would be “antilanguages” (Halliday 1976): argots spoken by groups (or in roles) culturally defined as opposing, or inverting, prevailing norms—such as thieves, prisoners, and revolutionaries. As Halliday points out, the linguistic phenomena characterizing these codes cannot be accounted for simply by the need for secrecy or for group boundary markers, although those needs are present. Instead, the codes’ origin in *counter-societies* is reflected in many aspects of their linguistic form, for instance in their elaboration of lexicon and metaphor relevant to their special activities and their attitudes toward the normative society, and in their frequent use of formal inversions and reversals, such as metathesis. Also significant is their conspicuous avoidance and violation of forms recognized as “standard” (consider, for example, Reisman’s [1974] description of “contrapuntal” speaking in Antigua as a counter to conventions of orderly turn-taking associated with the social forms of white colonial society and its heirs; see also Kochman 1972). These anti-languages are clearly not autonomous codes, then, although the normative codes on which they depend may be. The anti-language is not, and has never been, anyone’s native tongue, nor are all its formal characteristics simply arbitrary. Both functionally and formally it is derived from the normative code, just as its speakers define their social role in opposition to the normative society.

The language (and culture) of gender, in different societies, might be another suitable set of cases, some perhaps even showing the characteristics of “antilanguages” (in cases where sex roles are culturally conceived of as antagonistic). The question is whether the forms of speaking associated with males and females reflect, in some way, cultural conceptions of their social identities, in relation to each other and in relation to other kinds of statuses an individual may hold.¹³

My point is that indexical correlations between realms of linguistic differentiation and social differentiation are not wholly arbitrary. They bear some relationship to a cultural system of ideas about social relationships, including ideas about the history of persons and groups. I do not mean that linguistic variation is simply a diagram of some aspect of social differentiation—as correlational studies often in effect suggest—but that there is a dialectic relationship mediated by a culture of language (and of society).

As a more detailed example, an ethnographic case from West Africa illustrates these suggestions about code discreteness and autonomy.¹⁴ Among rural Wolof of Senegal, there is a series of ranked, endogamous occupational groups, called “castes” in the ethnographic literature on the region. As I have described (Irvine 1975, 1978b, 1982), caste differences are culturally associated with differences in speech style. A style connected with high rank (*waxu géér*,¹⁵ “noble speech”) contrasts with a style connected with low rank (*waxu gewel*, “griot speech,” so named after the bardic caste which in some respects is said to epitomize low-ranking groups). Linguistically, the phenomena that most conspicuously distinguish the two speech styles are gradient in form and/or application: prosodic differences, such as pitch, loudness, and speed of talk; and the proportional use of emphatic particles and parallel and/or repetitive constructions. The prosodic phenomena in particular can only be defined relative to one another. There is no pitch frequency that absolutely marks a voice as high-ranking or low-ranking, only relatively low or high pitch. The two speech styles are *complementary*, mirror-images diverging from a neutral middle ground to the extent that a social situation defines differences in social rank as relevant.

Contrast this complementarity in Wolof speech styles, then, with the speech of another “caste” group, the Lawbé (Woodworkers). A semi-nomadic population said to have migrated into Wolof territory from a Pulaar-speaking region to the north, the Lawbé are bilingual: they speak Wolof during their temporary visits in Wolof villages (during which they are hired by

villagers to cut down trees and carve wooden utensils from them), but they speak Pulaar in their encounters with Pulaar-speakers (the similarly semi-nomadic cattle-herding Peul and the sedentary Tukolor). Wolof villagers claim that the Lawbé also speak Pulaar among themselves, and that their command of that language shows they are “not Wolof.”

Given the dearth of published studies of the Lawbé (and I have not closely observed them myself), it is not clear *what* they speak among themselves—whether what the Wolof claim about them is true or, if true, whether it holds for all Lawbé groups or only some of them. What does seem to be clear, however, is that Wolof villagers assign the Lawbé a different ethnic origin and a separate history, to match their control of a separate language, Pulaar. These same Wolof villagers also describe the Wolof system of caste occupations, its associated symbolism, and so on, as if it were complete without Woodworkers—that is, as if Woodworkers were simply a late, tacked-on addition to an already autonomous, self-sufficient social system. In contrast, they describe nobles and griots as complementary ranks such that neither could exist without the other. Without nobles, or without griots, there would be no Wolof caste system at all.

Now, it is probably true that the Lawbé, or at least some Lawbé, are descendants of migrants from a historically separate system to the north, and that their linguistic behavior, as compared with Wolof nobles and griots, is the result of historical facts. But this cannot be the whole story, because historical documents attest that there used also to be Wolof Woodworkers, called by a different name (*seeñ*), and taking their place on lists of Wolof caste occupations.¹⁶ So I would suggest that Wolof villagers’ ideas about the history of Woodworkers and their place in an overall set of caste roles have at least partly shifted to match their linguistic behavior and their residential marginality, in a broader cultural scene that ideologically links language differences with historical autonomy (and with regional boundaries rather than caste boundaries).

In this case, we see two kinds of code/role relationships: the speech styles of nobles and griots, nonautonomous styles that can only be defined relative to one another, like their speakers’ social roles; and the separate language, Pulaar, whose speakers are culturally assumed to have an autonomous history matching their autonomous code.¹⁷ There is an iconic link here between the *kind* of linguistic differentiation and the *kind* of social relationship it marks, at least in the cultural ideology.

Two other languages present on the Wolof sociolinguistic scene—Arabic and French—can also be considered in the same light. These languages are of interest because they are relevant to the connections between a rural Wolof village and the national and international systems that impinge upon it, and also because we can see these connections mediated, again, by the ideology of language just described. For Wolof villagers, Arabic is the language of Islam, the dominant religion among Wolof for many centuries. Although villagers are well aware that Arabic is also the language of the modern Arab nations, including neighboring Mauritania, for the majority of the community the religious connotations predominate and a form of classical Arabic is the only variety of that language they know.¹⁸ Indeed, many villagers, of various castes and age groups, know some Arabic;¹⁹ in contrast, far fewer people know (or admit that they know) French, the language of colonialism, despite the long-established presence of French-speaking schools, radio, and so on. The level of acquisition of French, especially before the 1970s, has been low compared with its availability in terms of exposure and opportunities for systematic instruction.

From the linguist’s point of view, of course, Arabic and French are equally unrelated to any form of Wolof; the three are historically, and denotationally, autonomous. But some Wolof villagers have not always seen them that way. In 1970 I was told that Arabic “is really Wolof underneath, at heart. . . . Only the pronunciation is different.” French, on the other hand, was said to be quite alien, even formed in a different part of the body. Thus the local ideology of language was tending to assimilate Arabic into the repertoire of “Wolof” linguistic varieties because of its functional integration into social life, while French remained (in that view) a

“foreign” language belonging properly only to non-Wolof, and not readily acquirable by true Wolof ethnics, except perhaps for persons of low rank.²⁰

Since local ideology linked the nature of linguistic differentiation (between Arabic, Wolof, and French) with the nature of the social relationships and activities it indexed, ideas about language were likely to shift if there were some major change in the social situation. It is not surprising, then, that the advent of Senegalese independence, by altering some aspects of the political and economic connection with France, eventually affected villagers’ ideas about French, now the official language of the Senegalese state.²¹ While no one has told me that French “is really Wolof,” by 1984 it was apparent that many people who used to consider French unlearnable and unspeakable had changed their minds.

Note, however, that the linguistic ideology whose modifications are described here is no simple reflex of the change of government or even of a shift in economic opportunities. The attitudes toward language in general (and French and Arabic in particular) found in this rural Wolof locality differ from those in some other areas of Senegal, where (for example) French sometimes penetrated earlier, even though instructional opportunities were fewer and economic opportunities no greater. What we see here is a particular rationalization of a particular local experience, a rationalization informed by a framework of other ideas about language and about the kinds of people who speak in certain ways.

It should be clear, therefore, why this discussion of indexical values of linguistic phenomena, and the topology of linkages between codes and social relationships, does not propose a direct analogy between linguistic and social differentiation that would claim to predict the one from the other. To attempt such prediction would be to ignore the role of linguistic ideology—the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests—which is a crucial mediating factor. And I should also emphasize that the cultural system (including the linguistic ideology) is a *mediating* factor, not necessarily a causative one. In some cases it may merely rationalize a set of sociolinguistic differences, rather than shape them. The usual assumption that some historical contingency of a nonlinguistic sort, such as migration, has brought about a present-day sociolinguistic scene may often be true enough; but it is not all we need to consider. The cultural reformulation of that scene (its persons, groups, and codes) according to some rationalizing criterion is also relevant, perhaps sometimes inventing as much history as it reflects.²²

incorporation: linguistic phenomena are included in the economy as practices and as commodities

One of the reasons correlational sociolinguistic studies fall short of revealing the full involvement of linguistic phenomena in political economy concerns the fact that forms of speaking are not always merely an index of some independently generated social differentiation but may indeed *effect* social differentiation. The division of linguistic labor is not just an analogy with the division of labor in society, or even a homology (as some have said; see Rossi-Landi 1983), but, in some ways, part and parcel of it. That is, while linguistic phenomena may denote the forces of production, and they may index the relations of production, they may also be among those forces, and they may be objects of economic activity. I turn now to that “communicative economy,” to borrow a term used by Hymes (1974:4, 26) to describe the organization of a society’s system of communicative (not just linguistic) institutions, vehicles, and contexts. In this view, verbal skills and performances are among the resources and activities forming a socioeconomic system; and the relevant knowledge, talents, and use-rights are not evenly, randomly, or fortuitously distributed in a community (see Bourdieu 1977, 1982; Hymes 1971, 1973). The fact of uneven distribution is itself economically relevant.

verbal skills as economic resources (and as practices constituting a social role) One way in which linguistic goods enter the marketplace is simply as a consequence of indexical

correlations like those noted above. This process is discussed at length by Bourdieu (1977, 1982), who sees it as a process of “conversion” between a “linguistic marketplace” and a material one. In a class-based society, he points out, where social classes and class-linked activities correlate with linguistic variation, the linguistic varieties acquire differential value that translates into economic value. Access to high position and prestigious social circles may require, or seem to require, the ability to speak or write in a prestigious language, variety, or style, whose acquisition becomes the focus of economic activity.²³ People who fail to acquire the high variety, such as a national standard, at their mother’s knee must pay for instruction later on, whether through tutoring, how-to books (more often how-not-to), newspaper columns about “proper speaking,” or state subvention through the school system.

Bourdieu’s discussion focuses on the European industrial nations, especially France, and on the acquisition of standard language among other indices of membership in the bourgeoisie. Much of the argument applies elsewhere too, however, even in pre- or less-industrialized settings. Any case of diglossia, or a case where there are linguistic forms that (for at least some of the population) can only be acquired through special education, will be somewhat parallel. In all these cases code acquisition—actually, second-code acquisition—is surrounded by economic activity because of the perceived value, and distributional scarcity, of the linguistic variety to be acquired.

Now, while Bourdieu’s view of the “linguistic marketplace” is clearly useful to our inquiry, it is not without complications. For example, it tends to reduce language to presuppositional indexicality and to derive language’s role in political economy entirely therefrom. Little room is left for any statement made in one of the available varieties to make a difference to the political and economic situation—to be anything other than a symptom of it.²⁴ As Woolard (1985) points out, moreover, Bourdieu’s statements on the value of class-linked varieties in the linguistic market, and his emphasis on the institutional domination of a language, are oversimplified. Questions remain as to whether the linguistic market is ever fully integrated, and whether the population that does not control a dominant variety regards its domination as legitimate (1985:740–741).

These questions about integration and legitimacy are especially relevant to Third World situations and the link between local sociolinguistic systems and the languages of national and international relations.²⁵ Senegal’s “linguistic market,” for example, is far from integrated. The political dominance of French was long acknowledged in Wolof communities without being considered legitimate, while, in contrast, members of other ethnic groups often favored French as the alternative to Wolof domination. Within the particular Wolof village described here, changes in the legitimacy of French have already been mentioned; but even though French is no longer resisted as much as before, differences in the legitimacy of French and Arabic show up in the economics of their acquisition. Economic activity surrounding acquisition of Arabic takes place at the grass-roots level, where villagers pay for their children’s (and sometimes their own) instruction, while economic activity directed toward the acquisition of French—dominant but far less legitimate, in the local view—takes place at the level of the state.²⁶

Despite complications, however, it is evident that linguistic skills can be economic resources, and even if some skills are merely status markers their acquisition may be the focus of economic activity. Still, as regards how linguistic phenomena can be economic resources, grammatical competence in a high-valued code is not the only aspect of language to look at. We must also consider skills in the appropriate use of language and in the management of discourse—skills that fall outside “grammatical competence” as usually defined, and that do not depend on the differentiation of a set of codes. Many social roles and statuses are at least partly defined in terms of discourse management: teacher, lawyer, or psychiatrist, for example. Even where verbal skills are not crucial to the performance of some particular social role they may be crucial to gaining access to it; see studies of gatekeeping interviews by Gumperz and his associates (Gumperz 1982; see also Erickson and Shultz 1979).

Among rural Wolof, skills in discourse management are essential to the role of the griot (bard), whose traditional profession involves special rhetorical and conversational duties such as persuasive speechmaking on a patron's behalf, making entertaining conversation, transmitting messages to the public, and performing the various genres of praise-singing. Not everyone who might be born with the appropriate raw talent can become a professional bard—for that one must be born into the griot caste. But within that category, the most talented and skillful griots earn high rewards and are sought after by would-be patrons, such as village-level political leaders (or those who seek leadership positions). High-ranking political leaders do not engage in these griot-linked forms of discourse themselves; to do so would be incompatible with their “nobility” and qualifications for office. But their ability to recruit and pay a skillful, reputable griot to speak on their behalf is essential, both to hold high position and to gain access to it in the first place.

Note that political systems in other African societies (and societies elsewhere in the world too, for that matter) commonly include spokesperson roles, such as the Ashanti “linguist” who speaks on behalf of the king. In contemporary states public relations personnel, press secretaries, and professionals in the communications industry are statuses somewhat resembling these traditional spokesperson statuses and in Senegal, at least, have often drawn their personnel from among the bardic castes.²⁷

This point—that some social roles are constituted by discourse management—has been made often by Hymes and others, and I shall not belabor it, even though it is important to our understanding of political processes and access to political positions. I shall just emphasize that its implications reach beyond the cognitive (questions of communicative competence), to include how we conceive of economy. Thus, one must consider the place of verbal skills and rights in a system of transactions that includes both material and nonmaterial goods, services, and values. It is perhaps not a question of looking at a “communicative” economy, therefore, or at some sort of linkage between a sociolinguistic system and an (independently conceived) economic system, but, instead, just at an economy, from which the verbal must not be excluded.

Indeed, linguistic elements and utterances may themselves be goods and services, exchangeable against other goods and services, including material goods and cash. The next sections shift to this focus.

authentications: signs accompany commodities and give them value In a 1975 paper, “The Meaning of Meaning,” Hilary Putnam presents what he calls a “division of linguistic labor.” The discussion turns in several ways on the reference of terms for natural kinds, such as *elm* and *gold*. Putnam writes:

We could hardly use such words as “elm” and “aluminum” if no one possessed a way of recognizing elm trees and aluminum metal; but not everyone to whom the [linguistic] distinction is important has to be able to make the distinction [between the things or substances]. . . . Gold is important for many reasons: it is a precious metal, it is a monetary metal, it has symbolic value (it is important to most people that the “gold” wedding ring they wear *really* consist of gold and not just *look* gold), etc. . . . Everyone to whom gold is important for any reason has to *acquire* the word “gold”; but he does not have to acquire the *method of recognizing* if something is or is not gold. He can rely on a special subclass of speakers. [These are people who have the job of] *telling whether or not something is really gold* [1975:227–228; italics in the original].

In other words, these people are experts whose knowledge (for example, knowledge of some test for telling whether a metal is really gold), while not itself linguistic, nevertheless renders their usage of the term *gold* authoritative. The economic and symbolic value of gold for the wider community depends on this. Any gold object circulating in the community must be accompanied by some convincing testimonial to its being authentically gold, if it is to command its full value. The testimonial may be oral or written (for example, when the state stamps its insignia on a gold coin).

Most often, we are probably relying not just on a single testimonial statement, but on a *chain of authentication*, a historical sequence by which the expert's attestation—and the label (expression) that conventionally goes along with it—is relayed to other people.²⁸ For example, I claim that the necklace I wear is made of gold because I acquired it from a trustworthy person who said it was, and who in turn acquired it from a "reliable" dealer, who in turn acquired it from a reliable source, and so on back to a point at which some expert actually did make the tests that enabled him or her to declare this metal to be gold. Thus my valued commodity (the necklace) is accompanied, not just by one special kind of statement (the authoritative testimonial), but by two: the authoritative and the derivatively authoritative (reportive—all the statements after the expert's, in the chain of authentication).

This kind of process applies not just to gold, but to any exchangeable item invested with social value, where only an "expert" can tell if it "really" is what it purports to be. Such items include not only material objects, but also verbal items like magic spells or other texts. Just *what* is invested with what sort of value, and which persons get into the position to speak authoritatively about the value, must vary from one society to another. What this process suggests, however, is that perhaps *any* system of prestations and counter-prestations—that is, an economy (in a broad sense)—will necessarily include authoritative statements as part of the exchange system. When I pay for the gold necklace, I am paying not only for the necklace itself but also for the chain of authoritative statements that accompanies it. And if I take it to be appraised, I am paying for the statement alone.

utterances as commodities exchangeable for material goods The above discussion of testimonials focused on statements accompanying an object of exchange, statements necessary if the object is to have its full exchange-value. I turn now to cases where a verbal statement is the object of exchange. Although the appraisal of a piece of jewelry meets this criterion in a way, it only does so because it is part of a longer series of transactions whose object is the jewelry, not the statement. What we consider now are verbal "goods" and practices having value in their own right. Thus, a view of economy that can incorporate verbal practices and products will be useful for understanding systems where linguistic texts can become alienable property, and systems where some forms of speaking are institutionalized and receive financial reward.

What the verbal goods and services are, and where they enter an overall economy, will vary from one sociocultural system to another. Presumably, *any* aspect of a speech act might, separately or in combination with other aspects, be the source of its economic value in a particular system. In any given case we might ask: What aspects of the verbal performance bear the value? Who holds rights in them? Who benefits? Who pays—and in what coin?

For example, magic spells may be as much the property of a community (as with some Trobriand magic [Malinowski 1978 (1935)]) or lineage (as with some Wolof spells) as gardening land is. According to Malinowski (1978 [1935]:64), however, although the community "owns" the major form of gardening magic and has the right to benefit from its application, only one person, the *towosi*, has the right and the ability to perform community gardening spells, though he may delegate the office to a junior relative. All members of the community who expect to benefit from the performance must contribute payments for it—just as they pay for other kinds of specialist services, material or otherwise.²⁹

In its capacity as community property, Trobriand gardening magic is apparently inalienable; but verbal properties may be alienable too. Silverstein (n.d. a) describes proper names in Northwest Coast societies as "investment property" and "heirloom antiques," alienable during the lifetime of a bearer. People used to try to accumulate as many names as possible and to control their bestowal (on themselves or on others). Sometimes the bearer of a name would vacate it, bestowing it on some junior relative. Acquiring a new name involved a ceremony in which an audience assembled and called the new bearer by it—receiving, in exchange, large quantities

of material valuables. As Silverstein writes: "The wealth thus constitutes a back-prestation in response to the audience's having come and called the new bearer by that name, this act effectively validating the claim to it as being at a certain ranked ordinality with respect to their names (n.d.a).

Consider, too, the case of "the sick who do not speak" (Sansom 1982). Among Aboriginal Australians of Darwin fringe camps, a person who has undergone a major episode of illness may not verbally recount the story of the illness.³⁰ The right to tell the "sickness story" is given over, instead, to the persons who "helped him through"—in partial recompense for the debt arising from their care. The story, Sansom argues, is a bit of property exchanged against caregiving, in a community that places little store in material investments.

Although Darwin camp members treat the telling of "sickness stories" as a privilege, in other societies some kinds of talk may be treated as a burden one pays someone else to undertake. The high-ranking Wolof noble pays a griot to make a public announcement for him, because loud public speaking is something he would be "ashamed" and "unskillful" at doing.³¹ On many public occasions the noble whispers briefly in the griot's ear, and it is then the griot who volubly and elaborately performs the speech for the audience. In this case, then, the act of public utterance is a service for which the griot is paid in cash.

These examples could be multiplied. It seems preferable, however, to explore one case in greater depth. Accordingly, the following section offers a more extended example of this kind of relation between language and economy. It concerns a particular type of verbal goods—statements of praise and compliment—and the verbal services of the flatterer, among village Wolof as compared with contemporary middle-class Americans. But while one of my purposes is to examine some verbal objects of exchange, the material I present also reflects other linkages between language and political economy, especially the indexical relation discussed earlier. Thus the example illustrates the fact that language is always multifunctional—and its relation to economy is, therefore, manifold.

II. the multifunctionality of linguistic signs: a Wolof example

Recently there appeared a cartoon in the *New Yorker* magazine, entitled "Flattery getting someone somewhere" (M. Stevens, 28 July 1986). "You're looking great, Frank!" says a man in business suit and necktie to another, perhaps older, man with glasses and bow tie. "Thanks, Chuck! Here's five dollars!" Bow Tie replies, handing over the cash. The joke depends, of course, on the notion that the exchange of compliments for cash should not be done so directly and overtly. We all know that Chuck may indeed flatter Frank with a view to getting a raise, or some other eventual reward; but it is quite improper in American society to recognize the exchange formally, with an immediate payment. A compliment should be acknowledged only with a return compliment, or a minimization, or some other verbal "goods." If it is to be taken as "sincere," it is specifically excluded from the realm of material payments.

Some cultural systems do not segregate the economy of compliments from the economy of material transactions and profits, however. It is doubtful, for example, that the cartoon would seem funny to many Senegalese.³² With a few suitable adjustments for local scene, the transfer it depicts is quite ordinary. There is, in fact, a category of persons—the griots—specializing in flattery of certain kinds, among other verbal arts. The income they gain from these activities is immediate and considerable, often amounting to full-time employment for those whose skills include the fancier genres of eulogy.

Let us return to a consideration of the social system in which these transfer, and institutionalized acts of eulogy, occur. As I mentioned earlier, the Wolof (and, indeed, most other Senegalese peoples from the Gambia River north) traditionally had a complex system of social stratification usually called a "caste" system. Though undermined by government policies and

other factors the caste system retains considerable importance on the rural scene, and even on the urban scene too, according to some observers (see, for example, Silla 1966). Thus Wolof society is a hierarchical one in which hierarchy is an explicitly acknowledged value. It is also personalistic, a patronage system where person and position are closely identified. Compliments to the person are directly relevant, therefore, to the construction of high position, political and otherwise.

The lower ranks of rural Wolof society engage in various kinds of activities—agricultural labor, smithing, weaving, and so on—whose product, delivered to their patron, enhances his or her position and role as redistributor.³³ The higher ranks, as patrons, compete among themselves for political position and influence. Access to such positions is supposed to be based on genealogical rank and moral qualifications as well as on one's ability to attract and maintain a large clientship; but ideologically these criteria are almost indistinguishable from one another, for one's moral character, personality, reputation, and ancestry are all considered to be linked.

Verbal activities fit into this local system of production in several ways, most notably as one of the kinds of productive activities low-ranking persons provide for the higher-ranking. Thus verbal praise enhances the reputation and attractiveness of a would-be patron. It is comparable to physical enhancement, such as hairdressing, and requires a similar reward. (Actually, eulogizing and hairdressing are often done by the same people, or at least by members of the same social category, the griots.) Moreover, the griots' performances supposedly—that is, in the ideology of the system—contribute more directly to the system of production and distribution as well, because their liveliness and excitement arouse the addressees to carry out their own allotted role more energetically and enthusiastically. That is, praise directed to a patron stimulates him/her to (re-)distribute largesse more generously, while other kinds of performances, such as the drumming and singing directed to a work party laboring on a patron's behalf, rouse laborers to work more vigorously. Physical aspects of the performance are relevant to how this works, or so informants suggest: the forceful gush of humanly shaped, vibrating air (breath) stimulates the energy of the recipient, just as the air blown from a bellows arouses a fire.

The propositional contents of compliments and praise are of course dependent on a cultural system and the kinds of attributes locally invested with social value. Among rural Wolof, personal beauty is in some respects subordinated to "beauty of birth" (*rafet-juddu*), the subject matter of much of Wolof praise, especially of its most institutionalized form, praise-singing (as the Wolof term *woy* is often translated; praise-oratory might be a better term). I shall examine this oratorical form in more detail in what follows. But note that in doing so I am not departing so far from Chuck and Frank's conversational compliment as it might appear. Wolof conversational compliments are often formulaic praise-utterances derived from, or alluding to, the extended forms of praise-oratory. Thanks for a gift, for example, always includes praise and very frequently draws upon these formulaic expressions, or other allusions to praise-oratory. A difference between full-fledged praise-oratory and its conversational vestiges is that the former are performed only by griots, while the latter may be produced by anyone. But the griots' praise-singing is, for Wolof, a cultural model or prototype for praise-utterance in general.

Indeed, except for compliments between lovers, only this type of compliment is proper.³⁴ Otherwise, anything departing too far from the model is suspect, suggesting an indecent envy or exposing the addressee to the attentions of witches. "Departing too far" means a compliment focusing only on physical appearance or possessions, and uttered by someone of same or higher rank than the addressee. (Neither condition alone would be problematic. Lower-ranking people, like a griot speaking to a noble, may freely comment on appearance and possessions; while a high-ranking person may comment on ancestors and generous deeds.)

Returning, then, to the contents of praise: the content of a griot's praise-song normally focuses on the praiseworthy ancestry of the addressee—the ancestry that qualifies him or her for high rank and has contributed to the character and the physical being he or she is. Although

the performance includes comments explicitly eulogizing particular ancestors (their generosity, strength, rectitude, beauty, great deeds) and the addressee, much of it consists in naming the ancestors and connecting them to kings or village founders or other heroic figures. Merely setting forth the names would be eulogy in itself, a display of the addressee's verbal family heirlooms, as it were. That the most elaborate displays of genealogical eulogy are performed at life-crisis events and family celebrations is only appropriate, therefore, as are outbursts of eulogistic performance at local-level political gatherings. Praise is not limited to those occasions, however, and in fact the shorter forms of eulogy and compliment need no special scheduling to occur.

Since I have described some aspects of praise-singing elsewhere (Irvine 1978a), I shall focus here on just a few relevant matters: some characteristics of praise-singing as a kind of sign. For some of these the Peircean trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol is useful, because it allows us to see praise-singing as a complex semiotic gesture uniting all three types. As icon, praise-singing formally illustrates the roles of laborer and redistributor: the singer is both verbally and physically active, declaiming the praise long and loud, and with energetic, dramatic gestures. Meanwhile the recipient (the high-ranking patron) is silent and motionless, perhaps even hidden from view behind a curtain (depending on the occasion). His/her sole appropriate movement is to hand over the cash that pays for the performance.

These iconic, formal considerations shape several aspects of the linguistic register in which praise-oratory is performed—"griot speech" (*waxu gewel*), as opposed to "noble speech" (*waxu géér*). As I described earlier (and see Irvine 1975), "griot speech" is loud, high-pitched, rapid, verbose, florid, and emphatic, with assorted phonological, morphological, and syntactic devices linked to those characteristics. It is the appropriate style for all expressions of praise and/or thanks, by anyone (griot or not), and for other verbal expressions of rank lower than one's addressee;³⁵ but, as its name implies, it is conventionally associated with griots, as the professional eulogizers who carry the style to an extreme. Thus the speech style of praise is an index of the speaker's (relatively low) rank and social identity. In a larger sense it also indexes the traditional system of ranks and sources of authority, as compared with other sources such as the French-speaking colonial regime and the national state.

Another indexical function, too, links the praise-song's eulogistic and genealogical content to its addressee, at whom the griot dramatically points. That is, the praise-song indexes the praisee (addressee) because it is pointedly directed at him/her. This addressee is also the praise-song's principal referent, however. The praisee is named, and this name, together with the genealogical statements expanding upon and providing background to it, are part of the performance's symbolic dimension. Here it is important that the griot display the patron's genealogy coherently and convincingly, mentioning only persons of good reputation, and linking the patron to famous heroes and to the ancestors of other notables, perhaps even higher-ranking. Should the griot fail to do this—that is, should he state the relationships incoherently, or reveal skeletons (family relationships) the patron would prefer to keep in the closet, or spend so much time on other lineages that he fails to display the patron's own genealogy adequately—the performance will no longer qualify as truly complimentary. Of course, griots may fail in these ways conspicuously and on purpose, if they are unsatisfied with the payment they have been offered.

This mention of payment brings me to the economic value of praise-singing, an aspect of it for which Peirce's trichotomy is no longer particularly illuminating. It is not illuminating because Peirce focuses on the relations between the sign and what it stands for—not on what it may be exchanged for.³⁸ But the praise-song costs, and this aspect of it is crucial. It is one of the unavoidable, large expenses a Wolof notable must incur on his way to attaining political position and maintaining any claim to rank; and, moreover, it is a sign of his ability to pay. During a performance a griot may even display the money he receives, so that all may see and admire the person being praised as a potential patron for their own services. In an important sense, then, the exchange-value of the sign is an understood part of it.

Let us consider what that value rests upon. Wolof praise-songs are a form of property, in that exclusive rights are asserted over them. The rights are of two kinds: rights over the genealogical and historical *content* of the praise-song (it is the patron's genealogy, and in principle at least the griot must obtain permission before performing it for any other addressee); and rights over the *performance* of it. (Rights to perform the long, formal versions of praise-singing accrue only to griots of particular families, although griots may transfer these rights to other griots. In no circumstances may the patron perform "his" [or "her"] own song.)

The value of the performance depends in part on the gloriousness of the content—how praiseworthy the family history really has been, and how important the family has been in political and religious hierarchies—but it depends much more on the skill and reputation of the performing griot. Though even the clumsiest griot receives something for praising a patron, knowledgeable and skillful griots are much in demand and their performances highly paid. This is especially the case when, for example, two nobles from the same lineage are competing for a lineage title and, in the process, for the services of the most famous griots who know their lineage history. And those famous performers, in turn, are careful to keep the supply of trained performers down, in order to keep the price up (as one young griot complained to me).

Thus the complexities of the overall market in which praise-song performances are situated affect their exchange-value (in cash or goods), and are the reason one may indeed, I think, speak of exchange-value here rather than just use-value. Linguistic phenomena are not all limitlessly and publicly available, like fruits on the trees of some linguistic Eden. Some of them are products of a social and sociolinguistic division of labor, and as such they may be exchanged against other products in the economy.

Under what circumstances do utterances or linguistic forms become products exchangeable against other kinds of goods? Perhaps, as material in this paper suggests, when the sign (or some aspect of it) is a scarce good, invested with value—either because knowledge of the relevant linguistic form is unequally distributed, or because performance of it cannot be universally undertaken. That is, performance might be an exclusive right, or it might require time and effort, or other costs to the producer—including, for example, as in the Wolof case, an implication of lower rank (a cost explicitly recognized as requiring remuneration, and carrying the right to receive *largesse*).

In these pages I have only scratched the surface of a comparative economy of compliments and praise, and how they do or do not link up with other forms of transaction in a given society. Moreover, these are certainly not the only kinds of utterances worth looking at as objects of exchange. My purpose, however, was to suggest that the project is worth undertaking—that utterances, and indeed various aspects of linguistic form and its production, *can* be viewed as prestations, and thus as part of a political economy, not just a vehicle for thinking about one.

conclusion

I began by mentioning Saussure and suggesting—as, indeed, it has become fashionable to do—that I would take some post-Saussurean, post-structuralist position, in regard to his segregation of the sign from the material world. Actually, part of this position is not so very novel. Anthropology has a long tradition of looking at the material objects exchanged in a cultural system partly in terms of their sign value. A good example would be Evans-Pritchard's discussion of cattle among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1956). In some circumstances the sign-value of the Nuer ox can be so predominant, and its material substance so irrelevant, that you can substitute a cucumber for it. What I argue for here is, in a way, a parallel treatment of the verbal sign. Ultimately, the goal—which I do not pretend to have reached, though I hope to have moved in its direction—must be a more comprehensive conception of "value," so that the various kinds of sign-values and material values can be seen in their complex integration.

Thus, linguistic forms have relevance for the social scientist not only as part of a world of ideas, but also as part of a world of objects, economic transactions, and political interests. The verbal sign, I have argued, relates to a political economy in many ways: by denoting it; by indexing parts of it; by depicting it (in Peircean terms, the iconic function, illustrated here for Wolof praise-singing); and by taking part in it as an object of exchange. These multiple functions may all co-occur, because they merely reflect the multifunctionality of language in general.

Saussure's segregation of sign-value from the world of material values is linked to his focus on only one of language's functions—its role as vehicle for referential communication. To acknowledge that language has many functions, and therefore that signs relate to the material world in many ways, including as objects of exchange, is important to understanding language's role in a political economy. An opposition between "idealists" and "materialists" that assigns the study of language only to the former is—as social theorists increasingly recognize, on other grounds—a false dichotomy.

notes

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¹See discussions in, for example, Coward and Ellis 1977 and Derrida 1972.

²Unlike political scientists, apparently, many anthropologists make a close connection between the term "political economy" and debates over a Wallerstein-derived world-system approach, on which this paper takes no particular stand. One of the issues in the debate, however, is the degree of importance to be assigned to local social relations and their "culture" (I put the word in quotation marks since some writers contest its applicability). To the extent that anthropological views of culture have been bound up with language, then, this paper contributes to the debate by considering the way we think about relations between linguistic phenomena and the forces of production.

³See Hymes 1961 and 1973.

⁴Those that reduce language to presuppositional indexicality are equally problematic. This criticism, differently worded, has been leveled at the writings of Bourdieu (see Thompson 1984).

⁵Underlying this conception of language's role in social cooperation was Bloomfield's enthusiasm for behaviorist psychology. See his 1931 obituary of the psychologist A. P. Weiss, which draws a more explicit connection between language, its speakers' nervous systems, and cooperation among members of a speech community (1970:237–238).

⁶But see his discussion, in the last chapter of *Language*, of the roles of traditional grammarians, schoolteachers, and administrators as supported by the conventions of linguistic standardization.

⁷For a useful historical summary, see Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968.

⁸As regards the form of directives, this difference in settings is sometimes confused with matters of politeness or rank, I believe. For studies of directives in social and cultural context, see, for example, Ervin-Tripp 1976 and Irvine 1980.

⁹See, for example, Barth 1972 on the political integration of Pathan-speaking social segments into a Baluchi system. Despite the language difference, Barth argues, Pathan segments are easily attached to the Baluchi political hierarchy because a single bilingual spokesman suffices for the communicative needs of the political relationship and its economic arrangements. There is no need for the ordinary Pathan-speaker to convey personal opinions or discuss individual contributions, as (Barth suggests) might be required in a more egalitarian political system, such as is found among other Pathans.

¹⁰"Index" is used here in the Peircean sense of that sign-function in which the sign represents its object by contiguity (as smoke is a sign of fire), rather than by resemblance (as with a picture of a fire) or by rules and conventions (as with the word "fire").

¹¹Although Labov's conception of "style" differs from that of other scholars, the general point—that variation marking groups and variation marking situations appear to be closely linked wherever we have the information to investigate the relationship—still holds, I believe. See Irvine 1985.

¹²A similar contrast, however, might concern categorical versus variable application of a rule.

¹³For a recent discussion of the language and culture of gender see Silverstein 1985. For an extended ethnographic example see Abu-Lughod 1986.

¹⁴Fieldwork was carried out in Senegal in 1970–71, 1975, and (briefly) in 1977 and 1984.

¹⁵The transcription of Wolof expressions is based on the phonemic system developed by the Centre de Linguistique Appliqué de Dakar and officially adopted by the Republic of Senegal in 1971. The system is phonetically fairly transparent: /waxu géér/ = [waxu geer]; /gewel/ = [gewell]; and so on.

¹⁶The relation between *seeñ* and *lawbé* is complex. Yoro Dyao (Rousseau 1929, from a turn-of-the-century manuscript) briefly describes both groups; see also Kobès 1875. Abdoulaye Diop (1981) considers them to have been subcastes, but argues that the *seeñ* were eventually absorbed into a different low-caste category, not into the *lawbé*.

¹⁷That is to say, Pulaar is a language distinct from any form of Wolof, whose existence and form owe nothing to Wolof as far as we know (though the two languages are genetically related), and which has both formal and functional completeness within the main communities of its speakers, the Tukolor and Fula. For *Lawbé*, it is historically and denotationally autonomous, but has an indexical value within the Wolof system.

¹⁸Note that the village from which my description is mainly drawn is far from the Mauritanian border. In Wolof villages further north, or among Wolof-speakers in Mauritania itself, native speakers of Arabic would be much more conspicuous, and the relationship with them would, no doubt, alter the ways their language is thought of by the local Wolof population.

¹⁹Villagers' competence in Arabic is almost entirely passive. They may recite formulaic prayers, and those who know Arabic best read texts and listen to religious speeches on the radio; but they compose nothing.

²⁰The views of Wolof city-dwellers might well have been quite different from this, even at the time. Wolof villagers acknowledged that French was more widely used in town, but they also claimed that city-dwellers were likely to be people of dubious ethnic, caste, and moral background.

²¹Senegal gained its independence from France in 1960. Ties with France remained close, however, and a sizable French population stayed on—including, locally, a community of French technical personnel. For some time after independence, therefore, many villagers apparently still thought of French in colonial frameworks—whence the statements I heard in 1970. In subsequent years the French population in Senegal dropped sharply, especially in rural areas outside the tourist zone.

²²See also Silverstein's (n.d. b) discussion of comments on British regional dialects by the Queen's English Society.

²³Silverstein (n.d.b) calls this "commoditization."

²⁴Again, see Thompson's (1984) critique.

²⁵For a Mexican example involving the autonomy of Mexicano-speaking peasant communities, see Hill 1985.

²⁶The acquisition of varieties of Wolof itself should not be left out of the economic picture, although this part of the linguistic "market" operates in a different way (further evidence, presumably, of the lack of integration of the Senegalese "linguistic market").

²⁷See Silla 1966.

²⁸See Putnam (1975:246) on the transmission of reference, and Kripke 1972 on the transmission of proper names, from performative nomination or "baptism" through subsequent, warranted referential usage.

²⁹See also Weiner 1984.

³⁰The former patient does, however, bear a nonverbal sign of the illness, such as a tic, a scar, or a recurrent cough (Sansom 1982:183).

³¹See Irvine 1975, and Part II below. These attitudes are part of a larger sociolinguistic ideology connecting griots (and the lower ranks in general) with noisy activity and the high ranks with quiet, sometimes inert, solidity.

³²Except insofar as it might seem funny to see Americans or Europeans behaving like griots and their patrons.

³³Though I refer principally to "traditional" activities, and have not space to consider the complexities introduced by contract labor and "modern" trades, patronage and values generated through personalistic networks are important there also.

³⁴Actually, another proper type of compliment focuses on the addressee's religious goodness and piety. In practice, however, these compliments seem usually to merge with the praise-singing type, "goodness" being evidenced by birth and generosity.

³⁵This is something of an oversimplification. In some circumstances a speaker draws on only some features of the register, not others.

³⁶Some scholars consider that what the sign may be exchanged for, and what it stands for, are the same: hence Saussure's analogy between money and language, and the connection drawn between *valeur* and

signification. I believe the equation is problematic, however, particularly as regards the analogy with money. Because money is a system that is maximally structured by exchange-value and minimally by use-value, it makes a tempting analogy for language if one conceives of linguistic signs as those that are maximally structured by denotational sign-value in a system and minimally by any other kind of function. But these forms of “value” may still be distinguished. Moreover, the analogy between money and language may make it difficult to conceive of any other relation between them.

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