

8. Social structure, groups and interaction¹

PENELOPE BROWN and STEPHEN LEVINSON

1. Introduction

In this chapter we have two main concerns. The first is to examine how matters of large-scale social structure are related to aspects of verbal interaction, especially through the mediation of participants' membership in social groups. Examining the relation between group membership and its reflection in speech, we shall see that to a large extent this relation itself is mediated by the intervening variable of social relationships. A subsidiary theme is then how, through these interrelations, linguistic markers of one social variable can convey information about other social variables.

It would be impossible within the scope of this chapter to review all the kinds of relations between social structure and aspects of verbal interaction – that would involve a survey of the whole of sociolinguistics, the sociology of language, and much of the social psychology of language use, not to mention the ethnography of speaking and cognitive anthropology.² This chapter does not purport then to be a complete survey of the literature; we have chosen instead to focus on some exemplary phenomena that illustrate the complex nature of the interrelations between social structure, groups, social relationships, interaction and language usage.

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² For a survey of views about the relation between language structure and social structure see Grimshaw 1970; for specific claims about the relationship between social structures and the kinds of communicative codes they support see Gumperz 1962; for general surveys of these fields see Ervin-Tripp 1969; Fishman 1972, 1974; Giles & Powesland 1975; Hymes 1974; Labov 1972a: chs. 8 and 9; Trudgill 1974b. Cf. also collections of essays in Bailey & Shuy 1973; Bauman & Sherzer 1975; Fishman 1968, 1971–2; Giglioli 1972; Gumperz 1971; Gumperz & Hymes 1972; Hymes 1964; Pride & Holmes 1972; Sanches & Blount 1976; Shuy 1973; and issues of the journal *Language and Society*.

Arising out of that first concern – how matters of social structure are reflected in verbal interaction especially through the mediation of group membership – our second major concern is to make some basic theoretical observations about the ways in which social information is communicated in verbal interaction. Essentially we shall argue that it would be easy to be misled, partly by some of the methods and implicit assumptions of social psychology, towards an oversimple view of how social information is conveyed in speech.

Although we shall return to these theoretical observations in section 3, it will be helpful at the outset to have an indication of the theoretical direction of the chapter. This we provide in section 1. In section 2 we return to the empirical questions about how membership in social groups is reflected in speech, taking different kinds of linguistic marker in turn. From this a number of further questions arise, which we attempt to answer in section 3.

1.1. Approaches to relations between verbal interaction and social facts

In interaction, information about participants' social identities and relationships, and about the nature of the social context, are clearly conveyed by aspects of the speech exchanged. An attractively simple model of how this information is communicated would be this: linguistic variables are sometimes correlated with social variables, each such correlation being a *marker* in the sense of this volume, so that in interaction such linguistic variables act as direct signals of the correlated social variable. In interaction, then, social information is basically conveyed by the presence of such markers in speech.

Throughout the chapter we shall provide many examples of socially significant aspects of speech that do not fit this scheme, and we shall conclude that this picture is essentially misleading. As will become clear, this is because interactants do not generally treat socially significant linguistic features as simple signals of social facts – but rather take into account the interactional and social context in their evaluation of these features in highly complex ways. Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons why social psychologists might be predisposed to adopt such a model of how social information of this sort is encoded in speech. The reasons lie in discernable tendencies in the discipline. First, there tends to be an assumption that processes of interaction can be isolated from matters of social structure in a relatively unproblematic way. Secondly,

arising from the traditional reliance on experimental methods, there is an emphasis on the concept of correlation; given a correlation between a linguistic and a social variable it is tempting to think that the linguistic variable acts for participants directly as a signal of the social variable. Thirdly, there is a tendency to think of interaction as constituted by an unstructured exchange of such signals (which we may call the *barrage-of-signals* view of interaction), even though a barrage of signals patently does not add up to the highly structured event that any interaction is. Fourthly, and relatedly, there tends to be an underemphasis or even a neglect of the notion of *structure*, either as holding among linguistic variables or among social variables. Finally, there is an overwhelming concentration on non-verbal communication, an area where the barrage-of-signals view of communication may possibly be more appropriate.³

³ Some of these tendencies are much easier to document than others. There is no problem finding an array of basic introductory social psychology texts in which there is a total absence of the notion of social structure (and of structure in general), and in which interaction is treated in what for sociologists would be a social vacuum (see, e.g., Baron, Byrne & Griffitt 1974; Freedman, Carlsmith & Sears 1970; Jones & Gerard 1967). Views on the nature of communication systems are harder to document – in fact it is remarkable how many basic texts on social psychology and interaction have nothing at all to say about the structure of communication systems in the sense that, say, a linguist would understand that phrase (see, e.g., McClintock 1972; Secord & Backman 1974). But where views are expressed explicitly, they often seem to convey that disturbing picture to which we object – namely the view that interaction consists of a barrage of unstructured signals. Consider for example Newcomb's A-B-X system, as described by Sahakian (1974: 368): 'In speaking of social interaction, Newcomb does so in communicative terms, that is, social interaction (a process lasting a lifetime) he describes as virtually an exchange of information. . . . An interaction unit, the *communicative act*, is defined as "any observable behavior by which information, consisting of discriminative stimuli, is transmitted from a human source to a human recipient (Newcomb, 1953, p. 141)".' To be fair, the barrage-of-signals view of interaction, and the correlational view of a signal, seems to have another source in work done in kinesics and paralanguage by ethologists, phoneticians and others besides social psychologists. It seems for example to underlie the discussion of *indexical* information by Abercrombie (1968), Laver (1968), Laver & Hutcheson (1972), and although the model may be applicable to such domains (although this needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed – for counter-evidence see Good 1978), it certainly must not be generalized to all aspects of verbal or nonverbal communication systems. The basic distinction to be made here is that between what Lyons (1972: 71) calls *communicative* signals, those intended to inform by an exercise of choice by the sender, and noncommunicative but nevertheless *informative* signals that were not intended to convey information (cf. Laver & Trudgill, this volume: ch. 1, 1). The structureless barrage-of-signals view is only, if then, adequate for the latter kind of information transfer.

For some reason social psychologists have shied away from studying central aspects of linguistic communication, even when they claim to be studying interaction; we find instead a concentration on proxemics, kinesics, paralanguage – i.e. nonverbal communication (see e.g., Secord & Backman (1974), with a short discussion of nonverbal communication and none of verbal communication, or Argyle's (1969) text on interaction with only four pages centrally concerned with verbal interaction). Because of this concentration there is a considerable danger that the barrage-of-signals view of communication, more appropriate to the nonintentional aspects of nonverbal communication, will be generalized to the much more structured field of intentional verbal communication.

If the diagnosis is correct, these tendencies threaten to lead social psychologists towards a simple model of the sort sketched, and away from a more complex one that treats interaction systems and social systems as structures interlocked in such a way that, given aspects of the one, participants have strong expectations about aspects of the other. Such a more complex model is certainly what is required if the way in which participants themselves perceive and manage their interactions is to be adequately captured.⁴

It is instructive to contrast anthropologists' approach to interaction. To them patterns of interaction are very largely a reflex of social structure. They attempt to tie aspects of interaction, as dependent variables, back to aspects of social structure; so for example, particular principles of kinship structure are held to lie behind the systematic distribution of respect, avoidance, familiarity and joking behaviour among specific kinds of kin in particular societies (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1968; Radcliffe-Brown 1952 and discussion in Brown & Levinson 1978: 243ff.). Indeed the interrelations between social organization and the structure of interaction become much clearer when one varies the social and interactional variables in cross-cultural work. Further, anthropologists treat communication systems as organized along strictly structural lines, whereby the values of symbols are seen to derive from contrast and juxtaposition with other symbols rather than from intrinsic connections to social variables (see, e.g., Leach 1976). And when anthropologists study verbal interaction in detail, they do not isolate linguistic variables, but explore instead how they cohere into a structured event that ties into social structure in a number of detailed ways (*vide* the ethnography of speaking, as exemplified in Bauman & Sherzer 1975). While anthropological analysis generally lacks the rigour and replicability of social psychological methods, the

⁴ We raise here the problem of *emic* vs. *etic* analyses. We take the uncompromising position that the only facts relevant to interaction are *emic* ones, ones that are perceived (or at least perceivable) by participants and so can potentially play a communicative role in the interaction (cf. Giles, Scherer & Taylor, this volume: ch. 9, 3.4). We are not committed to the view that *emic* facts are explicitly storable by participants or even that they are conscious of them. How then are *emic* facts to be distinguished from *etic* ones? First, to be candidates for *emic* status they must be facts at thresholds that humans can perceive. Second, they should be shown to be attended to by participants. There are various ways of showing this, both directly and indirectly. An example is to be found in the work of Labov, discussed below. Labov showed that rates of /r/ production correlated with the social class of speakers in New York City. So far the result was *etic*, with no evidence that New Yorkers pay any attention to this fact or even notice it. But Labov went on to show, via the matched-guise technique, that New Yorkers can perceive different rates of production, and apparently do attend to them, and on the basis of these relative rates assign class and occupational potential (Labov 1972a). It was only the latter study that showed this social marker of class to be of any interactional significance.

emphasis on how the parts fit together to form a whole has important application to the study of social interaction.

The emphasis on one concept in particular is worth borrowing from anthropologists, namely the concept of *structure*. We may isolate two rather different concepts of structure, one relatively weak, the other stronger. The weak one involves the interdependencies and interrelations between the component parts of a whole; the dominant metaphor used here is an analogy to a mechanical or organic system where each part functions in relation to the other parts to produce the behaviour of the whole. The stronger notion of structure – as for example in Saussurian linguistics – maintains that components can only be isolated and defined, and their significance assessed, in relation to their role in the whole. So, for example, phonemes are only isolable by contrast to all the other phonemes of the language. The stronger notion seems generally appropriate to communication systems, and when we talk of *interactional structure* we may generally be taken to imply the stronger concept at least in part. In talking of social systems some theorists (e.g. Nadel 1957: 7ff.) employ only the weaker concept, while others (e.g. Leach 1961) use the stronger notion in that domain as well. When we talk of *social structure* we frankly equivocate, although in some cases at least the stronger notion does indeed seem appropriate (e.g. in the isolation of significant social groups – see below).

We shall argue that the notion of structural dependency is crucial to an understanding of how social information is conveyed in speech. It operates both to structure the relations between social variables and to structure the relations between linguistic and other interactional variables. As a consequence we shall show that for participants to understand the social significance of linguistic items, they must have a prior understanding of the social structures within which interaction takes place and a knowledge of the structural relations between aspects of interactional organization. These points can best be exemplified by a single extended example, which now follows.

1.2. Case study: T/V pronominal usage in a Tamil village

In a Tamil village in the middle of South India the population is exhaustively assigned to a set of about twenty castes (for the sociological details of this case see Beck 1972; for the sociolinguistic facts see Levinson 1977). Members operate a Tu/Vous type of pronominal system (Brown & Gilman 1960), where an asymmetric use of a T and a V pronoun indicates the

superiority of the T-giver and the inferiority of the V-giver. Looking for social variables that correlate with the use of each pronoun, we would soon isolate caste membership. Correlating speaker's caste with T or V usage we could get quite strong correlations for individuals at either end of the caste hierarchy, for high-caste speakers would tend to use T and low-caste speakers would tend to use V. We would of course be wrong to conclude that T and V are therefore markers of caste – for the correlations are actually a contingent matter, contingent in part on the demographic facts that if our speaker is a top-caste member then the chances are that a random interlocutor will be of a lower caste, and will thus receive T. Let's assume that we avoid this pitfall, and realize that the asymmetric use of T and V are markers of *relative* status only. But still we cannot conclude from an instance of, say, T that the speaker is superior to the addressee, for that depends (mostly) on whether the addressee returns V. If he returns T, the two will seem rather to be exchanging markers of solidary equality. So here is a case where to ignore an elementary structure of interaction (an *exchange* of address forms) would hopelessly confuse the picture of what is going on. We conclude therefore that a giving of T *relative to a receiving of V* is a marker of the relative superiority of speaker over addressee. There is no direct correlation with caste, as we find out when we examine the speech of middle-caste members who will of course be giving T to those below and V to those above. Caste is therefore no longer a variable in our account of T/V pronouns as markers.

But that is absurd. Because caste in fact lies behind the assignment of relative status to any pair of interlocutors, and in order for members to decide appropriate usage they need to know the caste of the addressee. For they know that the social structure of the village assigns the local population exhaustively to a (almost) linear rank of castes, so that for two members drawn from different castes one can nearly always assign a relative rank to the dyad. This fact about social structure underlies members' use of pronouns even if caste is not a significant variable when correlated directly with the T/V marker.

But for members to use the T/V pronouns appropriately they need to know a lot in addition to all this. In particular they need to know more about both interactional structure and social structure. For example, they need to know that when requesting favours from particular alters it behooves them to be more polite than they otherwise would (see Brown & Levinson 1978), and this may shift their pronoun usage.⁵ In addition, they

⁵ The fact that T/V usage in some languages is sometimes situationally manipulable for particular interactional ends may come as a surprise to speakers of languages where the

would not fall into the trap of thinking that the reciprocal exchange of T between members of four castes of intermediate status is an expression of solidarity, for they would know that these castes find themselves in a structural position of extreme delicacy on the border of an important bipartite distinction between high and low castes. Consequently, none dares give an inch for fear of falling into the low category; if none can therefore give the others V, they must all give each other T. The reciprocal T is thus here a sign of bitter stalemate.

This example we hope points out the potential dependencies of any observable pattern of language use on the structural properties of events and their encompassing social structures. For example, we have shown that the significance (or 'social meaning') of a pronominal choice depends on a number of aspects of interactional structure: first it depends critically on the reciprocal usage, and secondly on a distinction between a normal and a marked usage, as in the extra politeness (and switch to V) involved in certain requests. We have also shown that the significance of a pattern of pronominal usage can only be properly understood against a background of social structural facts: in this case we have to appreciate that the caste hierarchy imposes a status relationship on an intercaste dyad, so that caste is only indirectly reflected and not directly marked in T/V usage. In addition, only social structural information could lead us to know that the symmetrical exchange of T among members of the four intermediate castes mentioned above is not an expression of mutual solidarity. The social and interactional significance of a particular pronominal usage is thus relative to other features of these two levels of organization: in order to understand a given pattern, we must refer back to these structural features, just as the members who produced the pattern referred to the same features in their production and interpretation of it.

In the rest of the chapter our concern is to trace out some of the (not always obvious) connections between patterns of language usage and the particular social systems in which they occur.

use of a T or V pronoun is more rigidly determined only by relatively permanent features of social relationships, such as status. Brown & Gilman (1960) note that this situational and attitudinal flexibility clearly existed in the past in French and English. Friedrich (1972) documents the same for Russian (for further details see Levinson 1978). In Tamil the switch from T to V to mark extra politeness in requests only occurs in social relationships where the decision to use T or V is borderline in any case; however, the switch from V to an extra-polite pronoun ('super-V') is very common in many kinds of relationships (Levinson 1977).

2. Social groups and interaction

The term 'social structure' is used in a great number of different ways by social scientists,⁶ but most would probably agree that a description of a social structure should include a description of the structural relations between the major segments of a society. Such segments are often groups. Now group membership plays an important role in social interaction presumably for the following simple reason. To the extent that there are social regularities in interaction these are due in large measure to some typing or classification of significant classes of persons; rules for appropriate behaviour can then be attached to such classes. Group membership provides one such useful categorization, and so group membership often plays an important role in linking overall social structure to the details of social interaction.

After explaining what we shall mean by 'group' in section 2.1, we examine in 2.2. some cases of relatively direct linguistic markers of social group membership. We shall see, however, that in many cases the understanding of these markers requires reference both to social structure and to the structure of interaction. In section 2.3 we show how markers of social relationships in many cases are derivatively clues to group membership, and we therefore (in 2.4) review some basic markers of social relationships. In section 2.5 we describe some even more indirect ways in which social structure can affect group patterns of interaction, and in section 2.6 we draw together and discuss the different types of markers of relations between groups and language.

2.1. Group

Social scientists use the word 'group' in so many ways, as for example in the phrases *small group*, *reference group*, *corporate group*, *ethnic group*, *interest group*, that we are unlikely to find any common core that means more than 'set'. Social scientists who adopt the weak concept of structure outlined above are likely to think of groups in relatively concrete terms, as independently isolable units of social structure – perhaps in terms of Deutsch's (1968: 265) definition as 'an entity that consists of interacting people who are aware of being bound together in terms of mutually linked interests'. On the other hand, social theorists who adopt the stronger concept of structure are more likely to think of groups as relative

⁶ For a set of contrasting views of anthropologists, see Fortes 1969; Leach 1954: 4; Lévi-Strauss 1968: 279; Nadel 1957: 5; Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 192.

concepts, each group being a unit that is relevant only in relation to units of like size that for immediate purposes are contrasted with it. Thus for a man who lives in Cambridge, his territorial identification will be with Cambridge when contrasted with Newmarket, with Cambridgeshire when contrasted with Lancashire, with England when contrasted with Scotland, with the United Kingdom when contrasted with Germany, and so on. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) classic description of the 'segmentary structure' of Nuer lineages showed that this relative concept can be the basis of coordinated group action over common interests, so that it is not necessarily inconsistent with the more concrete concept of an interest-based, potentially co-active group. In many respects this relative concept of a group, as a contrastive category, seems to fit the 'native' intuitions better: for example in India there is no lexeme that unequivocally denotes the western sociologists' units of caste or endogamous subcaste; instead the word *jaati* (adopted by western sociologists for their units of analysis) can denote any category from a lineage to an animal species. Such conceptual relativity to opposed units may also explain the elusive nature of the western folk notion of 'social class'.⁷

An interest in the linguistic correlates of group membership itself directs attention to certain kinds and levels of social unit. While with enough ingenuity a few linguistic reflexes of even the smallest and most transitory of groups can probably be found, deep discontinuities in a number of aspects of communicative competence seem to be found on the whole only in the larger groups of the sort we call ethnic groups, sectarian groups, social classes, caste categories, and so on. Such units are, at least to some extent, culture-bearing units, and the linguistic discontinuities exist because there are independent bodies of norms governing the use of speech in each such unit, maintained by the kind of internal social network that can sustain such linguistic subcultures (see Giles, this volume: ch. 7; Gumperz 1958). For those who wish to retain some more concrete concept of group, these units can be thought of as categories from which actual interest groups can be drawn in particular localized situations – in a small town, for example. But the communication networks that sustain the linguistic differentiation of the larger categories must clearly stretch beyond these localized instantiations.

Just how these networks operate is still quite unclear – Gumperz (1958) has provided evidence that discontinuities in social dialect, for instance, are not always attributable directly to discontinuities in networks of

⁷ For an ethnosemantic study of Hawaiian terms for race and class along similar lines, see Kay 1975.

interaction as Bloomfield (1933) had argued. This makes untenable the view (as implied, e.g., in Trudgill 1974b: 34) that the analogues of the rivers and mountains that typically serve to divide regional dialects are, in the case of social dialects, fundamental divides in social networks (i.e. interaction barriers between groups).

However they are maintained, such basic discontinuities in language can, and are likely to, show up at all levels of the grammar (in which case we talk of *social dialects*) as well as in the norms that govern use of language – in short, in all aspects of what Hymes (1972) has termed *communicative competence*. There have in fact been relatively few studies of subcultural differences in the use of language, but this is likely to be a growing and important field of research that will complement studies of social dialect. Apart from Bernstein's work (1971), some suggestions can be found in Brown & Levinson (1978: 247–60), and some empirical work in Gumperz (1976, 1977, 1978) and Gumperz, Agrawal & Aulakh (n.d.).

Smaller groups are unlikely to maintain these fundamental discontinuities in communicative norms. Nevertheless, differences of repertoire, social deixis, but above all differences in vocabulary – and consequently in *register*, *argot*, *slang*, and so on – can still be distinctive amongst small groups. Thus in India only large categories of castes are likely to have distinctive dialects and communicative competences, while the smaller units of caste and subcaste are likely to display some lexical isoglosses. We shall touch on each of these distinctive aspects of language below.

2.2. Markers of group membership

Dialect. One of the most direct ways in which groups play a role in verbal interaction is that when we speak we tend to betray, sometimes by design and sometimes whether we like it or not, details of our group memberships. This information is carried above all in the particular variety of the code that we speak. Dialect, both regional and social, plays a key role here, and has been the subject of an immense amount of linguistic and sociolinguistic work. By dialect we understand a variety of a language distinguished from other varieties by features cross-cutting the grammar, including phonological, syntactic, lexical and prosodic features, which can be specified as a distinctive subset of the linguistic rules of a language. This will not quite serve to distinguish dialect from some related phenomena, but it will distinguish dialect from *accent* (phonological and phonetic features only), *register* and *argot* (features of lexis, predom-

antly), and *style* (a distinctive usage of linguistic resources within a dialect).⁸ Regional dialect can be a marker of social group membership insofar as regional boundaries are coterminous with social group boundaries but, given migration and invasion, the correspondence of regional and group boundaries is not usually one to one. Regional dialect can be deepened to accentuate linguistic differences between a local group and invading outsiders (Labov's report of linguistic change in Martha's Vineyard (Labov 1972a: ch. 1) is a case in point). And frequently regional dialect becomes a marker of social group membership as a social dialect, when a group migrates into a favourable or unfavourable social niche in another area (for example the Irish in New York; the Jews in Germany (Weinreich 1968); and dialects typical of other regions often typify the speech of particular castes in India).

But it is social dialects, especially dialects associated with ranked social strata, that tend to be the most significant markers of group membership within a single speech community. There is an ever-accumulating amount of information on social dialects in western cities, of which the most important is still probably the work of Labov on New York City English (Labov 1966, 1972a, 1972c; but see also Trudgill (1974a) on Norwich English; and Shuy, Wolfram & Riley (1967), Wolfram & Fasold (1974) on Detroit English; as well as the work of Sankoff (1973, 1975), Sankoff & Cedergren (1971), Sankoff, Sarrasin & Cedergren (1971) on Montreal French). Labov's work on social dialects in New York City reveals that in the continuously graded social strata of the White population, the 'dialects' are themselves continua distinguished by a relatively small number of sociolinguistic variables (mostly phonological), that are more often distinctive by relative quantity than by absolute absence or presence.⁹ It is apparently the relative frequency of these variables that

⁸ Usage of these terms in the literature is in fact varied and confused, in part because the phenomena themselves are not clearly discrete. Both structural and functional criteria are necessary to distinguish them. For example, diglossic variants are structurally the same phenomena as dialects, but functionally different: for the high diglossic variant is not the vernacular (basic casual speech level) of any speakers. *Style* is used in many ways, but two usages are especially significant for the sociolinguist: one (adopted in the text) views style as distinctive choices (usually related to social contexts) within the grammatical options provided by a dialect; another much broader (and purely functional) view takes style to be any distinctive language variant (including diglossic level, dialect, register, etc.) that is chosen from a speaker's repertoire in response to the social situation. As for the distinction between two dialects of a language and two distinct but closely related languages, Trudgill (1974b) gives a good exposition of the sociopolitical nature of such distinctions.

⁹ Both Labov's and Trudgill's work has concentrated on phonological aspects of dialect, but the same kinds of results have been found for syntactic features of Black English (see, e.g., Labov 1972c: ch. 3) and of Montreal French (Sankoff 1973). Choice between lexical alternates (for example, *ta/thanks*, or *sweet/pudding/dessert/afters*, in English English) has

lies behind the perception of a speaker's class (although there may also be some discrete variables, double negation for example); and matched-guise tests show that this perception is associated by members with the attribution of occupational potential (Labov 1972a: ch. 6; see also social psychological status attribution studies, reviewed in Giles & Powesland 1975: 38–9). Labov did find that Black English in New York is less continuous with White dialects, as one would expect from the nature of the Black community as an enclave in the city (the differences are also due to historical factors: southern regional features and, possibly, traces of Creole origins in Black English; see Labov 1972c: ch. 2). But even here, most differences are not of the discrete kind.¹⁰

The work of Labov suggests that dialect is not then as clear-cut a marker of social groups as one might imagine. Indeed recent sociolinguistic studies in general make it clear that neither languages nor dialects are the homogeneous and discrete entities that laymen and even some dialectologists had imagined (cf. Laver & Trudgill, this volume: ch. 1, 2.3). When the dialectologist elicits, what he tends to get is paradigmatical ideal-typical responses, while tape-recordings of actual situated speech reveal that dialects tend in fact to be much less distinct from other local varieties than the elicitations suggest (see, e.g., Blom & Gumperz 1972). Furthermore, the picture that emerges from the study of situated speech is that local varieties tend to be distinguished by gradient phenomena – such as degrees of articulation on some phonetic dimension (e.g. vowel quality), or relative frequency of some syntactic construction (e.g. copula deletion) – rather than categorical (absolute) differences in grammatical rules (Blom & Gumperz 1972; Labov 1972a, 1972c). These studies suggest that the student in search of categorical markers of class, ethnic or other group identities in speech is likely to be largely disappointed (cf. Giles *et al.* this volume: ch. 9, 3.2). What one is likely to find is that social group

hardly been studied in the same systematic way as yet, but is likely to show in some instances at least the same kind of variability coupled with class-based preferences. There are probably also instances of the same lexeme being used to denote different things, which are less likely to be variable (a case might be *dinner* in English, which is variously used to describe either the midday or the evening meal, or alternatively the chief meal of the day whenever it occurs).

¹⁰ Even where the features are distinctive of Black English, they can be shown to be much more closely related to White English variants than might at first be supposed. For example, deletion of the copula (as in *He bad*) is considered to be a characteristic grammatical feature of Black English, but Labov has elegantly demonstrated that it is an inherently variable feature of Black English, which in function parallels the contraction of the copula (*He's bad*) in White dialects, and which itself varies with contraction in the Black dialect. Of the rules governing contraction and deletion in the Black English Vernacular, then, only a few are peculiar to Black English; the rest are shared with White dialects of English.

membership will be marked by a handful of categorical rules (e.g. in upper-class British English double negation with the semantics of single negation seems never to occur) and a large number of rules that are distinctive only by degree of application or use. This seems to be true for both regional and social dialects of a language (cf. Trudgill 1974b), and even sometimes for languages themselves, as evidenced by language studies in communities on the border of different language areas (Gumperz & Wilson 1971).

Two other important points for the notion of group markers in speech emerge from the work of Labov. One key proposition of Labov's is that after the age of about 23 (1972a: 103–6) the ability to control the production of sociolinguistic variables is restricted to some reduction in frequency in formal contexts (including situations where persons from different classes or from outside the local group are present) if the variables are stigmatized, and some increase in frequency if they are prestigious.¹¹ The reason why speakers are unlikely to be able to control two vernaculars (i.e. the casual styles of two dialects) is to be found in the nature of dialect differences: the two dialects will differ in part in subtle conditions on applications of the same linguistic rules, and such subtle distinctions in applicability conditions are not amenable to conscious control to a very large extent (Labov 1972a: 215). The point is important not only because Labov's historical reconstructions of the speech community (1972a: ch. 9) rest on it, but also because – if it is true – persons bear the marks of their social class in their speech permanently if they have not escaped their own social group before early adulthood. If correct, this suggests limitations to the degree of possible assimilation or accommodation of the sort envisaged by Giles & Powesland (1975: 157–80).

This 'freezing' of dialect during the maturation of the individual accounts of course for the relative reliability of dialect as a marker of group membership. But it is important to emphasize that Labov's finding will not always have this consequence: it seems to be perfectly possible for whole communities to be bidialectal, providing all individuals have sufficient exposure to both dialects at an early age (see, e.g., Blom & Gumperz 1972; and discussion below). More common perhaps will be the situation

¹¹ Independent support for this claim of Labov's is provided by a number of social psychological studies of status evaluations of the tape-recorded speech of speakers from different SES backgrounds (cf. Robinson, this volume: ch. 6). Ellis (1967), for example, found that judges can with a high degree of accuracy assign SES to speakers reading a text, both in their vernacular style and even when the readers have been instructed to role-play and speak with as 'upper-class' an accent as they can – thus showing that status evaluations based on speech are apparently immune from attempts to disguise them. (The cues utilized by the judges, however, may be paralinguistic rather than dialect features.)

where a number of individuals come to be at least in part bidialectal through geographical or social mobility at an appropriate age (and here educational establishments and the media can play a crucial role). Labov has argued (1972a: 99–109, 215) that even here individuals can only produce a gross impression of one of the dialects, but we need considerably more evidence before we know just what the limits to bidialectalism are – and by implication just how reliable social dialects are as indicators of group membership.¹²

A second important point that emerges from Labov's studies is that sociolinguistic variables, while being sensitive markers of speaker identity in terms of class membership, are not on the whole reliable means of class attribution *unless* contextual factors are taken into account. For most sociolinguistic variables have distinctive rates of production in speech in relation to both speaker identity and to 'style', defined by Labov as degree of attention to speech.¹³ So a pipe-fitter being formal in New York may produce sociolinguistic markers at a rate that would be equally typical of a salesman being casual (Labov 1972a: 240). The implication is that even those markers of speaker identity that seem most clear and unequivocal prove on close analysis to require contextual information for their correct interpretation. Attribution of class on the basis of these sociolinguistic variables can be made only if the systematic interactional effect of formal and informal contexts (aspects of interactional structure; see Brown & Fraser, this volume: ch. 2) is taken into account.¹⁴

¹² Ability to control two dialects may be related to just how discrete those dialects are. Thus Blom & Gumperz (1972: 416) note that in the Norwegian bidialectal community they studied there were relatively strict cooccurrence constraints that served (except for some students who were in the process of losing their local identification) to keep the two dialects apart and unmixed, in contrast to the New York social dialects studied by Labov. Other kinds of relatively discrete language variants, diglossic levels for example, can be acquired after an individual's acquisition of his vernacular without difficulty.

¹³ Labov distinguishes 'indicators', which vary only in relation to speaker identity, from 'markers', which vary in relation to both speaker identity and style. Labov's views on style are specific and unusual and should be consulted directly (1972a: 70–110).

¹⁴ We have discussed Labov's work in a largely uncritical way, as the empirical findings by him and his colleagues remain the most detailed factual evidence about class dialects that we possess. But one may accept the findings without the general theory that accompanies them – a theory that minimizes the structural properties of interaction (subsumed within an impoverished view of 'style'; see Labov 1972a: ch. 3), and emphasizes the role of correlation as a source of sociolinguistic significance in speech. As the whole thrust of this chapter emphasizes the inadequacy of this point of view for the broad range of phenomena that we are considering, we may omit detailed criticism of it here; in the conclusions we attack a class of models of how social significance is conveyed in speech, into which some of Labov's view seems to fall as a particular instance. For critical remarks on the Labovian approach from different angles, many of which we would go along with, see Bickerton 1971, 1973; Dittmar 1976; Gazdar 1976; Levinson 1977; Robinson, this volume: ch. 6).

The kind of sociolinguistic variables isolated by Labov and others may be a very general phenomenon (see similar studies in Panama by Cedergren (1970), in England by Trudgill (1974a), and in Quebec by Sankoff (1973, 1975), Sankoff & Cedergren (1971) and Sankoff *et al.* (1971)), but they do not seem to be universally associated with stratified speech communities. Even within European urban communities, it seems (on the basis of native speaker reports) that speakers do not betray class affiliation by the use of markers of this sort in Zurich, Switzerland, for example, or in Madrid, Spain (B. Comrie & J. Moore, pers. comms.). And in what must surely rank as one of the world's most closely stratified set of speech communities, social dialects in India appear to be really rather different phenomena from those in the west.

The Indian facts are worth considering in detail because one might think that the lack of absolute markers of speaker's group identity in Europe was a correlate of the continuously graded stratification of western class systems and their associated social mobility (cf. Robinson, this volume: ch. 6). One might then turn to the Indian data expecting to find absolute markers of caste status correlated with the rigid hierarchies of Indian communities. But despite the proliferation of the term 'caste dialect' in the literature (see, e.g., Pillai 1972; Ramanujan 1968; Southworth 1975), with one or two exceptions (notably Brahman dialect in the south) there are no phenomena that match that description, i.e. it is not the case that a speaker can be assigned rigorously to an endogamous group or occupational category – a caste or subcaste – simply by reference to grammatical features of his speech. The general pattern seems to be rather that members of local communities of twenty castes and more are assignable to two or three gross categories only, on the basis of phonological or syntactic variables.¹⁵ In the north of India the categories seem to be Touchable castes (the great majority) vs. Untouchable, while in the south one genuine caste dialect – that of the Brahmans – is superimposed on this distinction. McCormack (1960) played tapes of speakers of various castes in South India to local persons who were able to distinguish Brahmans, Non-Brahmans, and Untouchables with some measure of success (87 per cent correct recognition of Brahmans, but only a maximum of 25 per cent for Untouchables). An informal replication by Levinson (1977) in a Tamil

¹⁵ It is true that castes, and even subcastes, are sometimes distinguishable by distinctive lexical items for a few ritual and cultural concepts, including kinship terms. But distinctive lexis in a few domains does not alone constitute a dialect – the phenomena here are closer to register (discussed below). Besides, these distinctive lexical items are avoided in intercaste interaction (usually by replacement with terms used by the locally dominant caste), so they do not serve to indicate group membership except within the group.

village showed no more definite results, and when the identification clues were tracked down, some of them turned out to be purely pragmatic and paralinguistic (for instance, members of the dominant caste spoke more 'forcefully', and used more swear words). Some groups that had immigrated to the region within the last hundred years were distinctive by virtue of regional dialect, and groups who maintained Telegu as a domestic language had some detectable transferred accent (but both sets of groups contained subgroups from opposite ends of the hierarchy). Now by virtue of this and other background information, informants could go some way towards speaker identification, but to do so they had to integrate a lot of information about the local social structure beyond dialectal clues. For example, the castes are divided between those (formerly called the 'right-hand' castes) who are fully integrated into the rural economy and were the first settlers in the region, and apparently later arrivals (formerly known as 'left-hand' castes) who maintain urban ties. The former tend to have stronger regional dialects, the latter have dialects closer to standard colloquial Tamil; the former avoided Brahmanical lexical items and English loan words, the latter adopted them. Since this distinction cuts the caste hierarchy vertically down the middle, while the Brahman/Non-Brahman/Untouchable one cuts it horizontally into ranked sections, the ingenious collater of information may be able to locate a speaker fairly closely in this two-dimensional social space. This suggests that in many cases even where speaker identity as a member of Group X is not directly encoded in social dialect, it may be inductively inferred from a large number of heterogeneous message components together with knowledge of the local social structure. And even where social dialect is clearly associated with a social group – as in the case of the Brahman dialect in the south – it may not have the interactional significance that one might imagine. For example, in isolated rural areas Brahmans in fact speak to Non-Brahmans without any recognizable trace of Brahman dialect, switching into the latter only when talking to other Brahmans (see Levinson 1977:29ff.), thus eliminating the one clear case of caste dialect as a factor in intercaste interaction.

Once again, then, in the case of Indian castes we do not generally find direct and context-insensitive markers of speaker's group membership. Rather we find that precise speaker identification is based on a large set of indirect clues ('forceful pronunciation', the use of swear words, etc., which are perhaps direct indications of personality or social relationship) along with detailed social structural information (right-hand castes vs.

left-hand ones, Telegu-speaking minorities, etc.) which together yield strong inferences.

Dialects can mark other kinds of social groups in addition to class and caste. In the Arab world, for instance, distinctive dialects can be found associated with religions and religious sects. In Bahrain, for example, members of Sunni and Shi'i sects have markedly different dialects of Arabic (Clive Holes, pers. comm.), while Jews, Christians and Moslems spoke different dialects of Arabic in prewar Baghdad (Blanc 1964). These kinds of dialects seem to be considerably more discrete than class dialects in the west. Just what are the conditions promoting maintenance of discrete dialects among interacting groups remains something of a sociolinguistic mystery. In certain social conditions dialects tend to become assimilated into a single prestige continuum (as described by Labov for New York City, and also, *mutatis mutandis*, for Creole dialects and their respective Standards; see Bickerton 1975; Hymes 1971). In other social conditions distinctive dialects are actually accentuated (see Labov 1972b: ch. 1).

Language. If dialect is one way in which a speaker signals his group or category affiliations, language itself can be another in multilingual societies. The particular way in which language can function as a group marker will be constrained by the nature of the multilingualism, to what extent it is diglossic, to what extent multilingualism is pervasive in the society, and so on (see Fishman 1974). We can imagine some limiting cases. In one, members of different groups speak different languages and do not understand at all (although they may recognize) the other languages; here language could signal group membership to members of other groups, but there would hardly be any point in using it in inter-group interaction. In another, members of different groups all speak all the available languages in just the same circumstances, so choice of language would not be a signal of group membership at all. A weak approximation to the first case would be some parts of ethnic groups in a large western city (e.g. older or female Pakistanis and Cypriots in London); an approximation to the second situation can be found where there is widespread multilingualism in a speech community and shared norms for usage of the different languages – a case would be the use of Spanish and Guarani in Paraguay (see Garvin & Mathiot 1968; Rubin 1968). But in general we tend to find situations falling somewhere between these two extremes, and in these intermediate situations language choice can function as a marker of group identity. A typical situation, found for example

in communities from village to city size in India, is where there are a number of groups using minority languages strictly for intragroup communication, and switching to the single majority language for intergroup communication. There language choice does not signal group membership in intergroup relations, although it does serve to mark the shared group membership of those speaking minority languages to one another (cf. Giles, this volume: ch. 7). There will be some further remarks on the significance of this below.

Clearly, very special conditions are required to allow language choice to function as a marker of group membership in intergroup interaction. Specifically, this would require that members of the society have comprehension of a number of languages, but productive competence shared with other group members in only one (or alternatively that this behaviour is normatively enforced). An approximation to this is provided perhaps by the remarkable case of multilingualism reported by Jackson (1975) and others for the Vaupés basin in Colombia. There in a population of less than 10,000 more than twenty mutually unintelligible languages are maintained, each individual speaking at least three of these but identifying with one in particular (his 'father language').¹⁶ In this situation language can function to signal speaker identity, some significant social groups and categories being coextensive with language boundaries: 'Each individual initially speaks in his own father-language during a conversation in order to assert his tribal affiliation' (Sorensen 1967: 678, quoted in Jackson 1975: 61), although, as Jackson points out, in most interactions such identifications have already been made, allowing other factors to enter into the choice of which language to speak in.

Situations like the Colombian one are rare enough to restrict the main function of language choice *per se* to marking ingroup vs. outgroup social relations (and some finer distinctions within ingroup relations) which will be discussed below. This is not to say that traces of a native language in speech in another language (most significantly, traces of accent) do not mark group membership – indeed, the volume by Giles & Powesland (1975), as well as chapter 7 in this volume by Giles, amply document the ways in which they do. Such traces are perhaps the most important way

¹⁶ Since in this society there is a rule of linguistic exogamy – i.e. that one must marry someone from a group that speaks a different language from one's own – the language of a person's father will be different from his mother's language. Speakers may learn their mother's language first, but identify with the second-learned language of their father because of the patrilineal kinship system. With ethnic group boundaries thus splitting the family unit, the identification of ingroup vs. outgroup (and its linguistic correlates) becomes extremely problematic.

in which membership in an ethnic minority group is marked in speech in intergroup interaction. Interference from the native tongue in the use of the dominant language can be very subtle, and there is growing work in this area (see, e.g., Gumperz 1977, 1978, and Gumperz, *et al.* n.d., on prosodic patterns in the English of Londoners of Indian extraction). Most of this material is covered in detail by Giles (this volume: ch. 7), and we may omit it here.

Repertoire. A rather different way in which group or category affiliation can be signalled by the code that a speaker utilizes derives from the fact that different groups within a speech community may command different subsets of the total linguistic resources available in the community. That is, their *linguistic repertoires* (Gumperz 1972: 20) may be different. This is well illustrated by the Javanese case reported by Geertz (1960). Here the language provides three levels of addressee honorifics and two levels of referent honorifics (see below) and six allowable combinations of these to form six distinct named varieties of the language. But no persons have productive control of all of these (or at least none can use them all); rather the varieties are unequally distributed across the three 'estates' (strata, groups) of aristocrats, townsmen and peasants. Thus the aristocrats control levels 3a, 3, 1b and 1 (Geertz's labels), townsmen control levels 3a, 3, 2, 1a and 1, and peasants control levels 2a, 1a, 1b and 1. This allows various inferences about a speaker's identity: if he is speaking levels 3, 3a, or 3b he cannot be a peasant, if he is speaking level 2 he must be a townsman or peasant, or if 1b either an aristocrat or a peasant, and so on. However, in intergroup interactions an aristocrat uses only level 1, a peasant only level 2, while a townsman may use 1, occasionally 1a, 3, or 3a, depending on the category of the addressee. This entire system has as its *raison d'être* something entirely different from the signalling of speaker identity – namely, the signalling of appropriate deference or power in relationships (i.e. the variables are markers of speaker–addressee relationship, not of speaker identity). Nevertheless, given the uneven distribution of competence, the system also indirectly acts to signal ranges of speaker identity.

What is really involved here is the fact that repertoire restrictions can carry clues to speaker identity. The different ways in which such clues may operate may be very large, but probably differential control of specific *registers* (see Brown & Fraser, this volume: ch. 2; Halliday 1968) is in general the most important. Thus an upper-class Englishman is unlikely to know the language of darts playing, and a lower-class

Englishman the jargon of horse breeding. Indeed, some registers are specifically designed to make them unintelligible to nonmembers of the group – for example argots used by members of the underworld (cf. Agar 1973; Halliday 1976). Sometimes these can be stable and linked to respectable occupations, as is apparently the case for the ship-builders' and goldsmiths' distinct argots in Bahrain, which are totally opaque to other local Arabic speakers (Clive Holes, pers. comm.).

A related source of information about speaker's group membership is provided by what we may call *pragmatic resources*. In talking of speech markers, analysts generally focus on features of the linguistic code, but equally and possibly even more revealing of speaker identity are aspects of what Hymes (1972) has called 'communicative competence', or rules for the utilization of a code in appropriate ways in social situations. Relevant here is a great deal of work in the ethnography of speaking, exemplified in the papers in Bauman & Sherzer (1975), Gumperz & Hymes (1972) and Sanches & Blount (1976). Some examples of the way in which the knowledge of how to utilize linguistic repertoires is differentially distributed in social structures, thereby allowing speaker's group identification, are the following. Labov (1972b) describes some special uses of language among Black youths in New York which involve exchanges of ritual insults as a competitive game for prestige. Amongst the rules for such insults are some that specify the use of phrases like *Your mother so X that P*, where X is an abusive category and P is obviously false (thus: *Your mother so old she fart dust*). If P is true then the rules are broken, and the ritual insults are just plain insults. Outsiders or group marginals are unlikely to understand the rules, and the correct employment of the rules in a verbal contest is then an indication of membership in the Black community.

Another set of cases involves the widespread reports that in rigidly hierarchical societies not everyone equally controls specific genres of speaking. Thus in Burundi (Albert 1972) only the top-ranking ethnic group is educated in oratory and related verbal skills.¹⁷ Here control of part of the linguistic repertoire (namely oratory) is importantly linked to social structure, including political control – and is used as an excuse for that control (see also Bloch 1975). The employment of such oratorical skills is a marker not only of membership in the elite group, but of legitimate authority.

¹⁷ In the same society (as equally in South India), low-ranking persons have to display verbal noncoordination, bumbling and hesitation, but this is in fact a marker not of speaker identity, since it is adopted only before high-ranking alters, but rather of speaker–addressee relationship.

Social deixis. Finally, there are some rather unusual markers of the identity of participants in interaction, markers that are truly unequivocal, categorical (rather than probabilistic) and determinate. These are linguistic items that encode social deixis. Deixis is a term linguists use to refer to the ways in which linguistic elements can refer to, or can only be interpreted by knowing, certain aspects of the communicative event in which those elements are used. Simple examples are words like *I* which refers to the current speaker, *now* which refers to the time of speaking (in some usages), *here* which refers to the place where the speaker is at the time of speaking, and so on. Analogously, there are linguistic elements that instead of referring to temporal/physical properties of the speech event, refer to its social properties: T/V pronominal alternates, for example, honorifics, address forms, and so on (for remarks on the scope of social deixis see Fillmore 1975; Levinson 1977). Most aspects of social deixis are relational, and have to do especially with speaker-addressee or speaker-referent relationships (see below), but just a few are absolute indicators of participant identity. There are a few forms in most languages that are restricted to *authorized speakers*. For instance the term *Gringo* is restricted to Latin Americans referring to North Americans (Fillmore 1975). Similarly, Chinese emperors alone used the pronoun *chin* for 'I', while in Koasati and Chukchee certain morphological alternates are reserved for each sex (Haas 1964; Comrie, pers. comm.). In the same way there are also forms reserved for *authorized recipients*. Not only are second-person pronouns distinguished for sex of referent in some languages (Serbo-Croatian, Basque, Japanese), but in Tunica (an American Indian language formerly spoken in Louisiana) third-person pronouns were also distinguished for sex of addressee (so there would be two words for 'they', one meaning 'they when speaker is addressing a man' and the other meaning 'they when speaker is addressing a woman' (Haas 1964)). Much more familiar, of course, are titles of address of the kind that are specialized to certain types of recipient. Thus in Modern English only a judge is addressed as *Your Honour* and only members of the royal family are addressed as *Your Highness*. Sometimes such terms do indicate group membership directly; in the Tamil village described above, the title *esamaanka* 'Lord', is more or less reserved for landed members of the high castes, while another, *caami* 'Lord', is reserved by high-caste members for Brahmans and gods while lowest-caste members generalize it to a number of high castes (Levinson 1977: 314ff.). Another good example of titles reserved for members of each major group in the society is reported by Goody (1972: 51) for Gonjaland in Ghana.

Prosodic and paralinguistic markers of group. The term *prosodics* is generally understood to include matters of intonation, stress and timing, while features of *paralanguage* 'differ from prosodic features in not being so closely integrated into the grammatical structure of utterances' (Lyons 1972: 53). Idiosyncratic person-identifying voice quality is often excluded from paralanguage (see Crystal 1975: 51ff.), while group-identifying voice setting can more reasonably be included (Crystal 1975: 62-4). What is involved in the latter is a habitual configuration of the speech organs within certain ranges that, due to processes of norm and socialization, group members tend to share, and the result can be distinctive and relatively determinate markers of group membership. There is evidence that class background is sometimes effectively indicated by such voice settings (see, e.g., Laver 1968; and social psychological work reviewed by Giles & Powesland (1975)). More curiously, an experiment by Brown, Strong & Rencher (1975) suggests that some such associations have cross-cultural validity: Americans with no knowledge of French could apparently assign Canadian French speakers to their correct social strata (although exactly what cues were attended to by subjects in the experiment is not clear; see discussion in Giles & Powesland 1975: 13-15). Prosodic and paralinguistic features are likely to prove some of the most reliable and direct markers of social information, particularly group membership; Crystal (1975: 84-95) indicates many areas for future research. Features like pitch range, loudness, tempo, rhythm and voice setting are all likely to be sources of indexical information about the speaker's group affiliations (cf. Laver & Trudgill, this volume: ch. 1, 2).

It is important to stress, however, that like all the linguistic features that we have described above, these too are subject to systematic variations in particular social contexts, and to manipulative exploitations. Indeed, prosodic and paralinguistic features play an important role in style (see Crystal & Davy 1969). They can also be more specifically communicative: features like falsetto pitch and nasalization have been reported as honorific markers of deference (or social distance) in, respectively, the Mayan language Tzeltal (Brown, in press) and the Bolivian language Coyavava (Key 1967: 19, cited in Crystal 1975). The researcher cannot therefore assume that paralinguistic or prosodic features will turn out to be much less problematic as markers of social group membership than dialect, repertoire and so on. It is likely that in many cases such markers will, like the others, be relative to situations and to other aspects of interactional structure, and require social structural information for their correct interpretation.

2.3. Clues to group membership provided by markers of social relationships

We have been considering some of the ways in which group membership is indicated in speech in relatively direct ways. It has been necessary to point out, though, that such markers are hardly ever context independent correlations between group membership and linguistic features. Moreover, the inference to group membership from these specific aspects of language often requires detailed knowledge about encompassing social structures, the total communicative repertoires of different categories of speaker and so on. It is important to remember, too, that a great deal of exploitation of such markers, or simulations of group membership, is likely to go on in interaction. Nevertheless, with these caveats, it is clear that members of social groups in many cases do command distinctive ranges of communicative competence – languages, dialects, registers, styles – that are a basic source of inferences about speakers' group identity.

But besides limiting ranges of communicative competence, group membership determines aspects of interaction in a number of other ways, which can then serve to provide indirect clues to participants' group membership. It is important to grasp the distinction between the direct kinds of marker of group membership reviewed above, and the indirect clues to group membership we shall discuss here. The direct markers are *indexical* in the sense of Laver (1968) – i.e. indicative (with all the caveats noted above) of the speaker's affiliation to a particular identifiable group – to the 'working class', say, or to the New York City Jewish community, or to the Brahmans of a particular area of South India. Such indexes to a person's group affiliation occur perhaps largely unintentionally, often without the speaker's conscious control and indeed often despite his attempts to mask them. The indirect clues to group membership to which we now turn are quite different in nature, for they tell us not *what* group a speaker is from, but rather what kind of social relationship obtains between speaker and addressee. From this information it is possible, as we shall see, to infer whether the relationship is 'ingroup' or 'outgroup', and armed with this knowledge plus knowledge of the relevant groups in the speech community and their respective social structural loci, it is often possible to infer what group the speaker is from. The inferences involved are often subtle and complex in themselves, and greatly complicated by the fact that the expression of social relationships is open to a great deal of intentional manipulation.

We shall concentrate on markers of social relationships as indirect clues to group membership, for these, we suggest, provide the most important indirect clues on the basis of which members make inferences about speakers' group memberships. The importance of social relationships for this task derives from the way in which, for any pair of participants, group membership restricts and even selects the social relationships that may be enacted. As for the concept of social relationship itself, we understand this in the standard sociological and anthropological way to denote 'determinate ways of acting toward or in regard to one another', with the emphasis on expectations concerning rights, duties and the manner of behaviour (see, e.g., Beattie 1966: 34ff.; Goodenough 1969; Nadel 1957: 8ff.). Most theorists agree in seeing in social relationships the basic and smallest unit of social structure; for this reason social relationships and their markers provide an important connection between the levels of social structure and interaction.

In considering the relationship between groups and social relationships, a crucial distinction that immediately arises is that between ingroup (that is, *intra*group) and outgroup (that is *inter*group) interaction. Here we are concerned with the broad characteristics of interaction across groups as opposed to that within a group, regardless of the nature of the particular groups involved (whether class-based, kin-based, task-based, or whatever). Considerable social psychological research has been devoted to features of ingroup vs. outgroup interaction: see, for example, Campbell (1965); Cartwright & Zander (1960); Sherif *et al.* (1961); Tajfel (1974). It seems a reasonable hypothesis that if both parties to an interaction are drawn from one group then it is likely that the social relationship obtaining between them will be organized around nongroup (or subgroup) identities – sex, kinship, role, personality, or whatever the relevant criteria may be. On the other hand, if the parties belong to different groups, then their group identities are likely to be the ones that (at least in large part) determine their relationship. So the distinction between ingroup and outgroup relationships is one which is fundamental to the organization of interaction for any two parties (cf. Giles, this volume: ch. 7).

The group boundary thus looms large in interaction, and it is expressed in the verbal channels in a great range of (largely redundant) ways. First, there are code differences: if A perceives B as a co-member of a group he belongs to, then he may use a language or a dialect or a register appropriate to their shared group, or even just a few markers that are retained for such ingroup addressees. Many of the simpler aspects of code-

switching are determined by this; for example in the north of Norway the local dialect (Ranamål) will be used only between 'members of the local team' (Blom & Gumperz 1972). Gumperz has shown in a number of cases that in plural societies where code-switching is rampant, the languages switched between tend to converge systematically, so that syntactic structures can become isomorphic in two languages of quite distinct language families (Gumperz & Wilson 1971). The interesting questions then are these: Why are the two codes maintained as distinct entities? Why is the merging process halted, instead of going to completion? The codes may be distinguished by no more than a few lexical items and phonological correspondences (see, e.g., Gumperz's (1964) description of Punjabi and Hindi in Delhi). Gumperz's answer is that the token differences are maintained just where there are two distinct domains of use, within the group on the one hand, and for intergroup interaction on the other. It seems that the desire to mark the group boundary in interaction is sufficient to keep the two codes at least minimally distinct.

Secondly, in addition to code differences, there are attitudinal markers of many different kinds that function as signals of ingroup membership between interlocutors. For example there are the signs of ease and relaxation (allegro speech, kinds of laughter and the like), some of which have been described by Labov as being associated with or constituting 'vernacular speech' or 'casual style' (Labov 1972a: ch. 3). In addition there are a great number of verbal strategies typical of ingroup relations which have been catalogued and discussed under the rubric 'positive politeness' in Brown & Levinson (1978). These range from familiar address forms (T pronouns, nicknames, endearments) to the rhetoric of exaggerated statements (*How fabulous your roses are, Gertie!*), immediacy (. . . *and so he comes over and says to me, ' . . . '*) and presumptive request forms (*I've come to borrow a cup of flour*). As we shall discuss below, many of these strategies seem to be universally employed in ingroup encounters.

Beyond the group boundary, when members of a dyad are drawn from different groups (or when whatever groups they may share are not significant in the context) and they have thus selected codes and attitudes typical of extragroup relations, group membership still continues to play a further rôle in structuring interaction. Often, if the groups have a characteristic and definable relationship one to the other, a dyad that is drawn from them will inherit that relationship. Thus, to return to the Tamil example we used in section 1.2, if caste A is higher than caste B, then a member *a* of A will be higher than *b*, a member of B. So *a* will typically give *b* the T pronoun, and *b* will typically give the V pronoun in

exchange. It is certainly an important observation that the kinds of relations that can hold between groups (rank, rivalry, alliance, etc.) are precisely the kinds of relations that can hold between members of them. It is because of this parallelism that we can often infer the group membership of *a* and *b* by observing their interaction, given further background information.¹⁸

We may have given the impression in this discussion that every individual is assimilated to only one group, which would have the implication that indicators of ingroup and outgroup relationships are more or less automatic reflexes of the group membership of each participant. This is clearly not the case. Not only can individuals be members of many different kinds of well-established groups, and members of different orders of the same kind of group (as in 'segmentary' group structures), they can even invent groups to cover new interactional situations (as when strangers from neighbouring lands meet up far abroad). The result of course is that group membership is often negotiable or selectable in actual interactional situations, and when this is so it will often be selected and signalled by linguistic indicators of ingroup/outgroup relations (this is clearest, perhaps, in studies of code-switching). The noteworthy thing about membership in ranked social groups, whether ethnic, class-based, or caste-based, is that negotiability tends to be highly constrained (by the interests of the higher-ranked groups). Even here, though, the interactional relevance of such memberships can be held in abeyance in the formation of special interest groups (e.g. co-gamblers in an Indian village may ignore caste memberships while gambling, in a way they normally cannot).

2.4. Some markers of social relationships

So far we have indicated how group memberships (at least once they have been selected in interaction) can determine gross features of social relationships, namely those we associate with ingroup and outgroup interaction. But there are of course much finer-grained distinctions within these broad categories that can be marked in speech. For example, it may

¹⁸ Of course many factors other than group memberships can determine the nature of a social relationship, including role relations, personal attractions and so on. But the potential importance of these other factors is itself likely to be determined by social structural constraints. It is only when social groups have an overriding effect on the nature of a social relationship that we may be able to infer backwards from that relationship to particular group memberships (given further information about the number and relations of such groups). But class, caste and ethnic group memberships, for instance, often seem to have such an overriding effect.

be that members of some groups other than one's own can be treated as rank inferiors, while members of others must be treated as rank superiors. So degrees of deference can indicate for an observer which of a number of ranked groups an addressee is likely to be associated with. Moreover, within ingroup relations, the same degrees of deference (now expressed in conjunction with ingroup markers) may distinguish different kinds of kinsmen, for example (see, e.g., Levinson 1977: ch. 5). So how persons treat other persons interactionally, together with a great deal of knowledge about the relevant structures, can be the basis for inferred attributions of precise group or subgroup membership.

Rather than describe what must inevitably be culture-specific details of such attribution processes, it will be more useful to describe the kinds of markers of social relationship that sociolinguists have found to recur in speech across different cultures. Each of these categories of markers may yield inferences about group memberships, but they are only likely to do so relative to a great deal of background information. In reviewing some of the most important ways in which social relationships are marked in speech we may seem to deviate from the main topics of this chapter. But markers of social relationships play such an important role in indirectly conveying group memberships that they should not be ignored in this connection. Moreover, there is reason to believe, as we shall make clear in the concluding remarks, that markers of social relationships have a very special and central role to play in the conveying of many different kinds of social information in interaction.

There seem to be two basic ways in which the social relationship obtaining between speaker and addressee is marked in speech. One is through the direct encoding of kind of social relationship in the grammatical system, in which case we talk of *social deixis* (Fillmore 1975; Levinson 1977). The other is by the way of putting things, the particular choice of linguistic expression, governed we suggest by *strategies*. We shall take these in turn.

Socially deictic markers. We have already mentioned how social deixis can mark features of speaker or addressee *identity*, but it is far more commonly the case that it is the social *relationship* between speaker and addressee (or between speaker and some referent) that is thus grammatically encoded. The relationship encoded may be one of asymmetrical rank disparity, in which case we may talk of honorifics; and it is important here to distinguish *addressee honorifics*, where respect to the addressee can be conveyed by choice of linguistic form regardless of the content of the

message, from *referent honorifics*, where respect can only be given to things or persons (including the addressee) that are actually referred to (for justifications of the distinction see Brown & Levinson 1978; Comrie 1976). The implication of the distinction is that in some languages – those with addressee honorifics – it is possible to say a sentence like *The soup is hot* and by choice of lexical item convey deference or the reverse to the addressee, whereas in other languages (those which only have referent honorifics) one would have to add some title like *Your Honour*.

The distinction between these two kinds of honorific is important because they are not encoded in the same way in grammatical structure. Referent honorifics are necessarily confined to referring expressions, and morphological agreements with them, and empirically they tend to turn up in titles of address, verb endings, words for persons and their body parts and belongings. Addressee honorifics, on the other hand, could theoretically turn up in any part of the linguistic system, and empirically tend to be found in lexical alternates for common words (including function words, auxiliary verbs, and so on), aspects of morphology, special particles that are otherwise without meaning, and aspects of prosody and paralinguistics.

The two kinds of honorific are also differently distributed in the world's languages. Addressee honorifics are relatively rare and exotic; the really elaborate reported systems all come from Southeast Asia (in Japanese, Javanese, Madurese, Korean and so on).¹⁹ The Javanese case is familiar to sociolinguists through Geertz's (1960) well-known description; we have mentioned above that six named levels of honorific speech were distinguished by the Javanese. These levels were made up in fact of three levels of addressee honorific combining with two levels of referent honorific. It is interesting that Indian languages, despite the even more hierarchical societies in which they are used, do not display the same richness of addressee honorifics, although they tend to have at least some particles that function in this way (see Levinson 1977). Addressee honorifics encoded in prosody and paralinguistics are probably much more widespread; in the Mayan language Tzeltal, for example, the use of sustained falsetto gives deference to the addressee (Brown & Levinson 1978), and in English we seem to have a few special polite intonation contours for use in requests and the like.

Referent honorifics, on the other hand, include titles, and are thus almost certainly universally available to some degree in all languages.

¹⁹ Japanese has been extensively described for its elaborate honorifics systems. See, e.g., Harada 1976; Martin 1964; Miller 1967; O'Neill 1966; Uyeno 1971; Yamanashi 1974.

They also include the familiar T/V systems, since the choice of the polite alternative requires that the sentence refers to the addressee. These systems are in fact extremely widespread, and probably to be found in most language families (see Levinson 1978). Since Brown & Gilman's (1960) classic study there has been a growing amount of work on European T/V systems (see, e.g., Hollos 1975; Lambert & Tucker 1976; Paulston 1975; Slobin 1963; for discussion and further references, see Levinson 1978; for an Indian case, Levinson 1977). The ways in which patterns of T/V usage can provide inferences to group memberships have already been illustrated in the Tamil examples in section 1.2. In English, though we now lack the pronominal choice, the choices amongst titles and names (*sir*, *Professor*, *Your Honour*, *Madam*, first name, last name, title plus last name, etc.) can pattern in usage in a precisely similar way to T/V pronouns (see Brown & Ford 1964; Ervin-Tripp 1972). Here we can see clearly how group membership can indirectly determine linguistic usage (which can thus in turn indirectly mark group membership): a labourer or a porter or a college servant may say 'sir' or 'guv'ner' to someone whom he takes to be of a higher-ranking group, and while a doctor is unlikely to address another doctor as 'doctor', a patient, nurse or visitor – or even outside that context, the doctor's garage mechanic – may feel obliged to do so.

Honorifics are not the only kind of socially deictic marker of social relationships; social relations other than relative rank can be encoded in the structure of a language. Kinship terms, for example, indicate what kind of genealogical relationship persons are in, together with the associated prescribed behaviours, including altruism, respect and joking behaviour. In many societies (especially those of simple technology typically studied by anthropologists), kinship is the basis for membership in the most enduring social groups, and the use of kin terms in such a context would function directly as recognitions of group membership.

Strategies of language use. Let us turn now to the second major way in which social relationships are indicated in speech, namely by means of strategies of language usage. Again, from the relationships indicated, indirect inferences can sometimes be made to the group memberships of participants; but here the markers of social relationship are themselves inferential. A certain way of putting things, i.e. the strategic choice of message form, can indirectly imply the nature of the social relationship between speaker and addressee. To take a simple example, in English we vary the ways in which we request things partly in relation to what we are

requesting, but partly in relation to whom we are requesting from. So for instance to a close friend one may say, 'Lend us five bob, Bill', while to a more distant acquaintance one is more likely to say something like 'Could you by any chance lend me twenty-five pence?' Such variations in the way in which one expresses a particular speech act turn out to be highly systematic, based on a large but delimitable set of constructional principles, many of which are investigated in Brown & Levinson (1978). There it is argued that the motivations for modifying the expression of speech acts are visible in the particular modifications that are chosen, and on the basis of these we can identify the strategies that actors are pursuing in their speech. For example, contrast the strategies involved in:

- (1) You'll lend us a fiver, won't you mate.
- (2) You wouldn't by any chance be able to lend me five pounds, would you?

The first intuitively involves interactional *optimism*, the second interactional *pessimism*, and the particular constellation of negative, subjunctive and remote possibility features in the second can be seen to derive rationally from the corresponding strategy.

The choice of one strategy rather than another clearly depends crucially on the relationship between interlocutors. In this way, a choice of strategy conveys an assessment of the relationship, or, in other words, it is a *marker* of that relationship. Thus an interlocutor, by saying (2), is indicating via his choice of language that his social relationship to the addressee is not intimate. In this way strategies of language usage can be markers of social relationships, via a chain of reasoning and inference, in a way that parallels the more straightforward markers of social relationship that are found in the use of socially deictic linguistic forms such as address terms and honorifics.²⁰

Other ways in which language usage strategies are tied to social relationships, and ultimately back to group memberships, have emerged from work in the ethnography of speaking (see Bauman & Sherzer 1975; Sanches & Blount 1976). We may take as an example Irvine's (1975) description of greetings among the Wolof of Senegal. Here the one who initiates the greeting is the lower in status, and the more elaborate the

²⁰ Indirect speech acts play an important role in politeness strategies of this sort, and have received a good deal of attention recently from linguists. Among the most important studies of the usage of indirect speech acts in context, which shed light on how one can use them to analyse the expression of social relationships in speech, are a case study of interactors in a university office (Shimanoff 1977), where the use of many of the strategies described in Brown & Levinson (1978) was tested, and a number of studies of the acquisition and use of some of these in actual contexts (Bates 1976; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Shatz 1975).

greeting, the greater the deference given. Given that there are some four or more ranked 'castes' or estates in this society, the mode of greeting can indirectly convey the group memberships of the participants. Moreover, there are distinct styles of speaking that convey deference or superiority, and these are especially associated with caste membership (Irvine 1975). However, although the mode and style of greeting can effectively convey participants' membership in the ranked groups to a bystander (and alter's perception of ego's membership to a participant), the whole performance is subject to manipulation: high-status has its price (gift-giving, in particular) and is often effectively denied by assuming the lower-status role (Irvine 1975: 175–6). These strategies for greeting are first and foremost markers of social relationship, and thus open to any manipulations that social relationships are subject to; they are only indirect, and uncertain, clues to group membership, although nevertheless an important potential source of such information.²¹

2.5. Further connections between groups and language: stratification and social network

So far we have emphasized the point that even apparently simple markers of group membership on close examination soon turn out to be less than simple 'signals'; in fact, in many cases, we have argued, group membership is indicated in speech only indirectly through markers of social relationships, which in turn are partly structured by group memberships. However, there are even more indirect relations between group membership and features of language employed by group members which in the long run are no less significant. One such indirect relationship that we shall concentrate on here is the recurrent association of distinct patterns of language usage with high or low groups (or strata) in stratified social systems.

Consider for instance the following interesting and hitherto unexplained fact: it is regularly reported that in stratified societies where a

²¹ Another African study is worth reporting for the light it throws on the notion of a linguistic marker. Goody (1978) reports that among the Gonja of Ghana, sentences that are syntactically questions are interpreted very differently according to the relationship between speaker and addressee. If the speaker is lower in rank than the addressee, questions will tend (when possible) to be interpreted as polite suggestions, while if the speaker is higher in rank they will tend to be interpreted as assertions of control. Since there are three ranked estates that are one source of rank disparities in the society (see Goody 1972), a question with its interpretation (as revealed in the response) may serve to indicate group memberships. Here the linguistic form is a marker of social relationship only when paired with a particular kind of interpretation.

Tu/Vous type opposition in singular second-person pronouns is employed, there is a tendency for the reciprocal exchange of the T pronoun to be associated with the lower groups, classes or castes in their ingroup interactions, and a tendency for the reciprocal use of V to be associated with upper strata (for a full discussion, the statement of a tentative sociolinguistic universal, and some apparent counterexamples, see Levinson 1978).

For instance in the Tamil village mentioned above, there are different patterns of T/V usage within castes depending in part on the status of each caste in the local hierarchy. The lower the caste, the more internal reciprocal T exchange is used, while in the upper castes such usage is increasingly replaced by symmetrical V exchange and asymmetrical T/V usage (see Levinson 1977 for details). There is some evidence that reciprocal T exchange within the family is a nonprestigious feature of language usage in the village, while the increased use of V is prestigious. Can we *explain* the distribution of intracaste usages by identifying reciprocal T as a stigmatized variable, reciprocal V or asymmetrical T/V as a prestige one? Or, equivalently, by identifying the usages as markers of, respectively, low-group membership and high-group membership?

A moment's reflection will show that the notion of marker in this context would be nonexplanatory. In the case of socially deictic items or aspects of social dialect, their functions as direct markers of social features will generally provide an account of their *raison d'être*, or at least of the reasons for their maintenance. But we cannot think of these T/V patterns in the same sort of way, as (at least synchronically) arbitrary markers of group prestige or stigma, for the following reasons. First, they are intrinsically tied to particular kinds of social relationship, and so cannot simply be adopted for reasons of prestige without also adopting something as fundamental as the basic quality of ingroup social relationships. Secondly, since the usages in question only occur in ingroup interactions, the supposed claiming of prestige *vis-à-vis* other groups will pass largely unnoticed by those other groups. Thirdly, if the basic motivation for the use of reciprocal V (or at least the avoidance of reciprocal T) in high-status groups was simply that that usage was a marker of prestige, then we should expect the usage to be arbitrarily prestigious (like certain phonological variables are in class dialects) and thus expect to find the pattern reversed in some other society – which never seems to be the case. So some deeper explanations of the patterns and their distribution are required.

The explanation for this association of reciprocal T-giving with low-

status groups follows the same chain of reasoning that native observers are likely to follow in trying to make sense of the patterns they may perceive. T/V usage is tied primarily to kinds of social relationship, and the association of T-exchange with low-status groups in stratified societies is due to the way that stratification affects the nature of intra-group social relations. Specifically we may suggest that segments of lower social strata constitute communities where people interact intensely with one another in many different roles and capacities often involving diffuse debt; in such circumstances relations of equality and solidarity are likely to arise between adults, appropriately symbolized by mutual T-exchange. Correspondingly, social networks in high social strata tend to be fragmented for many reasons: smaller units (like families) vie for prestige, and do not rely on each other for support or services (provided instead by lower-status service personnel), with the consequence that relations between these units tend to be socially distant, and appropriately symbolized by V-exchange. There tends also to be an emphasis on hierarchy within the family, which precludes T-exchange (see Brown, *in press*; Levinson 1978). Given knowledge of the ranked groups and their internal social organization, a native observer of a particular pattern of intragroup T/V exchange can in this sort of way use it as an indirect clue to group membership.

There are other recurring patterns of language usage associated with high- and low-status groups in stratified societies that are probably best thought of in much the same sort of way – i.e. as indirect manifestations of group status that come about through the ways in which stratification affects social networks and thus social relationships. For example, there appear to be different kinds and levels of politeness typically used in different social strata (Brown & Levinson 1978: 247–60), and speech styles tend to polarize into a plain ‘low’ style (used by lower strata) and a structurally and rhetorically elaborated ‘high’ style used by elites (see Levinson 1978). Bernstein’s (1971) well-known work on class-stratified patterns of language usage also seems to fit in here: he claims to find distinctive styles of talking (‘codes’) associated with the working and the middle classes in England. His particular view of these differences as due to a radically distinctive psychological orientation inculcated through different patterns of socialization has come under severe criticism in recent years (see, e.g., Dittmar 1976), but that there are stylistic differences in the speech of members of different classes is very likely. Such differences however are likely to be tied to qualities of social relationships, which are in turn tied to social networks, which in turn are partly

determined by social rank (for some empirical work here see **Boat** 1957) – without necessarily involving deep psychological variables.

2.6. Linguistic markers of group membership: some important distinctions

We have ranged over a number of very different ways in which group membership can be indicated in speech, and it may be helpful to draw together the observations about the various kinds of ‘markers’ we have been examining. Recollect that a marker is, in the terminology of this volume, a systematic correlation between a speech variable and a social variable; and we have suggested (as have some other authors in this volume) that the concept should be restricted to *emic* correlations – that is to correlations at least potentially observable by interactants in such a way that they could play a role in interaction (cf. Brown & Fraser: ch. 2, 1.2; Robinson: ch. 6, 1.1). The markers we are interested in then are markers for interactants rather than markers for observers. As we proceeded we found that on close examination simple correlations of the sort that the term ‘marker’ at least connotes are the exception – group membership tends to be encoded in speech in rather complex and often indirect ways. It is useful, therefore, to distinguish between direct markers and indirect clues, where the latter are direct markers of some social variable other than the one in focus, but are empirically related to it. So, for example, markers of social relationship are indirect clues to social group memberships insofar as the social relationship is determined by those group memberships. There is an underlying idea here that language features are primarily tied to some particular social variables, and only derivatively to others; the difference would emerge clearly when one considered what would count as an explanation of the occurrence of those features.

Thus, so far we have considered two important distinctions: correlations discernible by the analyst vs. associations used by participants, on the one hand, and direct markers vs. indirect clues to group membership, on the other. However, in considering the concept of a social marker in speech there are a number of other important distinctions that we have not made, possibly at the cost of some confusion. The first set of distinctions has to do with the *intentionality* of markers. Although the importance of the distinction between intended and unintended signals has been noted in discussions of communication (e.g. by Lyons 1972), the distinction is not often rigorously applied (see, e.g., Argyle (1975), where the distinction is made, but then ignored in the search for general proper-

ties of nonverbal communication). In any case more is required than that. Crucially at least the following three-way distinction is required: (i) unintended or natural signs; (ii) intended signs produced in such a way as to appear to be unintended – i.e. exploited ‘natural’ signs; and (iii) communicative signs proper, that are not only intended, but are intended to be seen to be intended. Only the last are truly communicative, as Grice (1971) has pointed out. Now communication *systems* are only constructed from type (iii) signs (although not all such signs are necessarily part of a system). Further the barrage-of-signals view of interaction that we outlined in the introduction is only legitimate for type (i) signs, and it is especially inadequate for signs of type (iii).

A single piece of verbal behaviour can function in different circumstances in each of these three ways. Suppose, for example, that there is a correlation between a deep voice and the speaker’s personal confidence (for some such examples see Scherer this volume: ch. 5). A speaker may thereby be judged confident by a knowing observer. Strictly, the signal here is no more communicative than black clouds can be said to be communicating forthcoming rain; it is in this sense a natural sign. However, knowing this, a politician may purposefully lower the natural tone of his voice to induce belief in his self-confidence – he is then intentionally *exploiting* a ‘natural’ sign. In a third situation, someone may jokingly advise a friend to jump in a lake in the same low tone, where his intention is to convey his intention to sound mock-authoritative and confident.

The three-way distinction has application to the material reviewed above in the following sorts of ways. Some aspects of dialect, those that are relatively hard to change, can function as type (i) ‘natural’ signs – a case in point would be what Labov calls *indicators* (1972a: ch. 8), sociolinguistic variables correlating firmly and only with the socioeconomic status of the speaker. Similarly, aspects of repertoire restriction are likely to signal a speaker’s group affiliations whether he likes it or not. Other aspects of dialect can function more like type (ii) signs, for example what Labov calls in his terminology (a different usage from the one in this volume) *markers*, that is, sociolinguistic variables that are within the manipulation of the speaker so that he is likely to use them to claim higher prestige in intergroup, formal transactions. So can aspects of repertoire, as when a prestigious register is used to impress or influence. But aspects of social deixis are mostly not like these; they are communicative signals of the third type. An intimate pronoun of address, for instance, is part of a communicative system of address where it contrasts with a polite plural used to a singular addressee; and a choice within such a system will

always be read as intentionally significant and intended to be recognized as such. Nevertheless, signs can be both communicative and natural signs simultaneously: for example, the Javanese honorific levels mentioned above are constructed of communicative signs that convey degrees of respect to the addressee and to certain referents, yet a particular repertoire of these levels can be a distinctive natural sign of membership in one of the three Javanese estates.

The picture that emerges is a confusing and complex one: natural signs get exploited as communicative resources (see, e.g., Good 1978 on hesitation), while communicative signs can be distinctive of speaker's identity and thus function as natural signs. The web of interconnections between linguistic and social variables allows both a wealth of unintended inferences and intended exploitations for communicative and other purposes.

Another distinction, related but not quite the same, is that between markers whose existence can be attributed to their signalling function, and those that exist for independent historical reasons and just happen to be correlated with social variables. A case of the former would be the T/V pronominal systems, a case of the latter would be social dialects that derive directly from regional ones (as when an urban proletariat is recruited from a distinct rural area). In many cases these are very different kinds of phenomena, but the interesting observation perhaps is that markers that start off as correlations due to historical chance rapidly become integrated into a symbolic system where they function as sensitive signals of social variables (as the work of Labov has demonstrated in detail).

Finally, we have indicated that, as far as we can see, only emic markers of social variables will be of interest to the study of the principles which persons use to conduct social interaction. What are 'markers' for analysts may not be markers for participants, and we must be careful not to prejudge the emic status of, say, dialect as a marker of group membership, just because it functions in a number of particular societies in that way. We have used the terms 'emic marker or clue' to cover all cases where the information associated with the relevant speech variables is available to participants; we could make a further distinction between that information actually employed by participants in governing a particular occasion of interaction, and that which although potentially available to them is not used in a particular interaction. Interestingly, information not used by actually interacting individuals might well be utilized by nonparticipating bystanders (native analysts, if you like) to make sense of the observed interaction. The interactional importance of any

emic marker will clearly depend on how, and how often, it is used to guide actual occasions of interaction, or make sense of them to native bystanders. In reviewing types of markers of group membership and social relationship, and more indirect sources of social information in speech, we have followed the authors' own indications of emic status in the particular societies on which they have reported. But, apart from the avowedly emic status of socially deictic markers, the interactional relevance of each kind of marker is something that has to be empirically investigated in each culture. Nevertheless, the kinds of linguistic features we have reviewed are, judging from the available evidence, especially good candidates for emic markers of (or clues to) group membership or social relationship, and would be a good starting-point for research in a new social locus.

3. Concluding remarks

We have pursued two main themes. One is that social structure serves to link social variables in such a way that linguistic correlates with one such variable can provide important clues to the values of other such variables. In particular we have argued that group membership is not often directly marked in an unequivocal or unambiguous way in speech, and that in interaction there is much reliance on indirect clues to group membership. The other main theme is that interaction is organized in such a way that linguistic variables are dependent for their social significance on other aspects of interaction, including states of other linguistic variables.

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 follow up these two themes respectively. Section 3.3. addresses the theoretical problem that arises most directly from them: What would be an adequate model of the ways in which social information (especially about participant identities and relationships) is conveyed in speech?

3.1. Social variables and speech markers

We have argued that straightforward and direct markers of group membership are few and far between, and that the bulk of the ways in which social group membership is indicated in speech are indirect and involve a number of intervening social variables – especially the variable of social relationship. This indirect 'marking' is possible because social structural determinants, which structure the relations between groups, penetrate right down into the organization of social relationships. There is thus a

connection between the degree of interrelation between different social variables and the extent to which they are marked simply and directly in speech; the more interrelation, the greater the possibility of indirect marking.

It may be that other social variables (e.g. those examined in the other chapters in this volume) correlate with linguistic variables in a more straightforward fashion than social group. But we doubt this. And we suspect that, as is the case with markers of group membership, the overall social structure will determine the importance of the social variable in question, its relations to other variables, and hence the possibility of indirect 'marking' in speech. We would like briefly to review some of these other variables and to ask of each (i) to what extent its corresponding markers in speech are really direct, and (ii) to what extent the social variables themselves vary in their significance and in their connections with other variables due to social structural differences in different societies.

To some extent, due to our broad definition of group, we have already reviewed some of these other variables – in particular, class and ethnicity. But turning to markers of sex in speech, we can see that except for some paralinguistic features and some rare instances of linguistic features categorically reserved for one sex or the other, the linguistic markers of sex derive from one of two sources (cf. Smith, this volume: ch. 4). Either they are markers indicating the hierarchical relationship between the sexes, and so only indirectly markers of sex *per se* (and directly markers of deference or power), or they stem from the different social networks or activities in which members of the two sexes are involved in some societies (see Brown (in press) for a Mexican Indian case where usages of politeness strategies are tied to networks of relationships unique to each sex). The social structural determinants of the importance of sex as a social variable, and thus perhaps the likelihood of direct markers, do not always act in a simple way. Consider for instance that in South India women are markedly lower in status than men of their own caste and sex roles are sharply differentiated, yet there are very few direct markers of sex in their speech. The reason seems to be that the social hierarchies based on age within caste, and on caste-status in intercaste interaction, override the status asymmetry based on sex.

Another important social variable is age, but again simple direct markers of age are not common (cf. Helfrich, this volume: ch. 3). Thus in speech communities we have studied in England, Mexico and India, apart from certain paralinguistic features (voice set) and perhaps the age

stratification of repertoire and slang,²² markers of age are indirect; what is directly marked most conspicuously is the relative status that age confers. Furthermore, the degree of relative superiority thus conferred differs radically in the three societies due to the differing role that age plays as a criterion for authority and office, as determined by each social structure.

Even the most idiosyncratic of social variables, personality, is subject to broad social influences. Indeed this is the premiss of the work done in the 'culture and personality' school of American anthropology (see Kaplan 1961), wherein relations between cultural traits, child-rearing practices and the basic range of personality type in a culture are explored. A good feeling for the empirical basis of this kind of work can be gained from Carstairs' (1967) account of Hindu character; a more familiar example of such interconnections is provided by the belief held by many that the function of the elite English 'public schools' is as much to breed a certain kind of character as it is to educate (Scherer (this volume: ch. 5) makes a similar point concerning 'Prussian' personality). There is a special problem for markers of personality, namely that it seems that a great many of the dimensions on which personalities are usually thought to differ (at least by the layman) – e.g. aloof/friendly, leader/follower, confident/insecure, outgoing/shy, and so on – are also and perhaps primarily dimensions on which the qualities of social relationship differ. It would be possible, then, to claim that the markers in question are directly markers of social relationships and only secondarily expressions of personality. The point of course is that personality is expressed in the conduct of social relations, and particular ways of conducting them are the source of many if not most personality attributions.

Situation as a social variable is subject to the same kinds of observation (cf. Brown & Fraser, this volume: ch. 2). Clearly, social structure determines to what extent and how many emic locales and activities are distinguished. And again, markers of situation are often more directly markers of other things. Consider for example the switch from first names to titles plus last names by two English academics as they move from an informal situation (e.g. a chat in the common room) to a formal one (e.g. a faculty meeting). Such usages are primarily markers of social relation-

²² Labov's (1972a) studies of markers of social class have shown that these too stratify by age of speaker. This comes about because the sociolinguistic variables in question are subject to continuous processes of change. The result is that a certain phonetic realization, for example, that was once prestigious may within a generation become stigmatized, and vice versa. But since an individual's usage will tend to be frozen by his middle twenties, his speech will contain markers that may contrast with those of both younger and older members of his own class. We draw attention to this because it is yet another way in which such markers of social class also function as markers of a number of other social variables.

ships (indicating degree of intimacy or distance), but it so happens that in formal situations the display of intimacy is not appropriate.

In sum, we have argued here that group membership is not exceptional in being largely indirectly indicated in speech via inferences from markers of other social variables. In these other cases too, social structural determinants link the variable in focus to other social variables, thus allowing indirect marking. But if markers of most social variables tend to be indirect then there must be some social variables that are key, and carry the bulk of the direct marking. Our study of group markers and our short review of markers of other social variables suggest strongly that there is one key social variable that is more heavily and directly marked in speech than any other – namely, kinds and qualities of social relationship. (Indeed in 1967 Gumperz expressed a similar view (1971: 226).) It is as if markers of other social variables tend to be compressed into markers of social relationships, and thus into indirect status. We do not have to look far to see why this is so: the arena for social interaction is the social relationship – it is within the social relationship that other social variables have to be communicated – the social relationship *is* (at least in large part) the communication context. By linguistic modulations that vary the kind and quality of social relationships expressed, social variables on many other dimensions can be indirectly conveyed.

Because the social relationship constitutes the situation of communication to such a large extent and involves the recognition of, and adaptation to, a large variety of potential alters, we would expect markers of this variable to be of the intentionally communicative, voluntary kind. And this seems largely to be the case. For direct markers of other social variables are more often (though not exclusively of course) involuntary – like voice set as a marker of sex or age (taken indeed by laymen to be ‘natural signs’ of the same), and also many features of dialect. By contrast, the key markers of social relationships, such as address forms and politeness levels, are within voluntary, even sometimes conscious, control.

The heavy reliance on markers of social relationship to convey indirectly other pertinent social variables thus comes to have another significance: such indirect markers are likely to be of the voluntary kind. They are thus likely to be subject to manipulation, impression-management, strategic deployment. And the extent to which social markers in speech tend to be that way may be an important feature of human societies. If by birth we inherited inalienable markers of identity on all dimensions, then human social organization could be considerably more like that of ants.

3.2. Interactional structure and the interdependence of linguistic variables

We have argued that the social significance of markers in speech cannot be adequately assessed without reference to other aspects of interaction, including other such markers and various background assumptions made by participants about the nature of the interaction. We can isolate one basic set of problems concerning the notion of marker that will exemplify the point.

The problems have to do with what Brown & Fraser (this volume: ch. 2, 3.2) have termed the multiple ambiguity of social markers. This property seems to be more common than not, and it raises fundamental difficulties with analysis, especially of a quantitative kind. We may distinguish various ways in which markers can be ambiguous, that is, signal different kinds of things in different circumstances:

Markers with vector values. Examples are provided by Labov's variables (for example, New York City /r/) which are sensitive both to speaker's class membership and what Labov calls 'style', namely aspects of context that induce more or less attention to speech. Any particular rate of final or postvocalic /r/ pronunciation will be (in Labov's analysis) a function of the values on the two dimensions of speaker's social stratum and style.

Markers with dyadic interpretations only. The simple example here is the use of T/V pronouns, where the social valuation depends both on what pronoun is given and on what is received: a reciprocal T indicating solidarity, a T given and a V received indicating a nonsolidary power relation. This may be a much more general phenomenon than we now know. For example, in Giles' theory of dialect accommodation, if only one party accommodates there may be implications that the other is of higher status, if both accommodate they may seem to be striving for a degree of solidarity. Consider too code-switching phenomena: the social significance of a choice of language is likely to be at least partially dependent on what language other participants are using.

The neutralization of social information in linguistic markers. Again, T/V pronouns are illustrative here, but the remarks hold equally for the choice between any two sociolinguistic alternates (address forms, honorifics, styles, diglossic levels, even languages). Sociolinguists, following Geoghegan's pioneering work (see Geoghegan 1971; Ervin-Tripp 1972;

and discussion in Levinson 1977), have used flow-chart formalisms to represent the choices underlying uses of address forms. In such flow charts, a number of distinct pathways through a series of assessments of the social situation lead to the choice of a pronoun or address form. For example, in Ervin-Tripp's (1972: 226) representation of nineteenth-century Russian pronoun usage there are six pathways leading to choice of the V pronoun. Any instance of a pronoun usage is thus, when decontextualized, multiply 'ambiguous', although in context, given the available information about whether the addressee is or is not adult, whether the social context is formal or informal, etc., there is no such ambiguity for participants, who can reconstruct exactly what assessments lie behind a usage, i.e. its social significance. Thus a pronominal choice is only a marker of detailed social information relative to a great deal of other social information.

The 're-use' of contrasting markers to signal further social information. An example should make the notion clear. In a northern Norwegian situation described by Blom & Gumperz (1972), two rigidly separated dialects (perceptually, perhaps, distinct languages), Ranamål and Bokmål, are associated primarily with members of the local fishing population and members of the southern elite, respectively. For locals, ingroup transactions are primarily in Ranamål, outgroup transactions in Bokmål, and this is perhaps the primary social significance of the codes employed. But given this, the opposition can be *re-used* within ingroup transactions to signal other secondary social significances – for example, it can be used to distinguish between kinds of social role. Thus two locals will conduct official business in Bokmål, and neighbourly transactions in Ranamål. And then *within* the conduct of official business the opposition can be re-used yet again to signal attitudes to the topics under discussion. We cannot then simply say of one or other code that it is a marker of such and such; it depends critically on the interactional context (see Brown & Fraser, this volume: ch. 2, for additional examples).

Significances dependent on syntagmatic relations between markers. Clearly the address form *sir* in English has quite different significance when used alone, and when followed by a name as in *Sir Arthur*. Similarly, it has been reported for the Swedish pronouns of address *du* (T) and *ni* (V) that their social significance depends critically on the presence or absence of other address forms in the utterance: thus *du* plus first name conveys intimacy, *du* without first name conveys nonintimate solidarity, *ni* plus first name is a rural form of respect, *ni* without address form can be

considered rude, while *ni* with title plus last name indicates personal reserve (Paulston 1975). There is reason to suspect that this is a general, if largely unexplored, phenomenon.

'Marked' usages of markers. Here the term 'marked' is used in a distinct and technical sense to refer to the unexpected usage that contrasts with the basic or fundamental usage (see Geoghegan 1973). A simple case of marked usage would be the use of a T pronoun to insult where a V pronoun would be the expected 'unmarked' usage, or the use of a V pronoun to indicate withdrawal of affection where a reciprocal use of T is normal. One can find marked usage of all kinds of sociolinguistic alternates, including the languages used in code-switching. Their correct interpretation relies on a rejection of the 'face value' of the marked usage and the identification of the contrasting expected unmarked usage.

All these different kinds of usage of markers in speech are sources of 'ambiguity', and they indicate that one cannot attribute a particular social significance to a linguistic variable without a large amount of knowledge about other aspects of the interaction. In insisting on the importance of attention to structure in interaction, it is these kinds of phenomena that we have in mind. Any linguistic variable has a structural relation to other such variables with which it contrasts, or with which it forms a significant unit as a reciprocal or syntagm. Moreover, the social significance of a social marker can vary according to the overall 'frame' attributed to an interaction: to the same interlocutor a T pronoun or a first name may be unmarked in an informal setting while a V pronoun or a title plus last name may be unmarked in a formal setting. The full significance of a social marker can only be assessed against a body of information about the interaction situation and the values of other interaction variables.

The straightforward implication is that social markers cannot be simply identified by correlating linguistic variables with social variables: different instances of the same linguistic variable may have quite different social significances. Quantitative techniques can only sensibly be applied after a prior examination of the dependencies that a linguistic variable's significance has on other aspects of interaction structure and process.

3.3. Towards a model of how social information is conveyed in speech

In section 1 we indicated dissatisfaction with a simple and initially beguiling model of how social information, especially about speaker and

addressee identities and relationships, is conveyed in social interaction (cf. Robinson, this volume: ch. 6, 6; Scherer: ch. 5, 5.3). The model that we argued against can be characterized by the following assumptions:

- (1) a. There are simple and direct correlations between isolated social variables and linguistic variables, each such correlation constituting a social marker in speech.
- b. Some such markers are perceived by participants in interaction (are of emic status), thus effectively functioning as signals of the relevant social variables.
- c. A theory of how social information is conveyed in speech will essentially consist of an inventory of such markers.

We think that the model has a certain *prima facie* plausibility, and moreover suspect that certain aspects of social psychological methodology will predispose social psychologists to adopt it implicitly. Nevertheless, in our detailed discussions of how group memberships are marked in speech, as a general model of the ways in which social information is conveyed in speech we have shown it to be untenable. Collecting together our reasons for rejecting the model, we may state them as follows:

- (2) a. Direct markers seem to be relatively rare and not the most important way in which social information is conveyed in speech.
- b. Because social structure links diverse social variables, a marker of one such variable can serve to mark another, and this proves to be an equally important source of social information.
- c. Even when direct markers can be found they tend to be multiply ambiguous in their social significance. Their actual significance on an occasion of use can only be ascertained by examining their relations to other aspects of the interaction.
- d. Because it relies crucially on the concepts of marker and correlation, the model is atomistic. The notion of structure is required to make clear how the linguistic variables cohere into an interactional system and the social variables into a social system. Instead of an inventory of simple signals, what seems to be involved is a complex web of interconnecting and interdependent variables that allow complex chains of inference.

There is an additional danger associated with the model, namely that any strong correlation between linguistic and social variables will be taken to constitute a marker. But as we illustrated in section 1, such correlations can be epiphenomenal and misleading, so that the emic status of such correlations cannot be taken for granted and must be

independently demonstrated, if we are to suppose that they play any role in the conduct of interaction by participants.

Finally, the notion of a social marker lumps together phenomena of very different kinds: there are markers (like address forms) that are under voluntary control, others (like voice set) that are usually not; there are linguistic items that are so to speak designed to be social markers (honorifics, for instance), and those that for one historical reason or another just happen to indicate social information (like regional dialect). There is reason to suppose that not all these kinds of markers are utilized by participants in exactly the same kind of way as sources of social information.

It would almost certainly be premature to offer in place of the model in (1) any general theory that purported to account for all ways in which language usage can convey information concerning the social properties of aspects of the speech event (including of course participant identities and relationships). But our discussion has made it clear, we hope, that an adequate model would have at least the following characteristics:

- (3) a. It should incorporate a model of interactional structure, which would provide an account of the context dependency of the significance of linguistic signals of social information.
- b. It should incorporate models of social structure that describe the interrelations between social variables of different kinds, and provide accounts of their relative significance to participants.
- c. It should provide an account of the complex interrelations between social structures and interactional structures, such that participants using their knowledge of these structures and their interrelations can *infer* – often in involved and indirect ways – the social information from situated speech that they can empirically be shown to infer.

We therefore conclude that correlation, and the concept of marker that relies on it, can only be a useful method of locating potentially rewarding research sites, and cannot be the basis for an adequate general model of the ways in which participants themselves extract social information from speech. To do that they generally seem to utilize structural information about both interactional and linguistic systems on the one hand, and about social systems on the other.

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