The interpretation of pronominal paradigms: Speech situation, pragmatic meaning, and cultural structure

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> On prétend expliquer des types d'ordre en les ramenant a des contenus qui ne sont pas de même nature, et qui, par l'effet d'une contradiction singulière, agiraient sur leur forme du dehors. (Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques*, Vol. 4, 1971: 561)

The traditional interest of anthropologists in the study of the relationship of language to culture has been revivified in the past two decades by work generally categorized under the labels of 'sociolinguistics' or the 'ethnography of speaking'.[1] This work distinguishes itself by emphasizing how it pays attention to the *use* of speech as it can be observed in recordings of actual utterances. Until recently, less attention has been paid to the implications for the systematic analysis of symbolic forms of this new interest in the intricacies of use. This is changing (Silverstein 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979; Singer 1982). In this paper, I explore these implications, first through a critical look at the historical development of the theoretical discussions of the proper way to account for the organization of pronominal paradigms, and second, through an examination of the use of personal pronouns in a corpus of texts excerpted from an interview with an American high school student about the people in his school and his relationship to them. I come to this analysis because of problems that have confronted me in my analyses of American ideology (1978, 1981, 1983).

Deictic forms, e.g., person in verb morphology and pronouns, spatial and temporal coordinates, possessive and demonstrative adjectives and pronouns, etc., are considered of particular interest since they are those features of langauge that function to relate the verbal output to the speech situation and context. They are in the peculiar position of being *linguistic* features about which one can talk only in *social* or *psychological* terms (or so it seems). Deictic forms do not label an event, person or object that is the subject of an utterance. Rather, they signal the relationship of this

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subject to something else. Thus the *I* in *I am writing* signals the relationship of an utterance about writing to one of the persons in the social environment; the *I* points to the (single) person who is uttering the sentence.[2] The relation of person to utterance is not, as such, a linguistic event, though it is one that all human languages mark. Finally, since languages vary in the way they mark this relation, it makes very good sense to argue, as Silverstein does (1976), that attention to deictic structuring may be a privileged route to 'culture'.

This peculiar position of deictics is shared by a whole class of forms that, as Jakobson wrote of *I*, 'function as an index' (1957: 2). They linguistically *point to* an item other than themselves, an item that can be located either in the situation external to the speech ('exophorically') or in the verbalization that surrounds it ('endophorically'). This class in fact includes a large set of nominal forms. It was labelled by Jespersen (1922: 123) the class of 'shifters', words 'whose meaning differs according to the situation' — deictics, but also kinship terms, words like *enemy* or *friend*, and probably all words and linguistic forms that map social relations.[3] With some exceptions,[4] a word like 'mother' — particularly when used in address and in direct speech — does not refer to a substantive quality of the addressee; it refers to the (social) relationship of the speaker to this addressee.

The intimate conjunction of the linguistic and the social in the functioning of shifters makes their analysis particularly difficult. It is all the more difficult since we are now well aware that any statement of the relationship person/speech situation that can be made about any shifter must be extensively qualified. While *I* can be said to mark the (single) SPEAKER (a social role), one can find instances where it refers to *two* speakers (as in the book by Mehan and Wood [1975]). While *mother* supposedly refers to a person to whom the speaker is related by a certain type of biological tie, other persons can also be addressed in this manner (e.g., one's spouse, a special type of religious leader, etc.). Indeed, deictics have never been so interesting to social scientists as when they have been used 'inappropriately' (from the point of view of morphology). Typical is the work by Brown and Gilman (1960) and Friedrich (1966, 1972) on the use of second-person *plural* pronouns when one might have expected second-person *singular* pronouns — in Indo-European languages such as French or Russian. Traditionally, any instance of use of the same deictic form is approached from two points of view, first, from that of the place of the form in a morphological paradigm, second, from that of its place in a traditionally constituted structure of use. To the extent that it is accepted that both map a set of social roles (whether those of addressor, addressee, etc. or those of superior, inferior, etc.) one must assume that the two are related.

My goal, in the first part of the paper, is to examine a few classical statements for common and often unstated assumptions about the postulated relationship between these role structures and to suggest difficulties and alternatives. The second part of the paper takes a more inductive tack to demonstrate the usefulness of a directly textual approach for the analysis of deictics. The text of the paper is divided into five sections. It starts with a short summary of the traditional characterizations of shifter functioning. I then look briefly at the statements that are made about the structure of the canonical speech situation and discuss the grounds of their plausibility. This is followed by a look at sociolinguistic statements about what is very significantly glossed as 'metaphorical extensions' of 'primary' meanings. I discuss the limitations of this approach through a look at an analysis of 'inappropriately' used pronominal forms in baby talk (Wills 1977). I then move on to my analysis of the use of pronominals in an oral text.

Shifter functioning

The abstract characterizations of shifters, and the implicit characterization of nonshifters, could be briefly illustrated by the following two sentences:

1. *John Smith killed Mike Johnson on Saturday, August 28* ... (as the sentence might appear in a newspaper account);
2. That's who did it to him! (as a witness might say while pointing with his finger when recognizing the suspect in a police line-up).

It would not be too difficult for an English speaker to form a rather clear image of the action referred to and of the actors involved in the first sentence. That is, only a generalized form of cultural knowledge is necessary. Conversely, only a participant in the immediate situation could appropriately understand the second sentence.

All this is rather well known. The distinction between the two forms of speech was made a long time ago and has by now been utilized extensively even for purposes far removed from the intention of the linguists who first formulated it (e.g., by Bernstein [1974] and his colleagues, whose work on language and educational success is built upon the distinction). What I would like to do here is discuss one aspect of the common manner of phrasing the relationship between shifters and the social situation to which they point. Let us look at a recent characterization:

> The shifters, referential indexes, are a mechanism in which there is no abstract system of propositional equivalence relations, but only the rules of use which

specify the relationship of actual referent of the sign token to the other variables of the context, among them the sign vehicle. (Silverstein 1976: 29)

The key words are 'actual referent', 'rules of use', and 'context'. This definition (and it is essentially a restatement of Jespersen's) focuses on the pragmatic need of speakers to be informed about the actual situation of the speech event in order to interpret the deictic forms used. This means that the analyst of the utterance, the linguist or anthropologist, must also investigate extensively the context of an utterance to make sense out of it.

In his most recent writings, Silverstein has gone beyond this characterization, and we will come back to his work. To understand modern development, it is important to notice, however, that the analytic reliance on 'context' is fundamentally ambiguous. It is certain, on the one hand, that participants must have a good understanding of the situation of any speech to interpret it 'correctly'.[5] It is certain, on the other hand, that the participants must also possess a very good *linguistic* understanding of the forms used in the speech. To interpret *I am writing* one must be able to look at a situation to identify the *I, and* be able to decode the *I* as a particular type of symbolic marker with the property of marking a certain type of semantic relationship between features of the accompanying text *whatever the actual referent of this text*. Thus while the referent of Mehan and Wood's *I* is dual, and while the referent of a French *vous* may be singular, an American reader and a French cannot discard the semantic implications of the form used and of the contrast between morphological expectations and context.

The implications of the fact that a deictic form carries a semantic load independent of its indexing power is something that has generally been ignored. Jespersen led the way when he said it made no difference whether a child used his first name ('Jack') or *I* to refer to himself (1922: 123). Jespersen noticed the fact that children can refer to themselves in any of the possible persons, but saw in it simply the product of confusion on the part of the child about the nature of deictic forms: The child, at first, would not notice the reflexivity of deictics and would simply parrot the forms he heard used to address him. As for those who investigate phenomena like the *vous de politesse*, they generally agree with Brown and Gilman that 'the interesting thing about such pronouns is their close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life — the dimensions of power and solidarity (1960: 253). In other words, they make of the *social* situation the primary key to the interpretation of deictic forms.

In this type of analysis the notion of 'use' and 'actual referent' has the effect of moving the attention of the reader away from the verbal stream

to the social situation conceived to be external to the speech event. The utterance is said to be *about* some-*thing*, or some-*body*, an object unambiguously specifiable in the historical stream: for example, *I* points to the SPEAKER, an identifiable person. This dichotomization of the verbal/symbolic from the nonverbal/objective is, of course, of long standing in the discussions of the relation of language to social action. And so is the functionalist principle that language is a form of social action to be understood in terms of what it contributes to such action. But we also know that language has a greater power than that which it possesses by virtue of its being set in a particular situation. It is, *also*, constitutive and we must account for this power.

I will now expand this discussion by looking successively at the two dominant types of discussions of the relation of shifters to social situations. First, we examine the discussions of morphological person and the assumptions made by linguists as to speech situation. Second, we look at sociolinguistic discussions of morphologically inaccurate use.

In search of the canonical speech situation

For a rather traditional account of the morphology of the English category of person, let us look at Lyons's (1968: 276) summary: 'The category of *person* is clearly definable with reference to the notion of participant-roles: the "first" person is used by the speaker to refer to himself as a subject of discourse, the "second" person is used to refer to the hearer...'. However, this definition is confronted with the problem of interpretation of the 'third' person. Lyons puts this problem in the following way:

> The 'third' person is to be distinguished from the 'first' and 'second' persons in several respects. The speaker and hearer are necessarily present in the situation, whereas other persons and things to which reference is made may not only be absent from the situation of utterance, they may be left unidentified. (1968: 276)

But he does deal with the third person in the immediate context of his analysis of the other persons, thus obscuring the distinction to be made. Similarly, Halliday and Hasan (1976), while recognizing that first- and second-person pronouns function quite differently from third-person ones (in that the former 'are defined as roles in the speech situation' while the latter are not [1976: 48]) analyze all three 'persons' as one system of 'personal reference'. Benveniste, on the other hand, had earlier argued that it is (in Indo-European languages especially) 'la régularité de la

structure formelle et une symétrie d'origine secondaire [qui] *produisent l'impression* de trois personnes coordonnées'.[6] Of third-person pronouns, he writes that they are 'non-persons' since they can be used for 'anybody or anything except the people involved in the discourse'.[7] This anybody or anything can easily be specified and a nominal descriptive term can be substituted for the third-person form with minimal impact on the rest of the utterance (1966: 255–256). On the same issue Halliday and Hasan write:

> Only the third person is inherently cohesive, in that third person form typically refers anaphorically to a preceding item in the text. First and second person do not refer to the text at all; their referents are defined by the speech roles of speaker and hearer and hence they are normally interpreted exophorically, by reference to the situation. (1976: 68)

Lyons himself has recently stated that the distinction 'cannot be emphasized too strongly' (1977: 638–639).

The essential issue concerns the status one should assign to 'third' persons mentioned in somebody's speech. For Benveniste they are treated as any other objects to which we may wish to refer more 'economically' than is possible if we had constantly to repeat the full lexical form. Furthermore, mention of *John* does not tell us anything about the discourse in which the noun is uttered, while it tells us a lot about that person-as-object. Thus *John* cannot be treated on the same footing as *I* or *you*, for *John* is not a 'reality of discourse'. Of course, *John* is not a shifter, as Jakobson stressed in his overall analysis of 'duplex structures' (1957). Benveniste's argument must thus be interpreted as follows: While *he/she* are *formally* shifters, the tie with their nominal referents (lexical items or proper names) is so close that it is improper to deal with them as forming a single paradigm with first- and second-person forms. This is what Halliday and Hasan also suggest when they write that 'only the third person is inherently cohesive' (1976: 68).

John, according to Jakobson, is nobody else than this John.[8] Conversely, I is absolutely anybody who uses the pronoun. The issue thus is not whether the specification of *I* versus *he* is exophoric or endophoric but whether, given the four pronominal forms *I, you, he/she, it*, it is more relevant to mark in a systematic paradigm the distinction presence/absence of persons (versus physical objects) than to mark the distinction presence/absence of 'propositional equivalence relations'. If the propositional equivalence of a third-person pronoun is as immediate as Benveniste or Halliday and Hasan say it is, then we have to say that their inclusion in the class of shifters is warranted only on formalistic grounds

and not on grounds of semantic functioning. In a formal sense, third-person forms are deictic but, and this is at the core of Benveniste's argument, they may not point to an actual role in the social situation of speech.

This moves us back from what appeared to be a linguistic discussion into what is a social (in fact cultural) one: What is the social situation of speech? Many of the linguists who have written about shifters assume a certain model and rarely discuss its sociological plausibility. One of the most influential of the discussions was certainly Jakobson's contribution in his classic 'Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics' (1960). To organize his thinking about the functioning of language as a system of communication he postulates a formal model of a minimal social situation that only includes *two* roles: the roles of addressor and addressee. While he does not consider the question, the implication is that the 'third person' is not a necessary role in the minimal situation. I would guess this person is an aspect of the context or the message, a 'factor' in verbal communication, but not a role. All this squares off very well with Benveniste's position.

Let us now look at a much more recent effort: a paper by Pike, 'Sociolinguistic evaluation of alternative mathematical models: English pronouns' (1973). The impulse behind the work is best summarized by Pike's 'Principle 13 C': 'Sociolinguistic aspects and settings of language are important to the theory and structure of language, as are its formal and strictly verbal aspects' (1973: 150). This justifies the inclusion of the word 'sociolingusitic' in the title of the paper, even though Pike does not in fact look directly at speech in any actual situations. What does he do? Essentially he postulates a setting: 'let us *suppose* that we are watching a strange variety of the game of "musical chairs". There are three chairs, labelled "I", "you", and "he" respectively...' (1973: 122). He then asks us to imagine three persons moving from chair to chair and goes on to analyze all the possible combinations with the help of complex mathematical formulae. He concludes with the principle that 'underlying every discourse is an initial speaker and an initial audience' (1973: 159), what he also calls an 'I–thou' relation. In effect, while starting with a hypothetical situation where the third person is treated as an actual role, he comes back to Jakobson's analysis.

In fact, how realistic is Pike's initial setting? At the beginning of his analysis, third person *is* a role since the person referred to by the speaker and addressee is *present*, listening to what is being said and ready to take his turn: he is a very *involved* listener. But this very immediate involvement means that, in any actual realization of such a situation, his presence (his sensibilities, his supposed potential response, etc.) would be a major

factor in the conversation of the first two. Indeed, in American use (and probably in any other culture's) there are complex rules about the use of third-person forms when referring to a person present though not directly participating in the speech. These rules may amount to a kind of taboo and are broken regularly only in relation to the very young (who may later remember having resented it) and to the very old or very sick, that is, in relation to 'persons' who are not yet, or have almost ceased to be, fully human. When the taboo is broken, we may generally assume that an insult is intended or that the verbal form will be accompanied by considerable apology. In a group setting *he/she* probably only refers 'normally' to somebody who is absent and who has been explicitly named in the immediate context.[9] By contrast an *I* or *you* does not need to be accompanied by such explicit naming, since the pointing, 'indexical' function of the form is accepted matter of factly by the participants.

The use of third-person pronouns has not yet become a subject of much theoretical speculation. I suspect that the product of such an analysis would be the recognition that, in American and perhaps most other Western cultures, first and second person is to be differentiated from third both for formal semantic reasons *and* for symbolic-cultural reasons. Such an analysis would probably show that the former might be said to be sociolinguistically 'unmarked'. Using *I* to refer to oneself is not as controversial as using *he* to refer to a present third person. In a parallel fashion, in linguistic writing it is generally said that the analysis of first- and second-person forms, particularly singular ones, is very easy. Is this parallelism an accident? Are Jakobson's or Pike's statements about the primacy of the *I–thou* relation in speech the reflection of a fundamental and universally valid structural matter or are they products of the cultural structuring of the Western mind with its traditional tendency to place the *I* at the normal center of human interaction and human experience? It is perfectly possible to conceive of an alternative theory of the basic speech situation that would not be based on the canonical encounter of an I and a Thou jointly building an utterance and a social system. This alternative theory could conceptualize the canonical situation as involving an organized group speaking in 'one' voice, so to speak, and out of which, later and through various processes, 'I's' and 'Thou's' emerge. This, in effect, is what Durkheim suggested when he differentiated mechanical from organic solidarity and argued that individualization is an evolutionary result of the transformation of society from an undifferentiated mass into an integrated system of parts, each performing different tasks (1964).

Very little, in fact, exists of serious thinking on the canonical speech situation that does not start with the situation that is suggested by the

traditional display of person morphology by Western grammarians. I will just mention two suggestive passages. At the beginning of the last chapter of *Mythologiques* (1971, vol. 4), Lévi-Strauss spends a few pages discussing why, until then, he has always referred to himself as author as *nous* rather than *je* and why he will now shift to *je*. As we see presently, the use of what is labelled an 'editorial *we*' is generally treated in American sociolinguistics as a secondary metaphorical or rhetorical extension of the proper *I*. It also tends to be frowned upon.[10] But Lévi-Strauss does not think of his *nous* in this manner. His *nous* is primary in that it expresses the central thesis of all his writing about myths and about the nature of the human mythmaking ability, namely, that myths are the product of a collective activity that expresses itself through the individual speakers but over which these speakers have little control. Even when a myth has an individual author, even though we like to think of a work like Lévi-Strauss's as a highly individualized piece where the author is very 'present', for him, the fact that a myth is told and accepted, a work published, read, and discussed is what counts: 'les oeuvres individuelles sont toutes des mythes en puissance, mais c'est leur adoption sur le mode collectif qui actualise, le cas échéant, leur "mythisme"' (1971: 560).[11] Lévi-Strauss's *nous* expresses this basic fact. It allows him to *effacer* (rub out) his presence as independent subject so that he can become:

> le lieu insubstantiel offert à une pensée anonyme afin qu'elle s'y deploie, prenne ses distances vis-à-vis d'elle-même, retrouve et réalise ses dispositions véritables et s'organise en égard aux contraintes inhérente à sa seule nature. (1971: 559)[12]

Quite different is the statement of Maxine Kingston, a Chinese-American author who lived out the clash between her immigrant parents' world view and the world view of the American school she attended. She writes of her difficulties with reading *I* and *here*:

> I could not understand 'I' The Chinese 'I' has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American 'I', assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness; 'I' is a capital and 'you' is lower-case. I started at that middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it. The other troublesome word was 'here', no strong consonant to hang on to, and so flat, when 'here' is two mountainous ideographs. (1975: 193)

Lévi-Strauss's paradoxical stance, Kingston's difficulties, and Mehan and Wood's decision to adopt in their book 'the first person singular to

emphasize that this book is the voice of union and not of particular individuals' (1975: vii) all raise problems that are generally handled under the rubric of 'use' (and thus are studied by rhetoricians or sociolinguists) rather than under the rubric of 'structure' (the domain of linguists). This might be acceptable if linguists, when they deal with person morphology, were not in fact obliged to do so *in terms of use*. The question becomes, in terms of *whose* use? Up to now most analyses have assumed a situation as it is *intuited* by a linguist. Little consideration is given to the symbolico-cultural source of this intuition.

There do not exist approaches to pronominal analysis that have tried to stay away from a reliance on such assumptions of universal sociological principles. Friedrich, for example, insisted that the 'goal' of his analysis of the use of pronouns by the upper classes of Russia in the nineteenth century was 'to show how one phase of speech usage is determined by principles of what might be called "social culture" — that part of the cultural system which influences or governs individual and group relations' (1969: 214). Strictly understood, such a statement prefigures the position Silverstein has taken in his recent writings:

> *I* as a grammatical type ... is the potential for reference to an individual that *presupposes the constitution of the individual in the role of speaker in a speech event* ... So we are already in the realm of a theory of the types of roles in types of events socially recognized in a society; in other words in the realm of social anthropology. (1977: 142)

For Silverstein, this means that no grammatical analysis can proceed in the absence of a concurrent social analysis. Above all, it means that we see in the type of directly referential speech that is usually taken to be the prototype of linguistic activity only 'one system of speech ... conventionally constituted in a society' (Silverstein 1977: 145). This implies that cultural organization of speech operates in at least two domains: the definition of roles, and the definition of speech acts (e.g., reference, command, dedication, etc.).

Depending on how such statements are read, they may be just what is needed or they may be a more sophisticated surrender to sociologists than was the case with the earlier statements. Silverstein's thinking on these matters is still in formation and it is too theoretical to offer clear guidance on what exactly to do when confronted with a text. To understand the dangers of ambiguous references to the 'social' dimensions of speech, let us backtrack a moment and examine work done under the label of 'sociolinguistics'.

Inclusivity/exclusivity and the structure of *we*

The initial, and still most famous studies of pronominal use are those that sprang from the observation of a formal lack of congruence between the morphological rules for use of a particular pronoun and the social rules that had to be formulated to account for a certain pattern of use. I have already mentioned the most significant of these studies, those that dealt with the use of second-person plural forms to address single persons, thereby expressing a certain range of possible social relationships between addressor and addressee. I will not deal with these studies in any detail, for they are classic and extensively quoted. One point that relates to something we have already spent time upon is worth emphasizing, however: the 'surprise' that is presented as giving the impetus for these studies was purportedly produced by the observation of certain uses of the *plural* forms, uses that are considered to be *secondary* extensions of the 'normal' use of these forms. For example, in French, *tu* is considered the 'normal' form to use in addressing a single person; *vous*, when used in the same setting, is surprising.

Let us look at these issues in more detail in the context of the significant, though less well known, discussion of the nature of *we* and so-called first-person plural forms in most languages of which we have record. Lyons writes:

> *We* is not 'the plural of I'; rather, it includes a reference to 'I' and is plural. According to whether the 'first person plural' pronoun includes a reference to the hearer or not, it is customary to distinguish between an 'inclusive' and an 'exclusive' use of the pronoun. Although the distinction is generally not relevant in English, there are many languages in which the distinction between the 'inclusive' and the 'exclusive' use of the 'first person plural' is drawn systematically in sentences of all types and realized as a distinction between two phonologically unrelated pronouns. (1968: 277)

Various attempts have been made to represent graphically this distinction so as not to make it look as irregular and unsystematic as it is made to look when it is displayed on the model suggested by Indo-European morphology (McKaughan 1959; Austerlitz 1959; Hymes 1972). Of particular interest is Hymes's comment (building on Conklin 1969) on the logical implication of this type of analysis: The distinction between inclusion and exclusion is to be generalized as a formal dimension relevant to all pronouns in any system.[13] For example, in English or French, *I, je*, or *tu* are always exclusive, since only one person can be put in the role. *They* is always inclusive. *We* (or *you*), on the other hand, may

or may not include in (or exclude from) the reference group the addressee (or the persons who surround him).

It is easy enough to generalize these new formal analyses to Indo-European systems. To illustrate the yield of this approach, I use a paper by Wills on the use of pronouns in English and baby talk (1977). She summarizes the 'conventional usage' as follows (1977: 274):

Componential analysis of pronouns

	Receiver	Sender	Minimal membership
I	−	+	+
			+
You	+	−	−
3 P	−	−	+
	+		+
We	−	+	−
They	−	−	−

3P = he, she or it

Note the manner in which she deals with *we* and *you*. She deals with inclusive and exclusive uses as being underlaid by distinct structural categories. Wills states that it is Hymes's 1972 article that suggested the analysis to her. Hymes indeed invited such an extension of his work since he had framed his article in terms of a search for more appropriate universal categories of grammar.

And yet I am not quite certain that Hymes would accept Wills's analysis. He cautions against using 'arbitrary structures' to create analytic grids in which actual surface forms can be fit: 'I have seen reanalyses of pronominal systems ... that take over a partial analysis of English ..., and, by applying its dimensions to Philippine and other systems, quite lose their internal patterning' (1972: 102). Could it be that, by using a 'partial analysis' of Hanunoo, Wills is losing sight of the 'internal patterning' of English?

For Lyons, it will be remembered, the distinction between the inclusive and exlusive uses of *we* 'is generally not relevant in English' (1968: 277). By this, I think he meant that it was not *grammatically* relevant, i.e., that it was a dimension of use or performance and not a dimension of linguistic structure or competence. Modern sociolinguists generally reject this type of argument. For Hymes or Wills, the distinction reflects the operation of a very general linguistic category that happens to be realized in English pragmatically rather than morphologically. This peculiar form of realization might then be explained as the result of the same type of

contingent historical development as led to the disappearance of *thou* and related forms in another part of English morphology. The fact that English speakers can make the pragmatic differentiation in everyday speech is, in this kind of sociolinguistics, the best evidence for the need to postulate that a formal structure *is* operative. But, of course, English speakers can make many other pragmatic distinctions among all the uses of *we*. There is the 'editorial' *we*, the pragmatic equivalent of *I*. There is a *we* that is the equivalent of *you* ('Well, what are we doing here?', as it could be said by a teacher approaching a student doing something the teacher was not in fact participating in).

There has been little systematic examination of the analytic consequences of the principle that stresses the need to deal concurrently with morphological and pragmatic differentiations in the representation of deep grammatical structures. What is generally done is that one or another of the pragmatic distinctions is mentioned in passing or buried in a footnote while the focus remains on what is treated as the primary structural form, whether its realization is morphological or pragmatic. This is obviously unsatisfying. What are we to do with the French *vous*? Is it enough to treat it as a metaphor, a matter of secondary elaboration (e.g., 'plurality is a very old and ubiquitous metaphor for power' [Brown and Gilman 1960: 254])? Given the pragmatic ability of French speakers easily to disambiguate any *vous* in a situated utterance, on what grounds can we decide that this distinction is *not* a matter of some underlying structure, too?

Reference and metaphor

The most common solution to the problem of the *vous de politesse* or the editorial *we* is to treat it as a matter of metaphorical extension. Let us turn again to Wills (1977) for an illustration of this stance. I am particularly interested in the way she defines 'baby talk'. As far as the use of pronouns is concerned, she characterizes baby talk by the 'non-standard' use of adult pronouns when 'context, message, key and participants' make it clear that an utterance is addressed to an infant (1977: 2). She is differentiating between 'standard' or 'conventional' and 'non-standard' or 'unconventional' — those are her words — uses and looks only at the latter. The two types of usages form two 'registers' that can be distinguished in adult talk. She insists very strongly on this distinction: 'most BT pronouns are *conventional* pronouns used grammatically but *deviantly* in regard to participant role, number or gender' (my emphasis; 1977: 273). She describes her methodology as follows: 'Unusual pronominal usages

were isolated from the transcripts of the recordings and checked with the intuition of other native English speakers' (1977: 276–277). Wills is quite aware that to decide whether a particular instance of use is 'standard' or not is difficult, but she considers this to be only a technical matter produced by limitations in the recording machinery.

'Standard' use, in her analysis, refers to the modified morphological structure introduced at the opening of her article (the summary table I have quoted above) and she defines it in terms of 'participant role, number and gender' taken literally as substantive features *of the situation.* Methodologically, then, what is to be checked is whether the pronouns used to point to the setting as it can be shown in her recordings and her notes are those one would expect to find if the speakers were following the normal rules for relating linguistic form to speech situation. When the pronouns used are different from what is expected, then it is assumed that something interesting is taking place. This is not quite what Wills sees herself doing. She says of the display of her data that it is organized in terms of the various pronouns used to express various 'participant categories', i.e., roles in the speech situation. However, she does not include in her list of baby talk pronouns the ones we might expect (and I cannot believe that mothers, when talking to their children, never use first-person forms for example).

By doing this, Wills has, in effect, made of the normal forms special cases about which nothing needs to be said in a sociolinguistic study of use. She places them outside the purview of her analysis and, perhaps, outside the purview of the type of sociolinguistics she is herself involved in, the type that builds formal analysis inductively from texts. What she does not seem to have noticed is that no analyses of the 'normal' forms were ever devised from anything other than linguists' intuition of *both* linguistic use *and* sociological practice. Not that she should have noticed, given the paradoxical blinders of sociolinguists who define themselves against traditional linguists on the basis of their rejecting of intuition in favor of observation.[14]

In effect it is assumed that a *social* structure (the canonical speech situation) organizes — from the outside — a primary symbolic structure (the morphological paradigm); *single* forms from which can then be used in an ad hoc fashion as metaphors in rhetorical, manipulative speech. The use of these metaphors is itself externally controlled by the situation. In all cases the social structure remains fundamental both theoretically (as accounting for the morphological structure) and methodologically (in that it is by examining the situation that we can decide whether what a speaker is saying is or is not metaphorical).

This analytic attitude is not uncommon outside of sociolinguistics. It is

the typical functionalist position taken by many social scientists in relation to most symbolicocultural events. I am thinking here particularly of the theoretical framework used by anthropologists such as Scheffler and Lounsbury (1971) to deal with kinship terminologies, in which it is assumed that a fundamental *social* structure of biological reproduction is directly mapped by the primary meaning of kinship terms, terms that can then be metaphorically extended in use (cf. also Bean 1978).

This type of semantic analysis has been abundantly criticized, particularly as it has been used to deal with kin terms (Schneider 1968, 1972; Boon and Schneider 1974). But there has been little, if any, discussion of deictic structuring from this critical point of view.[15] Sociolinguistics, partially because it defined itself in healthy reaction against certain forms of American linguistic structuralism, has been until now determinedly functionalist in its outlook. Ultimately, as Silverstein argues (1978: 6), there is no conflict between the two approaches; they complement each other in the same spirit.

My argument here is that the functionalist inheritance prevents us from dealing with the types of problems I have mentioned: What is the canonical speech situation? By what criteria do we decide what is the primary morphological structure (particularly if we agree that certain pragmatic distinctions have grammatical value)? Where do we put the boundary between proper and improper or metaphorical usage? How do we decide, sociologically speaking, what — in the environment of an utterance — are features of 'the' situation of a speech that a deictic form might index, appropriately or not? And how do we account for the extra semantic load that 'metaphorical' use of a deictic puts upon an utterance?

The last is probably the most immediate problem for the approaches we have reviewed. Wills, among others, is quite aware that labelling an inappropriate usage a 'metaphor' is not a solution to an analytic problem, it is the identification of a new problem. To take one of her examples, when the chairman of a meeting addresses the participants saying, 'Let's quiet down' when he 'should have said' (from the point of view of the speech situation) 'you quiet down', he does not in fact have the choice between two equivalent forms. As Wills writes:

> *We* is not equivalent to *you* in meaning even *if* both have the same referent. *We* has a finite set of semantic elements which can function in a variety of ways in an infinite set of environments to produce diverse semantic and pragmatic effects (meanings). (1977: 275)

But the issue does not concern simply the interpretation of a particular *we*, it must also concern all the added features that the choice of *we* rather

than *you* implies. It is not simply that the interpretation of *we* changes depending on the situation in which it is used, *it is also that the interpretation of the total situation changes depending on the form that is used to refer to it*. The power of such modes of address to define a situation has been extensively demonstrated (in particular in Friedrich's work) and it is this power that must be dealt with. The implication of this stance is that pronominal use is constitutive *even when* it appears normal. The French *vous* is usually said to mark 'something extra' (power, politeness). But, by virtue of this extra loading, *tu* has also been transformed so that it has ceased being unproblematical. To address someone in the second person is not to be simply truthful, or simply referential, it is also to be familiar, or condescending, insulting or radically 'chic'.[16]

The use of *we*, *they*, and *I* in symbolic evocation

It is now time to shift our point of view and see how might proceed a true textual analysis of deictic forms, i.e., one that does not rely on external structures as a crutch. The texts I use here were collected during research that was initiated as an ethnography of interaction in an American suburban high school (Varenne 1983). I was eventually led to focus on the patterns of language use about interaction when I realized that I could not in fact divide what was social interactional from what was a matter of symbolic expression. The advantage of starting what became a socio-linguistic study as an ethnography is that it made me more sensitive to the complexity of the school as a social system and to the inherent difficulties of making statements about any actual or objective 'social situation' to which speech could refer. Social situations, in real life, are rarely obvious events the boundaries of which impose themselves immediately on either the participants or the analysts. Social situations are constructed. There can be disagreements about their nature. There can be more or less successful negotiations to settle what a situation in fact consists of. These disagreements and negotiations realize themselves in conversations that are necessarily influenced by the symbolicolinguistic means used.

In my analysis, I focused particularly on the various forms used by the teachers and students to refer to each other, whether nominal (e.g., *teacher, administrator, jock, freak, John, John Smith*, etc.) or pronominal. I decided from the beginning to look at the ensemble of texts I collected and to analyze all the forms used in terms of each other rather than in terms of an a priori understanding of their nature. The texts I am using here are drawn from one interview with a particularly articulate student,

'Jack Saario', of whom the interviewer was asking questions about what kind of things happened in the school. The 'speech situation' formally comprised only Saario and the interviewer, each of whom was successively addressor and addressee. No 'third person' was present. To show the actual complexity of this situation let us look at an apparently innocuous and straightforward statement:

T54a[17]

The freaks are the drama section of the school. Anything to do with drama or even the band and music and art, they are more or less the freaks, the long hairs.

The information communicated looks extremely specific. We are being told about social interaction; linguistic forms are being used to refer to social events. We can build an image of this part of the school and, to decide about its 'truth value', i.e., the extent to which it exactly maps its apparent referent, we could look at the drama department and the student who participates in it. This is, we might expect, what Saario himself did at some point. It is because the interviewer assumed Saario had done so that he asked this question about cliques in the school. But the interviewer was not so naive as to take Saario at face value and he checked further. It then became apparent that the presence of cliques in the school was an ambiguous matter. There was no body of students specifiable by objective criteria (e.g., 'those involved in drama') systematically referred to in indirect third-person discourse as 'the freaks'. Students, too, were quite aware of this fact and in other contexts they made sure that the observers noticed it.

This is not the place to justify this analysis (I have done so elsewhere: Varenne 1981, 1983). Instead, let us return to pronominal use. It was necessary to spend some time on the use of nominal forms for social reference to suggest that some of the statements made about pronouns, particularly in relation to their role as 'shifters', also apply to nominal forms: the word 'freaks' does not refer to a set of students. It refers to a stance that can be taken in relation to certain students. What is crucial here is the fact that Saario used a particular form, thereby suggesting that he was adopting a certain stance in relation to the student body. This is the stance that is characterized by the use of 'referential speech'. As Silverstein mentions, this is only one possible stance within the English system of 'speech-signalled' events (1977: 145). Referential speech is a symbolic event that is constitutive of the event of 'description'. To realize the symbolic aspect of the use of referential speech one has but to look at the interviewer's impulse when he decided to 'check further': the formal appropriateness of the speech, and its coherence to the question, is the

problem rather than the solution. Reference is a rhetorical mechanism. It can hide ignorance, or a lie.

Saario himself could take other stances that do not quite present themselves as descriptive. Let us look at another text from the same interview:

T54b

We never had any trouble like this before, but last year ... OK. Last year they started with bomb threats. There was a couple of bomb threats. They just phoned in bomb threats and everybody had to go outside and it was a big joke and we had locker searches, etc...

Neither the *we* nor the *they* were specified in the immediate context. Saario relied for their interpretation on the assumed cultural competence of his listener. Neither form is 'fully cohesive' in Halliday and Hasan's terms. First, it is obvious that this *we* is 'exclusive' in that it is not intended to include an addressee who was not in the school the preceding year. Second, it is extremely unclear who is in fact included in the *we*. It would seem plausible that the set of people who Saario associated with himself through his use of *we* would refer to people who participated in the school. But did it include 'they' who phoned in bomb threats? Does it include or exclude the teachers and other adults in the school, or does it refer solely to the students? Does it exclude the students who were not members of Saario's cliques? In the absence of any other marking it could be argued plausibly that Saario was referring to any one of three social groups that ethnographic analysis did suggest possessed a certain kind of organizational reality:

(1) 'we', i.e., all the people involved in the school, those who had to get out from the building when the fire alarm sounded;
(2) 'we', i.e., the students;
(3) 'we', i.e., my friends and I.

Both statements were in fact equally ambiguous as far as their strictly referential power is concerned. Indeed, none of the potential referents of Saario's *we* that I just listed are themselves unambiguous events in the social world. When this is related to what had to be said earlier about mentions of *the freaks*, one can doubt the accuracy of a statement that makes use of a nominal gloss for a postulated social group (e.g., *the students* to be the 'referent' of a pronominal like *we*). It might be just as accurate to write that it is *we* that is the referent of *the students* (at least in certain settings). But in fact the more conservative statement would be to say that neither form is the referent of the other. The referent of both forms is a complex social event that must thus be symbolized in order for

it to be mentioned. This symbolization then takes many forms depending on the adopted point of view, even though the relation of each form to the event is equivalent — from the point of view of semiotic theory. No form is inherently closer to the referred situation. But forms do differ one from the other and their equivalence from a certain point of view must not let us ignore their differing powers. Saario can sometimes say *the* /nominal gloss/ or *we*.

He can also say *I*, and a look at his use of the form will help us clarify some of these points. Throughout the interview, Saario obviously is speaking and is thus always the implicit sociological subject of all his utterances. He does not, however, always assume this position. When does he do it? Let us look, for example, at the opening exchange between the interviewer and Saario:

T54c

Int.: You had mentioned to me that you felt there was a change in the school from two years ago. Would you like to talk about that a little further?
Saario: Yeah, O.K. Now the change from two years ago. Now it seems that this school has just quieted down. I read an article once ... that mentioned the same thing ... The same thing has happened with our school ...

Another text where Saario has been asked to name members of cliques goes in part as follows:

T55

I really don't know because it more or less changes. Ok, there's Tracy Rivers I mentioned with David Hymes. But George Singer, I really don't know. He's a fairly good ladies man. I don't know who he's going with now. But probably the cheerleader type thing. Marty Larson is going with, I don't know her name, but he's going with a cream-cheese type too ... They're real jocks. I mean they demonstrate their virility doing pushups, that type of thing. That's another clique, more or less. A lot of people would disagree with me and say, oh, you're wrong, you're right or something, but more or less ...

Saario's *I* is systematically set off and is used to frame a third-person description: '*I* think that *they* ...'. On the one hand it might be said that Saario is limiting the import of his statements by stressing that they only express his own opinion ('a lot of people would disagree with me...'). But it might also be said that he is also constantly reaffirming his own singularity and separateness, thus expressing less the social fact that he is the speaker (since he can convey information very easily with no use of *I*) than the cultural fact that a separate individual is the source of opinion and attitude. One suspects that Maxine Hong Kingston's Chinese parents

would not have framed answers to the same questions in such a manner as Saario did or as she in fact did in her own memoirs (1975).

We must not be blinded by the obvious referential explicitness of Saario's *I* into treating it differently from the way we were dealing with his *they* and *we*. It may be literally true that '*I* don't know' (T55), but it would have been quite as accurate to say '*we* don't know'. *Our* school (in T54c) is also *my* school. Indeed, if Saario uses his *I* in the fashion suggested, it is because his social environment has taught him, over the years, that this is the appropriate framing of an answer to a question of opinion. It is the same cultural environment that has led the planners of the research to assume that it would be useful to talk to individual students about their personal — minimal membership *you* — views.[18]

In other words, we could not write propositions for Saario's utterances that would univocally specify what in the world he referred to. As a whole, Saario's speech refers to some sociohistorical events: a group of students and their relationships. Saario is one of them. He has participated in many activities with them over many years (more than four in many cases). He knows them intimately. He knows himself very well, too, particularly in his relationship with them. At the time of the interview all this forms the backdrop the interview is intended to bring to life in an improvised epic picture. We then find that this *same* situation can be expressed in various ways:

— 'this is the way it is: *they* ...' (T54);
—'*We* ...' (T54b);
— '*I* really don't know but this is what I think of it: they ...' (T606).

To say that all three statements are statements of opinion (which they are) would miss the point that Saario only frames some of his statements as opinions. To say that all statements are underlaid by a *we*/*they* dichotomy where *we* would be 'the freaks' or 'the students' as against *they*, 'the jocks' or 'the adults', would also miss the point that Saario can exclude himself from the freaks or the students, who would then become, in his speech, another *they*.

Reference and context in the determination of the structure of shifters

All forms we have been looking at are functionally equivalent. They are all shifters, indexical markers of social situations.[19] This is what allows us to deal with them as a single set. However, if my analysis of their use in the speech of the people in Sheffield is correct, we must account for these shifters in a fundamentally different manner from the manner that has become traditional.

Several things can be mentioned. First, it is clear that the pattern of Saario's use of pronominals cannot be explained in terms of the immediate situation of his speech. Second, it would be very limiting to approach this pattern from the point of view of the 'appropriateness' of the use of certain forms in this situation. There are no textual grounds to separate 'standard' from 'non-standard' use. Third, the social organization of the school is, by itself, no guide to the interpretation of Saario's pronominals. It is obvious that they are *about* this organization and that his use is influenced by his position within it. However, it cannot determine it. It is complex and ambiguous enough to allow him to place himself rhetorically in various positions within or without various groups, wherever he might 'objectively' be placed. Saario made sense. Fourth, it is possible to outline a paradigm of rhetorically signifying forms the characteristic features of which can be specified in terms of their rhetorical effect, rather than in terms of a postulated speech situation.

These considerations can help us rephrase the general statements that can be made about shifter functioning and the interpretive operations that are necessary to transform the linguistic message into an accurate image of the reality apparently referred to. To perform such operations, one must possess both a generalized knowledge of all the situations possibly referred to *and* a strictly symbolic form of competence. The generalized knowledge is necessary first because in most speech very few of the relevant features of a situation are verbally mentioned (e.g., Saario talks repeatedly of 'the school' — a very vague term indeed). More fundamentally, this knowledge is necessary because no speech, however nominally explicit it may appear to be, will ever be successful in orally rendering this knowledge in a way that would make the speech equivalent to the experience upon which it was based. Furthermore, the speech that interests us here is a speech about events that are not co-occurring with the speech. There is no immediate feedback from the situation that might provide the missing information or correct a mistaken interpretation. No such situation could in fact be devised, since the speech is often an attempt at relating many different situations. Finally, it is not even plausible to expect that two protagonists will in fact ever see the 'same' situation in the same manner (i.e., describe the situation in the same manner), since they cannot ever occupy the same position within it.

This generalized knowledge, however necessary, is not sufficient to understand what is being said precisely because the speech is so far removed from the social situation. It is possible, for those who are primarily interested in the social situation as an objective event, simply to ignore speech about it from the participants. This is a common solution among social scientists. But it is a solution the participants do not have

the luxury to adopt. They often do not have any other source of information about the nature of a situation than that which is offered in the speech of their interlocutors. In any event they cannot ignore this speech — even if they know better — if they want, or are obliged, to interact. It is all the more important that they listen to the speech as an event in itself if they want to understand the stance the speaker is taking vis-à-vis a situation and the effect this speaker may want to produce. In other words, the speech has an independent power and a special symbolic competence is necessary to make something out of it. How to account for this competence and how to describe specific systems is the task that sociolinguistics or sociosemiotics must give to itself.

In the case of shifters the distinction between generalized participatory or experiential knowledge on the one hand, and symbolic competence on the other, is all the more delicate to make since shifters are, functionally, *about* social relations and suggest, through their very forms, the parameters and organization of a social world. Shifters are all the more successful in that the world they offer is not completely false to experience. This rhetorical power is what allows for political manipulation, false consciousness, and the common presumption that there is a 'reality' behind the 'myths' by which we would conduct our lives. To try to do nothing more than reconstitute this reality is to lose sight of an important aspect of this very reality: Communicational structures are differentiated enough to cause this confusion. It is to lose sight of what Eco considers a central property of semiotic systems: the fact that they allow for lying or distorting for comic or tragic effect (1976: 7, 64).

Whether their imagined or signified school structure corresponds to the 'actual' school, all participants have at their disposal a structured system that constantly participates in shaping the production and interpretation of their speech about social relationships. Through this system speakers can express a certain stance they can adopt toward certain people at a certain time for certain purposes. They are not limited by their 'actual' social relations to the use of certain forms that would mechanically reflect these relations. Conversely, the forms they use carry a distinct 'meaning' that does not change, whatever the objective referent of the utterance at the time it is uttered. Thus, while it is certain that *we* is generally 'very ambiguous with regard to its referent' (Wills 1977: 279), *we* is much less ambiguous in terms of what it rhetorically suggests. *We* does not have many meanings to be listed in an ad hoc fashion. *We*, in American usage, always means something like *the possible intention of the speaker to identify with himself some other unspecified persons in relation to the action specified later in the utterance.* All the usages of *we* traditionally mentioned, from the editorial *we* to the inclusive *we* of the canonical speech

situation (when *we* = *thou* + *I*), can be seen in this light. The referential accuracy may vary, but the rhetorical meaning remains stable. *We* is not *they*.

This argument could be cast in terms of Silverstein's discussion of the relation between language structure and the metapragmatic constitution of this structure. Not only is *we* not *they*, it has also been built into a rhetorically powerful political event, the 'we/they' dichotomy about which most American informants can say something. My analysis, however, goes beyond the demonstration of a correspondence. Silverstein has been approaching the issue that concerns me from the point of view of the analysis of language. He talks of 'cultural prerequisites to grammatical analysis' (1977). He is well aware that the cultural analysis that is required for grammatical analysis must go beyond the altogether simple-minded functionalist explanations that have been typical of sociolinguistics. But he does not quite offer a clear alternative. In fact, there are 'grammatical' prerequisites to any 'cultural' analysis.

No cultural analysis is possible that is not also a detailed analysis of the language used by the participants to deal with their interactions with the world and with each other. If one does not pay proper attention to the full range of pronominal use in American English, it is easy to conduct reanalyses of Brown and Gilman (1960) that do not go beyond the concepts that have always been associated with the use of *tu* and *vous* since long before the advent of sociolinguistics — as the work of Bauman on Quakers (1981) reveals. Silverstein, for example (1979: 227–230), never departs from the traditional metapragmatic vocabulary. He talks solely about 'power', 'solidarity', 'equality', etc. In spite of his awareness that metapragmatic vocabularies can be misleading, he does not tell us how one would conduct the analysis that would allow one to see this vocabulary in its own cultural arbitrariness.

It is not enough to talk about recent European history in terms of the rise of egalitarian ideology. It is more accurate to say that this history is characterized by a *concern* with equality that produces investigations into everyday use, including language use, that highlight aspects of the linguistic system suddenly made politically relevant.[20] At the same time other aspects of language use cease to have the same political presence, though they may still be performed and available for metapragmatic awareness in certain restricted contexts. Such is the case with what I have called 'bureaucratic' speech in modern American culture. (e.g., 'The teacher is responsible for maintenance of discipline in his/her classroom': This utterance is almost solely possible in such settings as legal contracts.) No powerful theory of culture is possible that does not pay attention to what is not paid attention to in the political ideology of the people.

Western ideology, as Dumont has been arguing (1970, 1979), is best characterized not so much by its 'individualism' as by the institutions that it constructs as it tries to deny the relevance of a holism that it is in fact experiencing.

Such concerns may seem to have taken us very far from those with which we started. I hope to have made the case that these are concerns we must have if we are to understand the apparently narrower problem of pronominal use. I hope I have also made the case that all analyses of culture will be enriched by a detailed concern with language use. Neither linguistic analysis nor cultural analysis can solve its problems by reducing itself to the other. Linguists cannot solve the problem of deixis by invoking sociology, anthropologists cannot solve the problem of cultural analysis by invoking linguistics. The semiotic value of any symbol, i.e., its rhetorical effect on interaction, can only be determined through a 'textual' notion of use. Yes, symbols can only be deciphered in use, but the use is itself symbolic.

Notes

1. Many persons and institutions helped this paper come into being and I want to acknowledge their participation. First are the National Institute of Education, the Ford Foundation, and the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute at Teachers College, who provided financial support for the research. Patricia Caesar and Rodney Riffle collected much of the data I have used for this analysis; F. A. J. Ianni directed the overall project; my wife Susan provided the necessary personal environment. As for Robert Austerlitz, Paul Friedrich, Clifford Hill, and Ray McDermott, they read various drafts of the paper and challenged me into more careful honing.
2. I will not deal here with indirect discourse and the further complexities it raises. The analysis of sentences such as 'He said, "I am writing"' or 'He said I am writing' is an issue that is at the forefront of theoretical concern for people like Halliday and Hasan (1976) or Ducrot (1980). However these issues are resolved, they do not directly concern the more basic ones of approach to analysis that are our focus here.
3. Some would in fact like to treat all language as indexical, whatever the syntactic form of its realization, on the grounds that there are no universal propositions but only local ones, the efficient extension of which is never fully specified, even as interlocutors can use them with little difficulty (Mehan and Wood 1975: 93–95).
4. A word like *mother* can have nonshifter uses, as in dictionary definition, legal texts, or anthropological analysis.
5. To anticipate arguments made later in the paper, I would prefer to say that an understanding of the situation is necessary to interpret speech 'coherently' (rather than 'correctly'), since the notion of correctness implies a reference point outside language, a notion I want to challenge.
6. 'The regularity of the formal structure and a symmetry of secondary origin that *produce the impression* of three interrelated persons' (my emphasis; 1966: 256).
7. As is the case with so many such generalizations, this is not true cross-culturally. Paul Friedrich (personal communication) affirms that, in many languages, third-person pronouns can in fact be used for persons involved in the discourse.
8. In use, it may in fact be necessary to add many specifics (e.g., last names, social security numbers, etc.) to discriminate a *John*, given the frequency of such a first name, Indeed, it may be that most mentions of a first name are understood deictically through contextual information.
9. This in fact should be carefully researched: How widespread is the taboo? What are the rules of use of the taboo? What happens when it has to be broken? Are there cultural variations on all this? These are fundamental questions that have been hidden by the traditional understandings of shifter structure.
10. It is so unpopular, in fact, that the translators of Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* (1973) took it upon themselves to translate his *nous* into *I*, which obliged them to write an explanatory and apologetic notice at the beginning of the English version of the second volume when Lévi-Strauss made clear that his use of *nous* was fully conscious and planned. They do not seem to have taken seriously the possibility that *nous* and *je* carry different semantic loads even when they refer to the same actor. They must have told themselves — using an argument made famous by Malinowski (see note 12) – 'Since Lévi-Strauss can be assumed to have written this book his *nous* means *I* and our translation is justified'.
11. 'Individual works are all potential myths, but it is their adoption of the collective mode, should it happen, that actualizes their "mythism"' (my translation).
12. 'The insubstantial location given to an anonymous thought so that it could unfold itself, distance itself from itself, rediscover and realise its true disposition and organize itself according to the inherent constraints of its sole nature' (my translation).
13. I shall be using here the words 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' in the traditional sense consistent with Lyons' usage. Conklin and Hymes now talk of 'minimal and non-minimal membership' and reserve the other words to refer to the formal differentiation between first and second person: They talk of the inclusion/exclusion of speaker or hearer. This usage seems to me to be cumbersome and confusing.
14. It may be interesting to examine the source of these blinders. While this is outside the scope of this paper, it can be hypothesized that sociolinguistics has suffered as much as it has gained by associating itself closely to Malinowski's functionalist linguistics and particularly his idea that reference is the source of meaning (1946). If reference *is* the source of meaning then deictics particularly, because of their indexical function, are to be interpreted in terms of their actual referent, this referent being fully contained *outside* the linguistic form on the principle that 'the conception of meaning as *contained* in an utterance is false and futile' (Malinowski 1946: 307). What made Malinowski so interesting to modern sociolinguists, and what makes him so dangerous, is the fact that this principle was, for him, a *methodological* one that was a guide to the interpretation of texts. Thus, when he writes that 'the meaning of any single word is to a very high degree dependent on its context', it is a justification for his translation decisions: 'the words "wood", "paddle", "place" had to be retranslated in the free interpretation in order to show what is their real meaning, conveyed to a native by the context in which they appear' (1946: 306). The translation thus became essentially a *description* of aspects of the setting as observed by Malinowski: 'we paddle in place' for him means 'we arrive near the village' since the referent of the former sentence — as far as *he* could observe it — is the act of arriving. I will not summarize here the full range of Malinowski's thinking on all these matters and the criticisms of his position. Hymes himself, who is generally so respectful of Malinowski, is aware of the dangers of taking his most general principles too literally. Few were those who heeded his warning: 'It would not serve to displace the meaning of pronouns onto the contexts alone (as

Malinowski's approach seemed in danger of doing); that way would be sheer confusion' (1974: 112).

15. A very interesting exception is a paper by Seidel (1975) where he analyzes a corpus of political tracts from the 'May '68 events' in France. In the paper he confronts directly the fundamental ambiguity of the *nous*, *vous*, and *on* liberally used by the various authors to rally people to their cause. Seidel is particularly clear that the referents were always masked. Indeed, most of them were not actual events in the world but rather only hoped-for and rhetorically suggested events. But Seidel stops before investigating the source of the rhetorical power of the various forms and why participants always had a clear understanding of what was intended even when they radically disagreed.
16. Seventeenth-century English Quakers learned this lesson at their sometimes very dear expense when they insisted on the use of *thee* forms in address — and got beaten and thrown in jail for it. Their rationale, that the use of plural to single persons was a 'lie', and thus sinful, is the same rationale used by functional accounts of pronominal usage. The Quaker critics knew it was a lie, but insisted that traditional use, i.e., culture, was what counted. In fact the Quakers themselves used *thee* forms rhetorically, to affirm their separate identity!
17. The various texts are numbered as they are in *American School Language* (Varenne 1983).
18. Such an approach might shed some new light on an old problem. Jespersen was quite certain that a young child's use of self-reference forms could not be used as an index of this child's individuation. Singer has raised the issue again after observing a child use both first- and third-person forms for self-reference. On the one hand, such a case is 'merely' an instance of play on possible forms. On the other hand, the fact that these are the forms with which the child plays cannot be uninteresting. Finally, how do we know about adult individuation except through the manipulation of reference?
19. I shall not justify here why such forms as 'the freaks' or 'the administration' should be handled as shifters. I have done so elsewhere (Varenne 1978, 1981). At the center of the argument is the fact that such words are only used to refer to certain persons at certain times. At other times the same persons could be referred to through other means (first names, 'we', etc.) so that it could be said that the meaning of 'the freaks' was a 'reality of discourse'.
20. The Quaker case mentioned earlier would be an instance of this process, as are the continuing conversations in France about the proper use of *tu* that are leading to a self-consciously 'new' pattern, as members of the intelligentsia, both of the right and the left on the political spectrum, adopt the reciprocal *tu*.

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