

Towards Communicability

Programa de Pós-Graduação Interdisciplinar em Linguística
Aplicada (PIPGLA)
Faculdade de Letras/UFRJ
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

School of High Studies in Language and Society:
Mobility at Large

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Charles L. Briggs
University of California, Berkeley

Woolard & Schieffelin 1994

Language ideologies

- Language ideology is “a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk.” [p. 55]
- “We review here selected research on cultural conceptions of language--its nature, structure, and use--and on conceptions of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order. [p. 55]

Language Ideologies: remaining problems

- Woolard and Schieffelin (1994): We note a particularly acute irony in our task of delimiting this emerging field. One point of the comparative study of language ideology is to show the cultural and historical specificity of visions of language, yet ... we must decide what counts as language. [p56-57]
- Webb Keane (2007): proposes “semiotic ideologies.”

Language Ideologies: remaining problems

- Woolard & Schieffelin: "social structures," "cultural conceptions," and "collective order"
- Sites of difference, borders
- Continual (re)production of ideologies of language, tremendous dynamism
- Multiplicity of ideologies of language
- Points of convergence, divergence, intersection (sometimes) violent
- Domain specificity:
 - Dangers of overgeneralization
 - Lack of concern with "sampling" (from fragment to the universe)
 - Need for analytic humility

Scholarly interviewing: an example

- Natural links between frames and metapragmatic models
- Naturalization of connections between metapragmatics and pragmatics
- Pragmatics and discursive power
- *mono-metapragmatics*?
- Disrupting pragmatics as a mode of contesting metapragmatics
- Lack of scholarly reflexivity
- Metapragmatic blindness and issues of power
- Ethnography and the need for a politics of scholarly vulnerability

Scholarly interviewing: an example

- What are the stakes here?
- Anthropologists Madsen and Rubel and the reproduction of Mexican American stereotypes
- Chicano critiques
- Américo Paredes: missing frames, poetics, and humor
- Metapragmatic cross-talk
 - Elicitation of local knowledge and its anthropological amplification into scholarly discourse
 - Collaborative critique of stereotypes circulating in white public spheres and the collective production of alternative discourses
- “Local” theorizing of publics for racist discourse

Enter: J. L. Austin

- J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962:148): The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating. [emphasis in original]
- J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962:104): There are aetiologies, parasitic uses, etc., various 'not serious' and 'not fully normal' uses.

The critique of Austin

Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* (1988[1972]:14): I shall take for granted the fact that Austin's analyses at all times require a value of *context*, and even of a context exhaustively determined, in theory or teleologically; the long list of 'infelicities' which in their variety may affect the performative event always comes back to an element in what Austin calls the total context. [emphasis in original]

Rethinking Austin

- **Context, anyone? What was the context for Austin's speech act?** (The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating.): challenging analytic philosophy
- Rhetorical structure of the argument:
 - From "primary explicit performatives" (I promise to...) to the performativity of language
 - From locutionary//illocutionary//perlocutionary to the multiplicity of modalities enacted simultaneously in utterances

Rethinking Austin: convention

- J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962:154): As official acts, a judge's ruling makes law; a jury's finding makes a convicted felon. . . . It is done in virtue of an official position."
- J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* 1962:105): The illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention.
- J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962:191): ... unless the means employed are conventional.
- What about the (re)production of conventions?

Towards iteration: Derrida

- Jacques Derrida, Signature/Event/Context, *in Limited Inc.* (1977[1972]:43): "For the structure of iteration—and this is another of its decisive traits—implies both identity and difference. Iteration in its “purest” form—and it is always impure—contains in itself the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration.... It is because this iterability is differential, within each individual “element” as well as between the “elements,” because it splits each element while constituting it, because it marks it with an articulatory break, that the remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence: it is a differential structure escaping the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence, upon which opposition the idea of permanence depends."
- See also Butler (*Excitable Speech*, p. 3)

Butler's *Excitable Speech*

- **Continues her investigation of discourse and bodies:**
 - "the body is alternately sustained and threatened through modes of address" (p. 5)
 - Speech provides social existence, a recognition through language, "within the possible circuit of recognition and, accordingly, outside of it, in abjection."
- **Continues to follow/rework Derrida on iterability:**

A kind of discursive performativity that is not a discrete series of speech acts, but a ritual chain of resignifications whose origin and end remain unfixed and unfixable. (p. 14)

Butler's *Excitable Speech*

- **"The subject is neither a sovereign agency with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is pure complicity with prior operations of power." (p. 26)**
- **"The power of the speaking subject will always, to some degree, be derivative, that it will not have its source in the speaking subject" (p. 33)**
- **"Interpellation requires the citation of an existing convention but not a preordained subject, because "it seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one".**

Butler's *Excitable Speech*

- Erasing citationality, mobilities:
 - She argues in her discussion of names that their power emerges from movement, mobilities, and yet this power turns against them "*and seeks to arrest their movement.*" (p. 36, emphasis in original)
 - The reification of the sovereignty of the subject lies in its speaking depends both on the need to citationally perform preexisting forms, but the success of a performance and its attribution to the power of a subject involve a "dissimulated citationality," thus covering up the citational quality (p. 51).
 - Performativity thus "'works' to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized" (p. 51).

Butler's *Excitable Speech*

- **Critiques** Catharine MacKinnon, *Only Words*, (1993)
- Suggests that MacKinnon identifies hate speech with illocution, then conflates illocution with perlocution
- Butler argues for the need to analytically separate illocution from perlocution, to grasp the performativity of both illocution and perlocution, thus keeping open spaces of resignification & the creativity of iterability

A critical engagement with Butler

- Her critique focuses largely on pragmatics, on separating the pragmatics of illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions
- Given her disciplinary grounding, it is based on deep analytic treatment of primarily juridical cases and their mediatization, working at great distance from her objects of inquiry
- She projects a single (largely Derridian) metapragmatic model (iteration and resignification) as universally constitutive of discourses, bodies, power, and injury

Back to our core principles....

- Multiplicity of ideologies of language
- Points of convergence, divergence, intersection (sometimes) violent
- Difference, borders lie in both metapragmatics, pragmatics, and their complex relations with pragmatics
- Need for close textual analysis and ethnographic engagement with both metapragmatics and pragmatics
- Domain specificity:
 - Dangers of overgeneralization
 - Lack of concern with “sampling” (from fragment to the universe)
 - Need for analytic humility

Thus we need to rethink

- The continual performative creation of the very conventions that render discourse performative
- The power of iteration, circulation
- The need to study both locution (it's still important), illocution and perlocution through both pragmatic and metapragmatic dimensions
- Need to keep both the embodiment of discourse and the discursive construction of bodies in mind
- Need to dance around a binary between subjects as possessing sovereign agency or as the effects of pure complicity with prior operations of power

A new point of departure?

- We need an analytic to be able to explore both textually and ethnographically metapragmatic constructions and pragmatic routes of iteration and circulation
- To find a way to look closely and not overgeneralize, not construct universal frameworks and typologies
- That is where communicability comes in....

What is communicability?

- Surprise: I've been talking about it all along, I just avoided the lexical item!
- It is a particular type of metapragmatics, one that tells Derridian origin stories for discourse
- One that projects circulation in particular sorts of ways
- It also projects reception in particular sorts of ways

What is communicability?

- **Communicability powerfully embodies the models of and models for pragmatics:**
 - Often (but not always) projects a particular model as a transparent icon of how discourse is actually circulating
 - Is reflexive, describing the very act of circulation that is taking place in a text, transmission, SMS, etc.
 - Also interdiscursive, projecting how the current text (etc.) has recontextualized other contexts, texts, etc.
- **Creates discursive futures, purporting to**
 - map how the discourse will circulate in the future, the sorts of texts and contexts it will produce
 - Prescriptive: project how discourse should proceed, often laying out authoritative/inauthoritative, truthful/untruthful, or ethical/unethical discursive futures

The performativity of communicable models: subjects

- **Interpellation:** calls out to subjects and interpellates them, often in multiple ways (thus constructing difference as well as shared identity or positionality)
- In doing so, it (re)produces multiple subjects and subject-positions
- Communicable maps project subjectivities as associated with each positionality within a communicable map (we'll see examples!)
- Map forms of agency and degrees of sovereignty
- These subjectivities are often hierarchically ranked vis-à-vis their positionality in communicable models

The performativity of communicable models: spatialization

- Classify spaces as loci of particular communicable processes:
 - Discourse production: (can be absent, as in classic definitions of folklore)
 - Circulation
 - Reception
 - Spaces that are entirely outside this process
- Note that these discrete loci are themselves constructed by communicable models (eg “interactive media,” “crowd sourcing,” “online journalism,” and “mining big data” project transformation or collapse of producer/circulator/receiver distinction)

The performativity of communicable models: temporalization

- **Times**
 - of discourse origin
 - Velocity of reception
 - Times of reception, assimilation
- These, of course, form cronotopes, where spatialization/temporalization are constructed vis-à-vis projections of discourse circulation
 - E.g., "space-time compression"

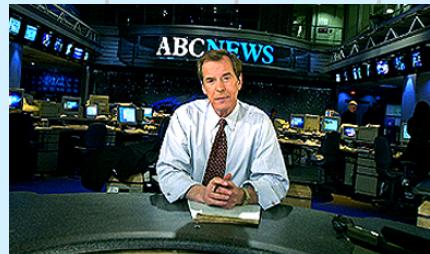
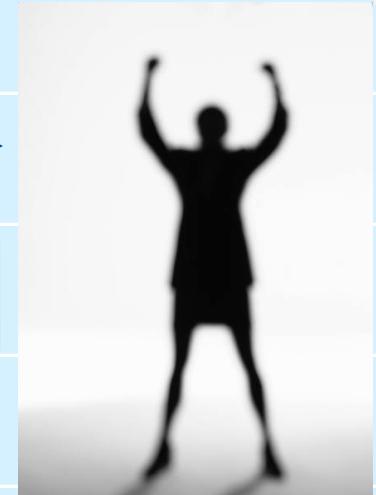
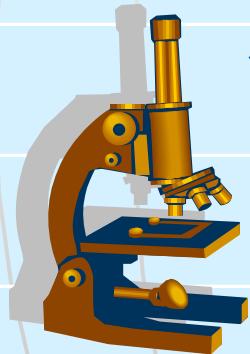
Other performative dimensions of communicability

- Objectification
- Technologies of circulation
- Ethics
 - Producing knowledge confers ethical advantage; producing “misinformation” is ethically suspect
 - The ethics of reception: Edward Snowden, National Security Administration, and Dilma’s cellphone
- Affects
- Scale-making
- Value (including assessments of Intellectual Property Rights and constructions of national scholarly hierarchies)

But hold on!

- No hasty generalization allowed!

Doctor Knows Best: Biomedical Authority/Passive Patient Reception—clinical & mediated



Doctor Knows Best: Biomedical Authority/Passive Patient Reception—clinical & mediated

