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Dans Langage et société 2012/1 No 139 , pages 47 à 66
Éditions Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme

ISSN 0181-4095
ISBN 9782735114214
DOI 10.3917/ls.139.0047
Date de mise en ligne : 02/03/2012

Keeping Ethnography in the Study of Communication

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In the autumn of 1970, shortly after my arrival in the Wolof village in Senegal where I was to spend a year (and to return several times thereafter), I came upon a large gathering of villagers in the central plaza. An inner circle of men, seated under a tall tree, wore the long kaftan or the *grand boubou* (surcoat) that was the usual costume of rural adult men on important occasions, except for one man who was dressed in a uniform-like khaki shirt and trousers. He too was seated. After this khaki-wearer said something I could not overhear, one of the men in a grand boubou stood and shouted, at greater length, to the assembled group. The two men then seemed to alternate turns. I asked my companion, a local resident, what was going on. The seated man, he explained, was the *chef d'arrondissement;* and as for the standing one, "he is transmitting [*jotilé*] the speech of the chef d'arrondissement, so that the townspeople will understand it well. Because he is a *gewel* he can speak up loudly."[1] (As I already knew from the literature, the *gewel* – a type of griot – are a bardic caste, professionals in the arts of speechmaking and communication, among other things.) "Otherwise," he continued, "the chiefs, who

1. What was actually said to me was the following, in Wolof: "*Munggi jotilé waxu seef d'arrondissement, ba nak waa dëkk bi dégg bu baax. Ndax moom, gewel la. Dafa mëna wax ci kaw." Wax ci kaw* literally means "speak loudly and with high pitch" – i.e., "speak up" in two respects, volume and pitch.

might be asleep or lying down, might not hear… And people who are not griots would be ashamed to speak this way."

No one in the gathering appeared to be either asleep or lying down, however. And a few weeks later, I observed my local companion himself – the one who had explained about the griot – similarly standing before a circle of seated men loudly addressing them. I knew that he did not belong to the griot category. Why these disparities? How might an outsider to Wolof village life understand these things?

These questions can be answered – herewith I offer a promissory note – via an ethnographic approach to language as social action, an approach advocated by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz, Hymes's colleague at Berkeley in the early 1960s. The ethnographic approach, I shall argue, is crucial. By this I mean the researcher's intensive immersion, although not everything that is called "ethnography" takes exactly that form. To illustrate and argue for this approach it is convenient to draw upon my own Senegalese fieldwork, since it was begun as a dissertation project under Hymes' supervision.[2] However, although the spirit of the work Hymes and Gumperz advocated remains important, there are specific aspects of the proposals Hymes offered decades ago that have been rethought and reconfigured in more recent times. So I shall also comment on the relationship between Hymes's conception of language's cultural setting with subsequent work on "language ideologies," as well as some recent trends in anthropological ethnography.

The 1964 collection edited by Gumperz and Hymes, *The Ethnography of Communication* (a special publication of the *American Anthropologist*), was a kind of manifesto of their approach. In the introduction, Hymes wrote:

> [S]uch an approach … must take as context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw. It is not that linguistics does not have a vital role. Well-analyzed linguistic materials are indispensable …. It is rather that it is not linguistics, but ethnography – not language, but communication – which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described. The boundaries of the community within which communication is possible; the boundaries of the situations within which communication occurs; the means and purposes and patterns of selection, their structure and hierarchy, that constitute

2. Although Hymes directed the graduate program in which I was enrolled, and supervised my dissertation, I also owe a considerable debt of gratitude to J. David Sapir, who worked with me in detail and introduced me to ethnographic work in Senegal.

> the communicative economy of a group, are conditioned, to be sure, by properties of the linguistic codes within the group, but are not controlled by them.… Facets of the cultural values and beliefs, social institutions and forms, roles and personalities, history and ecology of a community must be examined together in relation to communicative events and patterns as focus of study. (Hymes 1964:3)

This ethnographic approach to the study of language in society aroused considerable excitement in North American anthropology at the time, especially among anthropologists interested in language. It is not that research of this kind had never been published before. In fact, the large collection Hymes published that same year as an edited volume, *Language in Culture and Society*, attested to the possibility of staking out new scholarly territory, by assembling and organizing a range of published works – previously scattered, not seen as related – that could be identified with it. It offered a supplement to the more cognitively focused language-and-culture studies of the time, and it presented an alternative to the socially-agnostic school of Chomskyan linguistics. Both of those kinds of research, though unalike in many respects, took linguistic form as their starting point and central concern. To start from a community and its social life reordered the field.

When Hymes moved to the University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1960s he established a program to train students from both anthropology and linguistics to carry out field research in the "ethnography of communication." Accordingly, one would investigate language not so much in order to infer a system of grammatical rules people carry in their heads, but to focus on speaking – and patterns of language use – in social action, as a crucial part of social practice. Language does not just label the world; it is not simply a tool of reference, separated from the social forms and cultural concepts of which one speaks. It is also dynamically engaged in constituting them and enacting them. And, as Hymes emphasized, the ways this works can differ, from one society or one part of the world, to another.

As a member of the first generation of students in this program, I proposed to focus on the role of the griot in Wolof society and local-level politics; in particular, on how griot performances might influence public opinion. I intended to pursue this question ethnographically. I did not have a very clear notion of what "public" might mean in this context, nor of how to assess its opinion, though I only realized much later that these were problems. But those deficiencies were not devastating, because they were not really my deepest concern. My main objective was to

study communication and rhetoric as these shape, and are shaped by, the organization of society. An important key to this relationship would be the communicative repertoires at people's disposal and the ideas and attitudes they held toward their use. Since the ethnographic literature then available to me pointed toward griots as bards and historians, but also as spokespersons and mediators in public events, I planned to investigate what the social and linguistic consequences of this professional specialization might be, for griots, for others, and for Wolof society at large.

What, then, was to be the "community" within which, as Hymes's programmatic statement recommended, linguistic practice and communicative patterns were to be observed? Was it the "speech community," following Hymes and Gumperz in their revision of this concept as the organization of linguistic diversity – a concept that placed code repertoire, rather than shared code, at the center of observation and analysis (see, e.g., Gumperz and Hymes 1972)? In later years scholars began to recognize that the speech community, so defined, is difficult to operationalize as the starting point of field research.[3] Fieldwork was likely to begin, instead, with some older notion of "community," such as a village or other coresidential unit, or possibly even an ethnic group. The slippage between these groupings and the speech community was not obvious in the late 1960s.

In fact, one of the assumptions common in cultural anthropology at the time was the importance of village studies. Most ethnographic fieldwork in those days focused on a village or small town. Even when researchers worked in cities, they tried to find the urban counterpart of a village (and so studied neighborhoods or relatively tight-knit social networks). It was simply assumed that a village would offer the fieldworker a representative social unit, sufficiently complete unto itself to serve as local stand-in for an ethnic group, where the outlines of culture and society were concerned. "Traditional" society, that is, for villages were also often taken to be something like contemporary ancestors, repositories of "tradition," the representatives of what a society was like before urbanization and (for Africa) before colonialism. Although I did not share all these assumptions – I was well aware that social life did not stop and start at the village boundary, and that villages, like every other social form, are embedded in history – I did follow the prevailing wisdom that only a long-term, single-village study would provide the intensive immersion, and rich acquaintance with particular persons, that should characterize good ethnography.

3. For an extended discussion, see Irvine 2006.

Anthropologists today no longer privilege the village as the necessary or ideal site for ethnographic fieldwork, and certainly not as sufficient representative of the social life of some much larger social formation. Research may focus on social aggregates that are smaller, or larger; it may follow social networks rather than coresidential "communities"; it may concentrate on a particular institution (such as a hospital, a school, or a lawcourt) and its practices; and it commonly includes archival or other historical investigations, rather than taking anything for granted about the past and its effects on the present. Moreover, much fieldwork today is multisited, moving among localities and shifting from one social group to another. "Community," in short, is not to be taken as a baseline. The label itself is problematic, suggestive of a social harmony that may be far from the case.

These trends are all to the good. Yet they are only to the good, I believe, if they add to our research strategies rather than subtracting from them. In other words, intensive immersion is valuable, and that value must not be lost from view. Insight into communicative events and patterns, the linguistic and other communicative resources on which people draw as part of social practice – in short, an adequate picture of language as social action – may otherwise remain elusive.

To illustrate this point, let me return to my own early fieldwork in a Wolof village and outline some of its findings.

The linguistic performance styles associated with Wolof griots are part of a broader pattern of communication, movement, and the services provided by lower-ranking persons for their higher-ranking patrons. From the earliest times for which we have any evidence, Wolof society has had a strong emphasis on social hierarchy, organized in a system of castes and orders. Such ranked groupings remain important today, even if some of the details of their activities have shifted, and even if there is now no legal foundation in the Republic of Senegal for categories like "slaves." The exact relationships among these ranked groupings, and the appropriate analytical terminology for discussing them have been debated: is this a "caste" system? Is "slave" the right translation for the Wolof *jaam*, now or in the past? But whatever the shape of the system as a whole might be, and whether its constituent statuses are to be characterized by this or that analytical label, it is clear that social hierarchy is important and pervasive in organizing social practice.

Wolof social statuses are ascribed by birth. They are locally explained in terms of blood (and, often, other bodily fluids), in a discourse of purity, unbridgeable and dangerous difference, and stain (*gàkk*). As with

other Wolof statuses, one is born a griot, and if born a griot then one's only socially-acceptable marriage partners are other griots. Professional specialists in the arts of communication, griots provide communicative services to patrons, long-term or temporary, in return for gifts of food, material goods, and cash. In relation to the patrons they serve, griots rank low. There are other low-ranking groups who are specialists in other things, particularly in the modes of artisan production that have been important in the rural economy for a long time. Collectively, the people in artisan categories are called *nyenyo*, and this collectivity includes griots as artisans of the word.

Some scholars who have written about griots have seen them as creative artists; and so in many ways they are. But according to the villagers I worked with, the griots' creativity lies more in the rhetorical and social management of communication than in its content. The griot's role, I was told, can be summed up in the concept of *jotilé*, "transmission": the griot is the intermediary, who relays messages from higher-ranking patrons to some audience. The more skillful the griot, the more effective on the audience the rhetoric of the performance is, to the patron's benefit. The kind of situation in which jotilé is most conspicuous proceeds as follows: a high-ranking person whispers briefly in the griot's ear; the griot then stands before an assembled crowd, volubly conveying his patron's intent in a more florid style and at greater length. (This, of course, is exactly the scene with which this paper began: the chef d'arrondissement spoke and the griot "transmitted" his message.) However, jotilé also describes situations in which there is a lapse of time between the first communication (patron-to-griot) and the second (griot-to-audience), so that the patron and the audience are not copresent. In addition, jotilé can describe situations in which the patron is, in effect, the pertinent audience for a performance of praise-oratory. Since the historical content of praise-oratory is handed down from ancestral generations, in a sense it is those ancestors who are first authors of the message. If, besides the patron, other people are present in the audience, then praise-oratory has the effect of enhancing the patron's reputation.

This notion of "transmission" – effective mediation, influencing reputations for good or ill – is key to the griot's social position, and recognizing this helps us to understand some other aspects of the griots' role and activities on the rural scene. First, griots act as intermediaries in some quite concrete ways, not just in oratory. For example, they carry written messages. When the *chef de village* wanted to summon the heads of satellite villages to a meeting, he would send a griot to them with a

piece of paper on which was written the day and time of the meeting; the griot would explain the rest of the message orally.[4] As another example, when large bowls of millet porridge were to be prepared for a feast, the porridge would be put in the bowls first, and then a griot woman would distribute sauce into each bowl. Similarly, butchering meat and distributing the pieces to the appropriate people were also "transmissions" done by griots. Moreover, griots not only enhanced their patrons' reputations verbally, but also sartorially, serving as beauticians and hairdressers.

If a griot is thought of as primarily a transmitter rather than the originator of the message he or she performs, then the griot is not responsible for its basic referential content, only for its rhetorical form. For this reason, griots can sometimes say very critical, even wounding, things with relative impunity. A type of performance in which such statements occur is the *xaxaar*, insult poetry performed on the occasion of a bride's arrival in her husband's household. I recorded many examples of xaxaar poems (see Irvine 1993, 1996), including some which – according to local gossip – destroyed their targets' reputations. One person, frequently targeted in these poems, committed suicide. It was said that she could not bear up under the weight of the criticism voiced in insult poems and in the gossip that followed after the poetry sessions.

More could be said on these matters. The point, for this paper's purposes, is that the patterns of communicative practice in which griots engage go beyond the linguistic. Various other kinds of activities are also seen as communicative and as enhancing – or damaging – a patron's beauty and reputation. So, as Hymes wrote in the statement I quoted earlier, "it is not linguistics, but ethnography – not language, but communication – which must provide the frame of reference."

Moreover, the very possibility of voicing certain kinds of criticisms in public depends on the identity of the speaker. While this last point is not surprising, in this case it is bound up with a Wolof system of ideas about griots and their words. The Wolof villagers who find a griot not responsible for his or her communicative acts – at least, not responsible for their referential content and their motivation – consider griots as having less moral weight, as it were, than the higher-ranking people who were the message's authors or sponsors. These are "facets of the cultural values and beliefs, social institutions and forms, roles and personalities" that Hymes, in the quote cited earlier in this paper, advocated studying in relation to communicative events and patterns.

4. In the examples of such messages I saw, the brief text was written in *wolofal* – Wolof written in an Arabic-derived script.

What about the linguistic dimension itself? Looking more closely at Wolof linguistic practice, one soon sees that griot performances are distinctive in their dramatic style of delivery and their rhetoric. The linguistic characteristics of this style are most clearly identifiable if one compares it – as villagers did – with a contrasting style of speech, ascribed to high-ranking persons (*géer*, "nobles"). That is, a "griot speech style" is not something to describe in isolation from other styles of talk, or apart from the behavior of other people who are present when the griot speaks. Instead, the villagers I worked with identified two styles: *waxu gewel,* "griot speech" (or "griot style-of-speaking"), and *waxu géer*, "noble speech" (or "noble style-of-speaking"). These two styles contrasted in systematic ways, and the use of either one of them implied the other. Each style entailed a relationship, an interaction involving speaker, addressee, and audience. And the styles were motivated by a cultural pattern that connected social identity with verbal conduct, and both of these with a hierarchy of rank. In this cultural framework, persons and their behaviors were differentiated according to a contrast between gravity and exuberance; or, the laconic and the impulsive; the austere and the elaborated. This contrast, conceived as morally loaded and carrying implications of social rank, organized social interaction and the behaviors, including speech, that were considered typical of persons belonging to opposite social categories.

Accordingly, compared with "noble speech", the style of speaking culturally associated with griots is more exuberant: loud, high-pitched, verbose, rapid, rhetorically elaborate, lexically detailed, repetitive and grammatically emphatic. In performance, the speaker stands and accompanies the words with dramatic gestures. As for the "noble style" of speaking, it is the opposite: low-pitched, quiet or even whispered, brief, slow, and grammatically simple. Indeed, the extreme of "noble" comportment would be silence and immobility. The ideal of high rank is self-control – stasis – except when moved, perhaps by a griot's excited and exciting words, to productive action. Such action is made all the more consequential by the high noble's great moral weight. I do not mean to claim that all griots, and all nobles, actually behaved in these ways at all times; they did not. Yet, because these speech styles pertain to cultural stereotypes, they constitute a frame of reference within which actual talk is judged.

I have described the linguistic specifics of these speech styles in some detail elsewhere (Irvine 1990, 1995), so I shall not detail them here, except to mention that all aspects of linguistic form – prosody, phonology, grammatical constructions, and lexicon – are involved. What I want to

call attention to, however, is the difference between villagers' metalinguistic and metapragmatic descriptions of these styles, and their realization in actual usage. On the one hand, in a great many social gatherings, especially those that were large-scale, the forms of participation and talk were differentiated along the lines of these contrasting styles of speech and comportment: high-ranking people relatively quiet and still, low-ranking people (especially griots) more active, loud and verbose. Those situations closely accorded with villagers' metapragmatic descriptions. On the other hand, however, contrasts in speech styles were not always so obvious. The conduct they involve could be differentiated to varying degrees, and in some situations, the contrast would be more subtle. The styles are labeled as discrete objects, but they are realized as a continuum. So, on some occasions the difference in conduct between the ranked persons would be extreme, while in other situations the difference would be more subtle, although still differentiated along the same axis – i.e., still contrasting some degree of austerity with some degree of elaboration. No talk should be supposed entirely neutral. Language itself could be seen as pervaded by its rhetorical potential – by the ways that certain types of constructions and effects were deemed characteristic of certain types of speaker, and conveying varying moral weight and emotional force. The usual kinds of linguistic description bleach all this out.

So far I have accounted for the first of the two Wolof village scenes I described at this paper's outset. What about the second?

As I have indicated, these styles of speaking were part of a broader cultural patterning of communication and interaction in general. Again, there is a difference between villagers' metalinguistic and metapragmatic descriptions of these styles and their realization in actual usage. Although the styles were named for griots and nobles, their use was not limited to members of those social categories (griots and nobles, respectively). Just as their labels (as separate types) belied their actual realization as a stylistic continuum, so their labels also misrecognized their social distribution. It is true that only the griots, indeed only *some* griots, produced the most technically demanding kinds of performances – those that required long-term study and practice to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful rendition. But other, less demanding kinds of speaking, such as personal narratives, or relaying messages, or speaking on someone else's behalf, did not always require a griot performer or the extreme versions of the griot style. As long as the speaker could be considered as lower in social rank – or some relevant aspect of social rank – than his or her audience, someone who was not

a griot could undertake these communicative forms. In so doing, the non-griot speaker would generally use a less extreme version, or a partial version, of the griot style.

Here is where the second scene in my opening description comes in. How could my local companion, who was a "noble" (*géer*), stand before a circle of seated men volubly addressing them? Because the seated men were all "nobles" too, and senior to him. The setting was an evening meeting of a *dayra*, or religious club, of which my companion was a member. There were many such clubs in the village, and some of them, including this one, drew their members from within a single caste. In situations where everyone in a group was of the same caste, communicative patterns mapped onto the participants in a manner that was analogous to a multi-caste situation. Thus low-ranking members might take on griot-like communicative roles, for the moment. (Sometimes a person who briefly took on such a role, for example in making a request for material assistance – goods or a "loan" of cash – or in thanking someone for such assistance, might be said to be speaking "like a griot," even though their actual caste affiliation was not in question.)

As an example, consider the following situation, from which I excerpt a portion in the transcript below (additional discussion can be found in Irvine 1990). One evening, I was sitting with several men, all "noble" and most of them kin of the village chief, in the yard of the chief's compound. Somewhat unusually, the chief himself was present too. (More often, in the evening he would remain inside his own house, receiving visitors who would come to consult him about local problems.) Conversation was casual; there was no particular purpose to the gathering other than sociable talk and the occasional companionable silence. The sound of a motorized vehicle – probably a truck delivering goods to one of the shops in the town center – was heard in the distance. At this point, the talk turned to truck drivers. After expounding on the skills of drivers who were trained by the French in colonial times (only just over a decade earlier), one man (MT in the transcript) embarked on a short narrative about a truck that got stuck in a muddy pothole, but was extricated by skilled drivers:

1 MT: Xamxam ci li nyu xam né, nyoonyu!
Knowledge about what they know they (emphatic)
The knowledge they have, those people!

2 MF: E – Tingéé̱j [? Indistinct]
[name of town, also known as Rufisque]
Eh – [the ones in] Rufisque. [?]

3 MT: Xamxam, xamxam dàll la nyu ko am, ba m'ko doylé
Knowledge knowledge really they it have till it suffices
They *really* have enough *knowledge*

4 Ci diggïnte, diggïnte, aa//
Between between
[to drive] between – ah –

5 Chief: // [indistinguishable] Mariama, yów fi
[JTI] you here
Mariama [JTI], you

6 de woon sax.[pause] | Fekk fu kenn du nyui xam fu –
Emph past even | find where anyone neg they-contin
know where
were *here* then. | Turns out nobody knows where –

7 MT: diggïnte Tingéé̱j ak Ndar.
between [town] and [town]
between Rufisque and Saint-Louis.

8 Chief: li ca – li nyui ci – jogé ba xam – [pause]
what at what they-cont. about set out till know
about what – about what they – get to know – [pause]

9 li ci de wonee –
what at emph was shown
what was indeed shown about –

10 MT: A! A – a – | am ngoonent, da nyu fi musa am
an afternoon expl they here once
have
Ah! w- w- | [because] one afternoon, they once
had here

11 benn, benn, benn kii bu fu – bu ko musa riix ci
one one one *machine* rel. where rel it once stick in
a, a *machine* where – that got stuck in

12 genn kekk. [pause; then rapid:] kaay topp ko, topp-topp-topp-topp-
one(aug.) pothole come push it push continually
a big *pothole*. [pause; then rapid:] [They] come and push it, pushing pushing

13 topp-topp – mu nyàngg – mu nyimé tabasiku!
pushing it suddenly active it manage suddenly disengage
pushing – it suddenly moves – it manages to burst out!

14 KN: A bon nak –
well thus
Well then –

15 MT: Bon nak, bu nyu jubuló, demal ci biir nger,
well thus when they straighten go-caus. in middle highway
Well then, when they straighten up, they make it go in the middle of the highway,

16 kii bu nyui law!
machine rel they-cont touch
the machine they were handling!

In this bit of transcript, MT's utterances, and especially his narrative, show some of the characteristics of the "griot style": repetition, including reduplicative morphology; emphatic particles and constructions, and dramatic narrative action. Although the transcript does not represent his prosody very fully, on the tape one can hear the rising pitch and volume, as well as speed, which also characterize this style of talk. His speech might seem unremarkable – and might even look like evidence that the "griot style" cannot be identified in ordinary conversation, since MT is not a griot – if one did not know that MT was the lowest-ranking noble present in the group. While most of the other men were members of the chief's own patrilineage, but for one other man (MF) who came from a princely lineage, MT had no such glorious genealogy. Though of noble rank, he was a junior member of a small patrilineage segment who lived on the chief's land as the chief's dependents. Meanwhile, the utterances of the chief himself, addressed to me, show some of the features of the "noble style": low-pitched, mumbling talk; hesitations that even turn into disfluency. Had I not known a great deal about these particular people, I do not think I would have noticed the pattern in their talk, which becomes differentiated into performance styles that replicate, in a subtle way, the contrasts between "griot style" and "noble style."

In short, a researcher who relies only on interviewing, or who does not spend a long time getting to know a particular set of people, will not easily discover the difference between interviewees' metapragmatic descriptions and their behavior in real situations, or the ways a person's conduct is interpreted by his or her fellows. It takes intensive, long-term ethnography to see that it may not be a contradiction if a griot style is used by a noble, and even to recognize that a subtle difference in the way two persons speak might count as illustrating the caste-linked pat-

tern of stylistic differentiation. The examples I have offered illustrate recursions – metaphorical applications of cultural models of conduct – and are not contradictions.

There is a well-known problem with intensive ethnography, however. Of what might its findings be representative? In the discussion so far, I have referred to a "Wolof" cultural pattern, as illustrated in the village of my early fieldwork. But what justifies calling this pattern "Wolof," as if it applied to an ethnic group, rather than merely supposing that the patterns I found apply to that village alone? Of course, that village was not isolated. It was the center of a small galaxy of satellite villages, whose residents showed up from time to time for the market, or to visit relatives, or for other business. Kin networks connected it to many other communities as well. And in addition to kinship, many other kinds of relationships (business, religious, administrative, etc.) linked it to larger centers. Moreover, some of what I found appeared to be consistent with reports in the scholarly literature on Wolof and other sahelian societies; and villagers used the label "Wolof" for themselves. They sometimes cited adages about, or stereotypical descriptions of, *olof njaay*, a sort of Wolof Everyman. These facts are perhaps the best justification for my representation of local ideas and conduct with a broad label like "Wolof."

Yet, the question of "representativeness" remains. Interconnection among communities (such as villages) does not make those communities identical. Given the hierarchical structuring of social relations across space in the broader Wolof region, such that one residential formation can be construed as "peripheral" to another, while perhaps also being "central" compared to a third, one might wonder whether the patterns of communication are somehow affected by such center/periphery relations. Notice that social hierarchy is spatially organized in a way that has some resemblance to center/periphery relations: the castes are residentially segregated, and their residences are organized in relation to a central plaza or entrance road. In the village where I worked, griots lived in their own quarter (as did blacksmiths and leatherworkers, in theirs); in some towns and village clusters, griots and other artisan groups had their own villages, organized as satellites to some central village occupied only by nobles. If a researcher lived only in one of those central, all-noble villages, would the caste-linked differentiation of speech styles, a differentiation that showed up even in all-noble gatherings in the multi-caste village I studied, also be discoverable? Would it still exist? I believe that it would, but there has not been the

kind of ethnographic inquiry that would answer those questions. And these are only a few of the questions one might ask about the variation among Wolof communities over space and time.

Notice that in a certain sense, the center/periphery spatial relations among Wolof residential units are actually communicative relations, involving the circulation of people in various patterned ways and for various purposes. So, for example, griots generally travel much more than nobles do, carrying messages, performing for patrons in other towns, investigating the genealogical background of a patron's prospective marriage partner, and so on. Their frequent travel is linked to their image as mobile, lively, even frenetic, as contrasted with the stolid noble. Language itself, I believe, is affected by these patterns: griots are stewards of linguistic expertise, and their circulation among towns over considerable distances may have contributed to the relative geographical homogeneity of Wolof. Geographical dialect differences in Wolof are very minor, apart from the French-influenced urban Wolof of a few large cities.

Evidently, a Wolof village is not a clearly bounded universe where communication is organized only within it. So, in some respects, the question of whether a particular village is typical of all villages is the wrong question. And why should that question even be asked? As I have already noted, present-day anthropology no longer assumes that a village is representative of a cultural tradition, or a stand-in for an ethnic group, or even, necessarily, the appropriate fieldsite. Accordingly, the statements Hymes made in 1964 that referred to bounded communities and cultural wholes can no longer be accepted, even if they offered useful starting-points at the time. His proposals about "the boundaries of the community within which communication is possible…," or "investigating [a community's] communicative habits as a whole," are no longer tenable.

There is another change in linguistic anthropology since Hymes's programmatic statements that is worth noting: a tendency among many scholars to shift from talking about "language in culture" to talking about "language ideology." (Related expressions include "linguistic ideology" and "ideology of language"; I do not believe these various expressions have corresponded to different concepts or theoretical avenues.) The change is more than just a new term for the same ideas, although the ideas do overlap. "Culture," whatever else it might mean, emphasizes the ideas and values which, for some set of people who have those ideas and hold those values, govern their conduct; a cultural

system identifies what is appropriate – or at least intelligible – to do and say, in this or that situation. "Ideology" has a much more political valence, as will be detailed below.

Changes in the terms of the intellectual conversation in linguistic anthropology have some parallels in trends in socio-cultural anthropology, which during the 1980s and 1990s increasingly questioned the importance and even the utility of the concept of "culture." The problem lay in what that concept was assumed to entail: boundedness, holism, systematicity, and homogeneity – such that differences were to be found between cultures, not within them. Granted, not everyone who draws, or ever drew, on a concept of "culture" makes those assumptions. But to the extent that the concept can seem to entail them, or at least to tend to mask inconsistencies, contradictions, group-internal differences and contestations, "culture" is a term that has baggage not every intellectual traveler will want to carry.

These debates over the "culture" concept in socio-cultural anthropology had not yet arisen when Hymes and Gumperz developed their programs for the "Ethnography of Communication" in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, what their approach emphasized was cultural conceptions of language as these were manifest in culturally distinctive patterns of speaking. Recall that this period was the heyday of the so-called New Ethnography, an approach to ethnographic fieldwork that focused on lexical semantics, as discoverable through carefully-organized interview protocols. Interviewing, however, as Hymes pointed out, is not a culturally-neutral activity, a transparent window external to the cultural system it was supposed to investigate. Cultural differences are also to be found in the kinds of questions a person can appropriately ask, and of whom; the very activity of questioning is culturally organized and differentially valued. In its early days, an important aim of the Ethnography of Communication was to shape interviewing in culturally-appropriate ways, and to show that a cultural system of communicative activity needed to be investigated before interviewing could usefully take place.[5] (This aim is still valuable today, given the renewed emphasis on interviewing in recent anthropological research

5. This aim of the Ethnography of Communication still applies, for example, to many types of interviewing still practiced today. For example, it applies to interviews about language attitudes, conducted and analyzed without considering whether the language in which the interview took place – or the language known to be native to the interviewer but not the interviewee – might have some relationship to the attitudes that are expressed.

– an emphasis that may have less to do with theoretical principles than with the reliance on institutional fieldsites, and the role of funding agencies and review boards, populated from other disciplines, as filters for research design.)

By the 1980s, the New Ethnography had faded from the scene; new influences had emerged, such as the writings of Foucault, Bourdieu, feminist theory, neo-Marxism, and other lines of intellectual inquiry emphasizing relations of power and economics. Similarly, several linguistic anthropologists previously connected with the Ethnography of Communication school turned toward a focus on language's relation to power and political economy (e.g., Friedrich 1989; Gal 1989; Irvine 1989). At the same time, there was a growing interest in seeing how politics and social action might be embedded in specifics of language structure. This second concern was being developed especially by Silverstein, who, early on, offered (1979) an influential formulation of "linguistic ideologies" as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use." Other linguistic anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s gave "language ideology" a more sociocultural emphasis. For example, in 1989 I defined it as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine 1989). Along similar lines, Gal (1989) noted that language ideologies are not only explicit, but include more tacit assumptions about the nature of language and its use. Developing the concept further, along lines that made it more consistent with Marxist approaches to "ideology," Gal envisioned language ideologies as differentiated between groups (of speakers) inhabiting different positions in a political economy. Meanwhile, from linguistics, an influential collection edited by Joseph and Taylor (1990) took up the question of what ideological bases underlay the "science of language" itself.[6]

One might identify (at least) two strands of thinking about ideologies of language. In one strand, following Silverstein 1979, the focus is on ideologies as *rationalizations*. What is rationalized may be a pattern of language use, or it may be a relationship of power or domination, reflected in ideas about language, or about the uses (and speakers) of particular languages. In the other strand, following Gal 1989, the focus

6. This field of inquiry, "language ideology," had already grown large by the mid-1990s. Its literature was reviewed by Woolard and Schieffelin in 1994, and its history and foundational ideas were more extensively reviewed by Woolard in 1998. Irvine (forthcoming) offers an updated review and discussion.

is on social *positioning*. The first strand tends toward the Marxist conception of ideology as "false consciousness," while the second strand tends toward a conception of ideology as perspective.

These emphases are not totally incompatible. In both views, language ideologies are conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices. Like other kinds of ideologies, language ideologies are pervaded with political and moral interests and are shaped in a cultural setting. To study language ideologies, then, is to explore the nexus of language, culture, and politics. It is to examine how people construe language's role in a social and cultural world, and how their construals are socially positioned. Those construals include the ways people conceive of language itself, as well as what they understand as the significance and social connotations of the particular languages and ways of speaking that are within their experience. The perspectival strand then goes on to argue that language ideologies are inherently plural: because they are positioned, there is always another position – another perspective from which the world of discursive practice is differently viewed. Their positioning makes language ideologies always partial, in that they can never encompass all possible views – but also partial in that they are at play in the sphere of interested human social action. Not only to be conceived as false consciousness, they also offer interpretive schemas and open avenues of possibility.

My own writings on Wolof illustrate this shift from "language in culture" to "language ideology." In earlier pages of this paper I have referred to Wolof "cultural patterns" of language use, but much of what I have called cultural patterns can be reframed, considered in terms of ideology. If ideology is connected with images and rationalizations of power, it can be seen here in the pervasiveness of social hierarchy and relations of domination (established for centuries through inequalities in land, through attitudes of disdain and comments about "tainted" blood and "dangerous" bodily fluids, and through the historical institution of slavery – now illegal, but well remembered). These aspects of Wolof village society make "ideology" a good concept for understanding the stereotyped images – for ways of speaking, based on images of griots performing for nobles – on which patterns of villagers' conduct so crucially depended.

Hymes was certainly not indifferent to issues of power and domination. If they are not conspicuous in the 1964 statement I quoted, or in the sociolinguistic taxonomy he presented in "Models of the interaction of language and social life" (Hymes 1972, but composed several years earlier), it is because he located them primarily in relations

between culture-bearing groups rather than within them. In retrospect it seems curious, especially in light of Hymes's vigorous opposition to the Vietnam War, that his theoretical focus on the organization of difference did not tend to see difference in terms of power differentials. Very likely the explanation lies in his (and Gumperz's) project of legitimating multilingualism, in the face of a growing and assertive monolingualism in American society and Chomskyan linguistic theory. Remember, too, that Hymes was trained as a scholar of the indigenous languages of North America. The relations of power and inequality that were especially salient to him, and which I believe are linked to that research terrain, were not any inequalities internal to indigenous societies, but rather those that pertained to the relations between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans, and between the United States government and the individual Indian tribes.

Linguistic anthropology has changed since the days when Hymes laid out a new program for it. As I have pointed out, there are ingredients of his program – assumptions that went into it, and important issues omitted – to which researchers today can no longer subscribe. Nevertheless, his project was enormously influential. This program and its successors, the various ways of studying language as discursive practice in social action and as ideologically shaped, probably represent the dominant intellectual genealogy in American linguistic anthropology today. In this essay I have tried to trace some pieces of that genealogy and its constituent ideas. What I also want to emphasize, however, is something I take to be a central contribution Hymes made that must not be abandoned: his emphasis on a kind of ethnography that required intensive, long-term immersion in a site of field research. The fieldworker's immersion must be sufficiently long term to have at least the following effects: to become acquainted with particular personalities and their personal biographies; to recognize the participants in a social gathering, so as to know something about how participation is structured and recruited, and know this without having to ask explicitly; to be able to distinguish between metapragmatic stereotypes and practice.

The challenge is to be able to retain the advantages of immersion fieldwork yet not be limited by it – to gain insight into larger networks and relations among communities, variation over space and time, and to track the circulations of people, objects, and discourse. Research might involve tracking along a network, or working from a center outward, or working in a team, or setting up a controlled comparison

– and these are surely not the only possibilities. There is more than one way to design research that might serve the purpose. The important thing, however, is that the study of language – rather, communication, including language – and society needs ethnography, as Dell Hymes argued long ago.

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