Abstract: The social scientific theorization of communication rests on the study of how by-degrees coherent semiotic texts (which turn out to be special kinds of simultaneously ‘indexical’ and ‘meta-indexical’ structures-in-social-spacetime) come into being in the context of mediating social events through which people adjust one to another. We ask how, in a communicative event, specific aspects of textuality-in-context come effectively to transform the very conditions of their use into new states of the relationship among participants. Such study has begun to reveal the varieties of human knowledge that go into appropriate and effective use of language and related codes, and how it becomes possible for people to have their knowledge transformed as a result of participating in interactions (such, presumably, as this one). Part of this effectiveness is compatible with looking at language in the normal lexicogrammatical way, but most rests on aspects of textuality-in-context that can be seen only by semiotic methods of study ultimately deriving from Peirce and Jakobson. I will be using examples of interpersonal interactions to show some of these different kinds of knowledge that are, on the one hand, the begetters of communicative form and, on the other, the begotten results of communication having taken the particular form it did in precipitating textuality-in-context.

The only evidence we have that someone else knows something is that person’s ability to engage in some communicative behavior that reveals such knowledge to us. In
psychological laboratories especially, but also in everyday life, such revelation is sometimes inadvertent or unaware: when particular knowledge, or particular forms of knowledge, and characteristic psychological processes of manipulating it result in a person’s engaging in sign (“semiotic”) behavior that presupposes upon and therefore points to that knowledge – that presupposingly indexes it, we say. Likewise, think of the way that person A might learn something – become transformed in his or her knowledge state – from person B. The only way this can come about is if person B has communicated something to person A, that is, if the sign behavior of person B has brought about – has creatively or entailingly indexed, we say – the change in person A’s knowledge. In the form of sign or “semiotic” behavior that we can isolate and study, communication thus faces in two directions. Communication in the form of semiotic behavior presupposes knowledge states of participants, and entails further knowledge states. In that sense, presupposable knowledge “begets” semiotically formed communication, and in turn communication “begets” sometimes new knowledge as a consequence.

But consider the more complicated condition of human discursive interaction, that is, social interaction that is carried on by means of language and all its surrounding sign behavior. People come to social interactional roles knowing certain things, both about the self and about the interactional other(s), as well as about their cultural universe(s). Very importantly, much of what social actors know that allows communication to take place is cultural knowledge of the social universe, knowledge of what kinds of people and other creatures and things there are, how they normatively behave under various kinds of circumstances, and so forth.

Such knowledge is group-specific, that is, at any given moment in the history of the group it is conventional and sociocentric, a norm presumable for any member of the group (though of course there can be outliers). Every specific or “token” discursive interaction winds up being, in its own way, a learning experience for the interactional participants involved, because “type”-level group norms being indexed are either upheld in the token event, or they are challenged. And participants evaluate challenges to communicative norms against their knowledge of such norms that they have already gained from their prior experience of social interaction, their “socialization” to society’s norms. This possibility of token-testing of every indexical norm is what ordinary language philosophers mean by the “defeasibility” of pragmatic, or interactional norms; in any instance of communication, one can violate a norm, and the particular mode of violation – the particular “incorrect” or “inappropriate” signs someone uses on such an occasion – creatively entails a new state of social relations between or among participants. (One of the earliest attempts to deal with the fact that even contextually “inappropriate” indexicals have “effective” entailing force in redefining or recalibrating the situation was Blom & Gumperz’s invocation of “metaphorical code-switching” [1972:425] in Hemnesberget, Norway, between regional dialect forms and national standard forms.)

Now if knowledge of the social universe is conventional and sociocentric, it presumes upon – it presupposes – the existence of some social structure and a communicational
framework for bringing people together not as undecipherable beings but as legible instances or tokens representative of particular social categories within the social universe. For example, I now monopolize the relational role of speaker/sender, you the reader occupy the role of addressee/receiver; but more than that my relevant biography is already a vast, cross-cutting classification of social types I can depend upon as I instantiate them in my individuality here-and-now as a text comes into being between us: elderly person; male; US citizen; professor; published researcher; etc. We are operating in the lectorial broadcast mode, originally orally-aurally and subsequently mediated by printed text-artifact – one speaker monopolizing the official floor and voluntary, self-selecting and possibly simultaneous addressees. So the social categories that I instantiate may be more obviously at issue, but yours, in my presumptions for “audience design” of my message, are also completely relevant here: scholars of fields relevant to culture, communication, language; members of educational institutions familiar with the lecture format and its published after-image; Japanese peers in academic life; global cosmopolitans; etc.

In fact, there is good reason to assert more generally that all of our knowledge is knowledge of categories of things (including beings) anchored to our imagination of universes of their interactions or, for categories at the “thingy” end of imagination, universes equivalently of person-thing relationality, such as “use value.” This is just to say that all knowledge – with vanishingly small exception (Chomsky thinks boundless recursion of structure over anything called a syntactic category of a certain type) – is really ultimately conventional and sociocentric, founded on and diagnostically revealed only in situations when we have to calibrate ourselves to others through communicative means (see discussion in Silverstein 2004). Let’s call this property the socio-empirical character of all conceptual categories beyond a few sensory schemata perhaps like hue-foci of color perception, or structures of facial-feature configurations (and perhaps the structure of predicate-argument propositional form, if really part of a distinct logico-linguistic denotational modularity).

The ultimate basis, then, of knowledge structured by socio-empirical conceptual categories lies in communicative events, which must therefore be the most primordial layer of knowledge. In my teaching I call attention to the “ethological” phenomena of inter-organismal signaling mechanisms at the basis of how various species of animals achieve coordination in groups (e.g., food gathering groups, reproductive groups, etc.). I contrast this with “ethnological” – i.e., sociocultural – phenomena among us humans, that vast universe of sociohistorically differentiated traditions by which large-scale human groups have emerged and persist. It seems clear that socio-empirical conceptual knowledge – the knowledge indexed by and revealed to us only in communication – is the bridge between the ethological and the ethnological, and has both an ontogenetic, or developmental, reality [cf. Hilary Putnam (1975), Vygotsky (1987 [1934]), et al. on the roots of reference] and a phylogenetic, or evolutionary-historical reality as part of our species endowment as Homo sapiens.

But here is the remarkable fact about human discursive interaction in our current ethnological condition of being. Two individuals interact one with another not directly,
nor even only by mere triggering mechanisms as lower life forms do (or as J. L. Austin [1975] and other “speech-act” theorists essentially think we do, applying “forces” on one another!). Human mutual social adjustments are everywhere mediated social relations. Participants feel themselves to be co-constructing a structured realization of knowledge in a denotational text that comes into existence between or among them. And not merely an abstract object that, like a cartoon bubble or balloon with words, floats into the intervening medium from one participant. The denotational text is, in essence, attached or anchored to both participants through their alignments to it; these individual alignments to the mediating denotational text allow the participants to align one to another, giving the illusion that direct human contact has been achieved. In other words, what humans say one to another, the propositional content they feel that they are communicating as “information” or denotational content, comes to mediate how humans interact one with another. That is, denotational (propositional) content mediates how humans “do things with words”; what they do one to another is brought about in-and-by communication that is parsed by the participants as consequential, agentive social interaction.

Let me explain. The generalization here is that universally, humans experience their mutual adjustments through the use of language and surrounding codes as a process of talking one to another about various things, a process of communicating propositional information so as to inform one another of states-of-affairs in the universe of experience and imagination. My point is that as a consequence of this intuition about what goes on in discursive interaction, they—we!—really misrecognize what is going on. We then have to invent additional mystical concepts like the application of “illocutionary forces” (see Austin 1975 or Searle 1969) to understand that discursive interaction is consequential for the way humans arrange themselves in groups and transform the categories to which they belong. We feel that we are relating “rationally” one to another, as though using language is basically just an inferential process based on propositional content that comes from somewhere else (thus the views of Grice [1989] and his followers), grammar from the gods of “logical form,” as it were!

So in the folk misrecognition, “rational” interaction—as opposed, note, to the performance of speech acts!—would depend directly on what each participant contributes in the way of propositional material to the conversation ongoing in the social context. Thought about this way, self-conscious discursive interaction presumes that each interacting person is an individual human being whose knowledge can just be externalized through denotational language, language that just makes statements-about-states-of-affairs-in-universes-of-denotata.

Here is the consequence of this naïve folk view of things. The language-to-world relationship gets extracted from interaction as such and is attributed to the properties of an individual mind operating in its own, pre-interactional sensory and higher-order cognitive envelope. The sociocentric has been removed from this naïve view of knowledge and its linguistic expression, note. From it one derives much that is dominant in Western philosophy (I include here 20th century linguistic theory from Saussure [1916] onward),
which reinforces by simply repeating in fancier terms the naïve feeling that “Standard Average Europeans” have about how we “use” knowledge to form sentences that then become someone else’s basis for decoding back into knowledge, a supposed mental property of another individual mind. H. Paul Grice and his followers present a perfect example of the circular dead-end that one reaches in trying to systematize this as an empirically useful way to study communication (as opposed to recognizing folk-intuitions about communication for what they are).

The fact is, such propositional “competence” – abstracted from the naïve misrecognition of communication – is not, and can never be, just “executed” (Saussure’s term) or actualized in the real-time of parole or “performance.” When we actually look at interaction, we discover the following characteristics:

First, what is interactionally significant about denotational text bears a strikingly indirect relationship to logically well-formed sentence-level units neatly laid out in a linear temporal order. John Lyons (1977:1.29) introduced the useful distinction between text-sentences and system-sentences. By the term text-sentences he means here the propositionally interpreted token segments of transcribable discourse, whether formally complete and projectible as predicates, arguments, and quantifiers, or projectible as only fragmentary realizations of such. (Thus note that large numbers of Japanese text-sentences lack explicit lexical coding of one or more semantically projectible arguments. But in cotextual frame, these syntactic fragments are perfectly interepretable.) By system-sentences Lyons means the abstract grammatical forms, the types, the elements of rules of grammatical norms by which we can parse discourse into text-sentences (and their fragments) in the first place. Much of the formal sign material that actually occurs in text-sentences is not part of system-sentence grammar at all; text-sentential forms far exceed what we can describe with grammatical approaches to system-sentencehood. All the actually pragmatic or context-indexical characteristics of discourse are beyond these methods, yet of course these aspects of utterances are clearly part of the meaningful denotational texts with which we communicate. So, as analysts of communication we no longer even expect that all the knowledge that goes into text-sentences will be reflected in the participants’ knowledge of grammar and lexicon of the sort we can study with grammatical approaches to understanding system-sentences. Denotational texts and even what we recognize, with a bow to naïve intuition, as their text-sentential chunks, are objects of a different sort from system-sentences. They partly realize or instantiate system-sentencehood, but far exceed it in their meaningfulness, linked as they are to the contexts in which they occur and cooccur.

Second, denotational texts that we can render (inscribe) with interactional transcripts are, first and foremost, organized into complexly laminated metrical units, which measure out the interactionally significant communicative forms into recurrent, equivalent units and give an overall architecture to interactionally relevant
information that is only indirectly related to “logical” or propositional content. (Though, to be sure, metrical units are sometimes asymptotically convergent with text-sentence forms and their fragments. This happens, for example, when discourse is structured into propositionally projectible linguistic units of text-sentencehood as its units of metrical form; think of standard adjacency pairs [(Question; Answer) or [Request; Refusal/Excuse] rendered by two participants in turn in canonically grammatical illocutionary form as a metrical structure of discourse. The units of turn-taking role inhabitation – A asks a question; B answers it – are the metrical units that unfold in full sentential grammatical signs.) It is the standard metrical property of cardinal measure – dividing a total temporal interval of communicated signals in discourse, sedimented as a transcribable segment of textual form, into equivalently-weighted units – that underlies how denotational texts mediate social interaction.

By contrast, recall that, as Chomsky long ago pointed out, unknowingly echoing Saussure’s (1916:103) axiom of linearity, there is no rule of syntax that appeals to cardinal measure as such, but only rules that stipulate ordinal measure, that is, ordering relations among constituent units (‘before’, ‘after’, ‘simultaneous’). (Thus, note as well that “ordering” principles dependent on surface-form “weight” crescendo and decrescendo, and many properties of anaphoric and other units of resumptive reference [reference-maintenance] invoking syntactic parallelism are not rules of grammar in the strict sense, but metrically dependent principles of text-sentence form.) Metricalization, as in official poetries, allows us to define a special, signal-internal indexical relationship among units of a text, cotextuality, which is the mutual locatability of units of text one with respect to another because they can be parsed as standing in particular metrical positions within a cardinally measured structure within a text. (In poetries, places like end-of-lines have special cotextuality relations. Or think of the complex “acrostic” metricalities of medieval Arabo-Spanish and Judeo-Spanish poetries, where “hidden” messages are spelled out by what occurs serially in particular positions that move across lines: first position in first line, second position in second line, etc. – such positions and line-units being entirely a function of conventions of cardinal metricalization.) Cotextuality, like contextuality, is an indexical relationship, here, of sign to sign, symmetric in the instance, as opposed to the asymmetric indexicality of text-to- [noncotextual-] context. Thus, cooccurrence of linguistic units in any actually renderable text is a complex product of rules of ordinally hierarchical syntax and morphology and phonology in the normal understanding of constituency structure, and special features of cotextuality that exceed and are autonomous of these grammatical stipulations. Cooccurrence from all these sources underlies the textual properties of repetition, parallelism, etc. of text segments as significant units of denotational textuality. Thus, the emergent hierarchical structure of information in denotational text is in principle autonomous of that deriving from hierarchical structures of grammatical form, though intersecting with them insofar as token forms from grammar are, of course,
implemented at the same time as units in textual organization.

Third, there is not just one type of metricalization we have discovered in denotational text; there are at least two different types of metricalization. The first is an explicit or obvious metricalization – most easily observable in what laypersons experience as “ritual” use of language and related semiosis – that organizes the surface material of language into many recognizable cardinally measured segmentations. The second metricalization creates implicit metrical structure in the form of deictic anchoring of denoted conceptual content into arrays of conceptually juxtaposed orderings. Now deictic categories are, of course, indexical denotational categories; they map the conditions under which tokens of the categories are used into characterizing the denotata over which they have scope. Deictics are pervasive in every language, and frequently take the form of morpholexical paradigms, such as English now – here – this: then – there – that, though there are many affixal deictics, such as English ‘Tense’ markers for ‘Past’ vs. ‘non-Past’, Hopi ‘Evidential’ markers for ‘Eyewitness Report’ vs. ‘non-Eyewitness’, Japanese text-sentence-final modality particles, etc. (Additionally, the denotational sense of many lexemes in every language has an effectively deictic component, such as deictic verbs of ‘Motion’ come vs. go, give vs. take, particularly where the locational schemata of paths implied by their semantics are superimposed on any accompanying morpholexical deixis of place or indexicalities of role: “Take it over there!”) The organization of denotational text is such, that deictic oppositions, themselves metrically arranged in the explicit text-sentence segments over which they have scope, become the operators over relatively less deictic, or non-deictic linguistic forms. (Observe how the grammatical structure of every language is organized into major constituent types that attract clusters of deictic operators, a fact that neo-Chomskian formalists have not yet realized is a clue to their information-organizing function at the level of text-sentencehood.) By in effect mapping a topology of the role-relation structure of a communicative situation as a conceptual topology, the deictic oppositions form a kind of “poetic ordering of denotational space” within which the denotata of other forms are understood to be arranged one with respect to another: “here’s” such-and-so – “there’s” that other; “now” such-and-such is factual – “then” something else was/will-be factual; etc. Within explicitly metricalized segments of denotational text, the very same deictic paradigms are recurrently brought into play to give further specific order to conceptual structure. Metricalization in denotational text thus comes in two recognizable degrees, doubling the capacity of explicit metricalization by the metricalization of deictic paradigms that seem to create orderly, conceptually unitized denotational spaces for the information about denotata to have its play of mutual relevances in cotextuality.

In multi-party discursive interaction, each participant seems to contribute to an ongoing, emergent structure of denotational information “in play,” as we say, from the ever-moving perspective of the indexical origo, the here-and-now in
which and through which the participants feel they communicate. The structure of this co-participation aligns each participant with this emerging structure of information, thus in effect mediately constituting a figure of mutual alignment of participants one to another. The capacity to participate in the co-construction of a denotational text in respect of which each participant is compelled to signal some alignment is the sociocentric principle of mediated social interaction. When I “cooperatively” agree with something my interactional alter has communicated as fact, in effect I align myself with the point-of-view, the status or identity, or even the politicoeconomic interest that my interactional partner thereby has manifested up to and at that moment, he or she being a person now inhabiting and realizing certain of the categories now “in play”; my co-alignment constitutes as an interactional move a socially performative act that frequently has consequences far beyond the interactional event here-and-now: I have potentially put myself in my interactional alter’s group in one or another respect – and with what perduring effect may not yet be clear at the time of interaction. When my conversational turn fills out a knowledge paradigm my interactional alter may be in the process of constructing in a denotational text, “adding information” in a mutually recognizable way, I am co-constructing a framework of mutual alignment in which the identities indexed by such a knowledge paradigm – note, not the knowledge itself! – suddenly become the terms on which and about which we are interacting. The effects of every self-alignment we achieve in respect of co-constructing a denotational text are felt on the plane of identities, outlooks, interests being worked on and adjusted in the particular discursive interaction. The co-construction of denotational text thus projects into the actual world of social relations; it is not merely a matter of informing one another of the contents of one’s cognition. This structure of movements-over-time of mutual alignments and their indexed implications in the world of social life is what we term the interactional text emergent between or among participants. It is the model of how they are in fact coming to mutual adjustment in a momentary and continuously changing groupness, or in a mutual group relationality frequently consequential beyond the interactional moment. And all this is accomplished by interlocutors as they seem just to be conveying information in denotational text.

And how, then, does what we would term knowledge – particularly socio-empirical conceptual knowledge – get manifested in this complex structure of denotational information as it comes to be the mediating interface between social actors? The answer is, in a number of structures of cotextuality and coherent cooccurrence that comprise the texture of discourse, as shown in Figure 1.

I like to call conceptual knowledge “-onomic knowledge,” a term that is based on the suffix in such terms as taxonomy and partonomy (also called meronomy), two of the kinds of organizations of conceptual knowledge that include also serial structure (ordering), paradigm (matrix array), and so forth. In discourse, we sometimes directly and explicitly stipulate an
Figure 1

**Conceptual Knowledge Revealed in Denotational (In)coherence**

Inexplicably Use of linguistic forms in conformity with knowledge coded by them, including lexical primes:

e.g., *…so I gave the pregnant man my seat on the bus this morning.

… the pregnant person … [‘male’ or ‘female’ person?] 

Use of proper co-textual devices across text-sentence boundaries, including reference- and other indexical grammatical machinery and –onomic relations among lexical forms serving as ligatures:

e.g. *I met my daughter, at the restaurant, as agreed. But he surprised me by having invited along …

…of a flight attendant, or a gate agent. These company personnel …

Explicitly Use of specific, sometimes special metasemantic construction types that denote specific sense relations among expressions (and hence knowledge structures that anchor ‘concepts’):

e.g., [definitional sense equivalence]  

An ophthalmologist is an eye doctor. [*≡*] 

taxonomy]  

The red oak is a kind of tree. [full form]; … is a …
[key]  

The red oak is a [deciduous] kind of tree.
[partonomy (meronomy)]  

The council is (a) part of the government of the country.
[serial structure]  

The acorn becomes/turns into the oak tree.
-onomic structure, as for example when we relate two descriptors or terms by one of a set of diagnostic metasemantic operators that seem to exist as phrasal possibilities in every language; we can use such predicating operators as English [...] is a kind of [...] and its translation equivalents to realize the -onomic knowledge in text-sentence form, thus making it explicitly communicable. In Figure 1, these explicit metasemantic constructional operators can be thought of as ways of unambiguously predicating certain conceptual relations in the flow of discourse, for example that the category denoted by the English lexeme red oak- is a subcategory of that denoted by the lexeme tree-. The lexemes are in a relationship termed hyponymy; predicating hyponymy is an act of taxonomizing, creating a taxonomic piece of knowledge. The same for something like serial structures, where orderings along already established dimensions – spatial, temporal, degree-measure, etc. – are predicated, as for example the developmental relationship (in time) between what is termed an acorn- and what is termed an oak tree-, signaled by the predicate relating these lexemes, become-.

But, as also illustrated in Figure 1, we must also remember that most -onomic information is signaled by implicit means in denotational text, insofar both intra-sentential and cross-sentential norms of cooccurrence (collocation) serve to index certain conceptual distinctions for us within metrical segments of discourse. Notice in the figure that what linguists for some time termed “selectional restrictions” on lexical primes are really ways in which in text-sentential realtime certain -onomic structures indexed by the use of a particular lexeme are or are not compatible with those indexed by the use of some particular other in a determinate grammatical and textual cotextual position, whether this is within the bounds of what we consider a system-sentence or across system-sentence structures.

In short, the varied kinds of conceptual structures of ordered knowledge are indexed – and thus revealed to native users of the language – by the use of conceptual labels, lexicalized terms in certain diagnostic text-sentential construction types, in the flow of discourse that is produced and interpreted with implicit measures of coherence licensed by the locally relevant conceptual knowledge. Such conceptual knowledge underlies one’s ability to produce and interpret discourse that is determinately constructed through grammar and metrical principles by using both domain-specific – i.e., specialized – and more general lexical material.

Socio-empirical concepts in this view are points of relational conceptual distinction in -onomic knowledge structures; as senses connected to the use of language, such concepts are indexed or cued by certain terms (words of consistent and recurrent denotational applicability). Thus, having a serial conceptual structure of the life-stages of a species, say bovines, that includes, in order, ‘calf’ – ‘cow/bull’, we can use the words calf- and bull-consistently in respect of this knowledge. If we share in this knowledge as English speakers, we can even answer test questions about relative age of creatures named (denoted) by the words: “True or False: A calf is older than a bull.” [Answer: False.]

These coherence relations in discourse thus index the existence of -onomic knowledge. For someone to use the terms according to such coherence relations at the same time
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indexes the status such an individual as a warranted participant in discursive interactions that depend upon the authority of such knowledge. Some of this knowledge is expected of anyone who “knows the language”; other knowledge is associated with ability to use certain lexical and phraseological shibboleths organized into registers (see Agha 2004; 2006; Silverstein 1998; 2003; 2005), usage of which projectively indexes such special identities. The use of terms, in short, cues both general and specific areas of cultural knowledge so that the textually coherent use of such lexical material in denotational text performs an identity-revealing, or identity-constructing act as much as communicating denotational information. One’s group membership, and even one’s status within a group, emerges in interaction as one signals control over group-specific -onomic knowledge, the kind of knowledge, to be sure, that one has access to as a function of participation in discursive interaction.

Hilary Putnam (1975) gestured toward this fact with his phrase “the social division of linguistic labor” – better corrected to “the sociolinguistic division of denotational labor” for our purposes. Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) meant this with his concept of heteroglossia at the level of lexicon: that -onomic knowledge and its manifestation in essentially terminologized denotational usage is unevenly distributed in society. People who claim to use “the same language” use the very same lexemic word-forms and expression-forms with different “meanings.” What denotational meanings their forms code is a constantly shifting function of their biographical histories of participation in one or another social group, at one or another institutional site at which people live out their discursive lives as speakers (writers, signers, ...) and hearers (readers, viewers, ...). Some of this history is in fact indexed by the very patterns we inscribe in or ascribe to the denotational text that mediates our interactions with others. For example, do we use certain kinds of vocabulary with the same degree of terminologized precision as our interlocutor(s), if at all [this paper perhaps an example of the problem] ? Do we control comparable structures of -onomic knowledge indexically referenced or cued by the use of particular words and expressions? Are the coherence structures built up in our discourse manifest or obvious to our interlocutors, and are these coherence structures ones to which they can contribute in the co-construction of an intersubjective understanding of what is being represented in an event of communication? All these kinds of variability are documented in the use of lexemes and lexical expressions (phrases) both in our intuitive everyday experience and in the systematic work of gathering examples from actual discourse in linguistic as well as sociolinguistic work.

The sociological dividing lines tend to be particularly marked for areas of experience and conceptualization with sharp register characteristics. Here, it is consistency of lexical usage within the denotational register of terminology that indexes the user’s -onomic knowledge and thus transparently differentiates expertise from non-expertise. Scientific discourse, whether in words or in mathematicized formulaics, is one such area, of course; discourses of connoisseurship, such as “wine-talk,” or oinoglossia as I have dubbed it (Silverstein 2003; 2004; 2006), are certainly others. But membership in every social group
Figure 2

(1) Hu"uh, An' Q_{A7} how do you like Chicago compared [to Ø] did you go to school there or uh, [wa] 

\[ \text{Oh, uh-huh} \]

(2) Q_{A8} An' you went to undergraduate Ø here or 

\[ \text{Oh, uh-huh} \]

(3) Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh I'm an old Jesuit boy myself, [unfortunately] 

\[ \text{R_{A1}: \Ø [at] Georgetown, down [in Washington]} \]

(it's) too bad 

\[ \text{If} [710 msec] \]

(5) Uh Yeah Well this is my second year here 

\[ \text{And, uh, If don't know.} \]

\[ \text{\(X_{2}\)} \]

\[ \text{It was nice} \]

\[ \text{I sorta enjoyed it -} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{This place is really really - di different -} \]

\[ \text{If} \quad \text{mu'} - \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{Büt, uh, [710 msec]} \]

\[ \text{If don't know.} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

(6) \[ \text{And it really was good} \]

\[ \text{It wouldn't} \]

\[ \text{overwhelming} \]

... there ...

\[ \text{R_{D7}. \quad If} \]

\[ \text{I went to school here also, [um]} \]

\[ \text{um, so If came back kind of} \]

\[ \text{If} \]

\[ \text{In Chicago at, uh, Loyola} \]

\[ \text{Oh are ya? \Ø Q_{B1} Where'd you go [to Ø]} \]

\[ \text{Oh yeah}, \text{yeah} \]

\[ \text{Q_{B2}. \quad Did you finish Ø} \]

\[ \text{Oh, uh - [huh]} \]

\[ \text{Yeah} \]

\[ \text{[If think -]} \]

\[ \text{Jesuit edu [cation changed] [700 msec] a} \]

\[ \text{lôt in the last five or six years}\]

\[ \text{An' If think} \]

\[ \text{If just caught} \]

\[ \text{If caught the tail end of the uh - of the - really old} \]

\[ \text{school -} \]

\[ \text{It was} \]

\[ \text{If - was really} \]

\[ \text{If mean -} \]

\[ \text{\'cause If If did my undergraduate work} \]

\[ \text{If finished that like four years a [690 msec] go} \]

\[ \text{five years ago}\]

\[ \text{And -} \]

\[ \text{If think} \]

\[ \text{Now - probably Loyola is a lot different} \]

\[ \text{in' a lot better [690 msec]} \]

\[ \text{y'know} \]

\[ \text{a lot more - variety of courses} \]

\[ \text{being offered et cetera} \]

\[ \text{and -} \]

\[ \text{y'know} \]

\[ \text{If - If} \]
is always and everywhere a more or less subtle function of continuously performing that membership – indexically locating oneself in social categories, in effect – for others whose task it is to recognize this interactional work and to situate themselves relationally in respect of it.

Figure 2 shows what I think is a wonderful example of this, in the course of a segment of two-participant conversation I have extensively written about over the years (Silverstein 1985, 1997, 2004, 2005). Two then young men, both graduate students at The University of Chicago in 1974, were engaged in a conversation of the genre I have dubbed “Getting to Know You.” Going into the conversation, the only thing each knew about each other was that his conversational partner would be, like him, a graduate student within the University. So certain frameworks of -onomic knowledge could be freely presupposed, such as the general serial structure of education in the United States, undergraduate education preceding graduate education. Hence, each certainly presumed upon the fact that both had certainly attended another, undergraduate college or university before matriculating as a graduate student at Chicago. Moreover, each certainly knew that The University of Chicago, like other such institutions, has a partonomic (meronomic) organization into distinct parts, among which those of a distinctively professional type are known as “schools,” such as the Law School, the School of Medicine, the Graduate School of Business, the Divinity School, and, relevant to our conversational material, the School of Social Service Administration. At the time of the recorded and transcribed conversation, Mr A was a student at (or “in”) the Law School, as it happened, and Mr B was a student in the School of Social Service Administration (“SSA” in local, identity-indexing abbreviation), as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

University of Chicago
Partonomy of Post-baccalaureate Organizational Units

Divisions and Schools of the University (28)

Divisions

Graduate School of Business > Law School > Medical … > … School of Social Service Administration

[i.e., PARTONOMY x HIERARCHY (SERIATION)]
Now up until the point of our example, Mr A had been relentlessly pursuing the question of Mr B’s identity as someone with a past, with a biography that could be made relevant to their “getting to know” one another — or at least for Mr A to get to know who — that is, of what sociocultural categorizations — Mr B was. About 18 minutes into the interaction Mr A presses explicitly on all this presumed -onomic knowledge so relevant to the professional-class bourgeoisie, and especially to the bourgeois male identity: what was Mr B’s undergraduate institution. In segment (2) of the interaction, in his eighth question of Mr B, he asks if Mr B “went to undergraduate [school or college] here,” that is, ambiguously either in Chicago, the city, within a geopolitical framework, where the conversation was then taking place, or at Chicago, the university, within a framework of educational organizations, where both also have institutional identities as graduate students in their respective professional “schools.” Mr B responds so as finally to differentiate two kinds of -onomic knowledge that had been in play almost from the beginning of their conversation: differentiating city from university, by clarifying that while he “went to undergraduate [college]” in the city of Chicago, he “went to undergraduate [college]” at Loyola University of Chicago, an institution of a very different character from the one in which both Messrs A and B were now matriculating.

Immediately hearing this, and giving off one of those excessive indexical markers of appreciation for having reached an interactionally culminative moment (“Oh, oh, oh, oh!”) he finally (!) had gotten his answer! — Mr A immediately keys the taxonomy of interactional interest, that is, he gives a predicable criterion of differentiation within what is a taxonomy now made relevant to the further interaction. “[He’s] an old Jesuit boy [him] self unfortunately!” — the last, modal adverbial uttered with a fixed grin of insincerity as befits a sturdy male type. By keying in this way, naming ‘Jesuit affiliation’ as the essential principle or dimension-of-contrast of taxonomic differentiation of colleges with which one can be affiliated by undergraduate degree or credential, he sets up the inevitable metrical continuation of the (Question; Answer) adjacency-pair structure that now follows. Mr B asks of Mr A his very first question of the interaction: “Where’d you go [to (undergraduate) school]?” And Mr A replies with his symmetrical piece of information, that he went to school “[at] Georgetown, down in Washington,” filling out at once the paradigm of institution and of location at once, in parallel to what, at long last, Mr B had obligingly done (see Figure 4).

This couple of lines is so rich in the various -onomic knowledge structures that they index to interactional effect, it is difficult to see without a guide. Mr B’s having denoted Loyola University of Chicago leads Mr A overtly to recognize its principal or at least to him conversationally most important characteristic, that it is one of the 28 Jesuit-run institutions of tertiary education in North America (note taxonomy in Figure 4). Now who might immediately recognize this? Obviously, someone who by this verbal act of recognition might in fact be within the orbit of the taxonomy in some way. So note that Mr A does not continue with something like an information-confirmatory interrogative, “Isn’t that a Jesuit-run university?” with distal deixis (that) to put it clearly in a topological realm
distinct from where Mr A is interactionally situating himself in the ongoing conversational context. Instead, he jumps right in with first person deixis to be part of the very “in-group” in which Mr B had just revealed himself to be: those people who know what is a Jesuit-founded and -run institution and what is not because they now are or once were students of those very institutions. “I’m an old Jesuit boy myself,” Mr A notes, predicating his in-group status but not yet revealing which one of those institutions he had, in fact, attended.

Let us pause, too, on the wonderful collocation old Jesuit boy-. You may have heard the lexemic phrase old boy network-, or its related form old boy club-, generally used in connection with political cronyism of in-group familiarity that leads to preferential treatment in business, politics, even academic life. To be an “old boy” is to be a member of an in-group among professional men, something one carries forward in one’s life as though always defined by one’s youth. (Compare the parallel way that many demographic subcategories of American women once referred to each other in in-group terms as “girls,” a practice against which feminist writers railed). With a modifier, we get the basis of in-group membership, here the network or club of “old boys” who have been schooled by the Jesuits. Note how Mr A not only identifies himself; he uses an unmistakable way of phrasing it so as indexically to put himself into the same network or club as Mr B has in effect revealed himself to be with the Loyola connection, offering him, interactionally speaking, similarity and even sameness, equality, being-at-oneness, despite the obvious difference in the status of their college credentials.

But this equality-of-membership and mutuality lasts but a fleeting interactional moment. As Mr A describes himself as in a sense Mr B’s co-member, uttering this denotational text-segment as an act within a developing interactional text in effect puts
both neatly in alignment with respect to Jesuitical matters. The next adjacency pair, however, consists of Mr B’s query on where Mr A got his old Jesuit boy’s club membership and Mr A’s answer; with this exchange things take a turn toward difference once more. For anyone who even knows that there are Jesuit institutions of higher education in North America knows – cultural -onomic knowledge this – that they are not all equal. There is a hierarchy of prestige, partly a function of whether or not the institution holds a distinctive position in American hierarchies of institutional prestige more widely, outside of the orbit of the Jesuit 28, that is. One Jesuit institution above all others has this position, Georgetown University, in several senses distinctive beyond the merely geographical proximity to the center of American national power; it is, furthermore, of an age and wealth that put it near – if not in – the class of the famed “Ivy League” institutions. By this criterion of being ingroup among the Jesuit colleges yet at the same time distinguished by out-group criteria, others among the set of 28 are distinguished institutions as well, to be sure.

The critical point for our discussion is that in 1974, when Messrs A and B conversed, Loyola University of Chicago was not among that set, along a number of parameters of comparison. Hence, when Mr A answers Mr B with his informationally gratuitous but metrically parallel institutional self-identifier, “[at] Georgetown, down in Washington,” he is unmistakably summoning a comparison of respective undergraduate institutions which are not merely taxonomically both instances of Jesuit schools, but ordered in a serial structure of prestige as places from which to have one’s bachelor’s degree (for the American bourgeoisie the degree of distinctive placement in the class order of society). Mr A’s Georgetown is superordinate to Mr B’s Loyola of Chicago in the serial structure of institutional credentialing. So Figure 4 laminates the taxonomy/key structure laid out in branches with the serial structure indicated by transitive signs of ordered inequality from left to right. Note how Mr A’s position in it through his deictic association with Georgetown is removed from that of Mr B through his deictic association with Loyola of Chicago.

In the nature of things, here is the interactional effect of invoking these laminated structures of -onomic knowledge. The mutual biographical self-revelation about colleges attended turns out to double the asymmetry of status already in play between Mr A and Mr B from the beginning of their interaction. It was established at the outset of their interaction that within The University of Chicago itself their identities are, respectively, as students in the Law School and the School of Social Service Administration, that is, as future lawyer and future social worker, already suggesting a potential asymmetry of status potentially lurking in the background of their interaction. Of course, this may be why, in the metrical adjacency-pair structure of Question-and-Answer, up to this point Mr A has exclusively posed (lawyerly?) questions to Mr B, who appears to be somewhat evasive in his answers up to his response to Mr A’s eighth question, the identity material we have just been elaborating. You should look to my published treatments of the interaction (Silverstein 1985, 1997, 2004) to follow the dénouement, which is wonderful and, a kind of “metrical, if also poetic justice,” if you will pardon the pun.
Observe, on this basis, the bidirectional character of the indexical relationship between coherence structures of unfolding denotational discourse and -onomic knowledge. On the one hand, to the degree that discourse can be processed as coherent with respect to the -onomic knowledge it indexes, it relies on the social existence of that knowledge, a necessary conceptual underpinning of communication presumed to be shared among participants in a discursive interaction. On the other hand, note that certain important features of how denotational discourse comes to textual formedness itself allow what we might term asymmetric -onomic communication, in which, in effect, participants can co-create new -onomic knowledge, structured in terms of the denotational text “in play” at least at some moment in the course of an interaction. Further, -onomic knowledge of one participant in an interaction can be taught through descriptive monologue by one person communicating to (an) other(s). (Coherent exposition of scientific theory has such a character, to be sure.) Partly, this depends on there being available in the language used for such purposes a whole set of semantically structuring syntactic schemata (Tyler 1978:255ff. terms them structures with “[semantic] ordering functions”) that in effect, as we have seen, “place” lexemes – and the cognitively cued concepts differentially associable with each – one with respect to another. Without a way of communicating to a novice that “The calf is a younger version (or earlier life-stage) of the cow/bull,” invoking the seriality inherent in adjectival comparison [English, ...ADJ-er_ than... ] along some continuum of degree to relate the denotatum of calf to that of cow-/bull, we could not teach a person who did not already have this -onomic knowledge the facts of bovine life, as it were.

So we can create new -onomic knowledge by putting lexemes pairwise (or multiply) into syntactic constructions (and equivalent cross-sentence textual structures). This makes -onomic knowledge into sharable culture. Learning a new area of -onomic knowledge is focally a question of learning new coherence relations among its key knowledge-indexing lexemes that become, to this extent, terminologized ways of using language (in text) to think coherently about a particular area of concern. One can learn a new area of -onomic knowledge by learning to represent it, that is, to talk coherently about it – coherence measured by the way those with prior, recognizedly authoritative knowledge themselves do. One can learn to be an “expert,” just as one can learn to tell if someone else is one.

Look at the transcript in Figure 5 of a second videotaped interaction involving the same set of professional school students, this time involving Mr A with a certain Ms C. The two are interacting not only across the gender divide but, as becomes clear at the outset, also across the divide of Mr A’s Law School identity and Ms C’s identity as a student in the School of Social Service Administration. At the outset of the interaction, Mr A even professes, a bit condescendingly from the position of the Law School student, not to know even what this school in The University of Chicago teaches: “Oh well! What do they do_ over there_ (I don’t know).” Here note the deictic use not only of “there” for the School of Social Service Administration, according to the usual deictic differentiation of here : there as shown in Figure 6; note that he uses the translational phrase that denotes a path from the here-and-now, “over there,” to a place from which he indexes his distance
Figure 5

My name is [Mr A]
I guess we’re s’pose ta begin →
I háte forced conversations first of all but anyway [FN]
What school are you in are
you
Oh well! What do they do over there (I don’t know)
Really? I – I have nó idea – conception at – at áll of
what
never
SSA before →
Yéah →
Yéah →

My name is [Ms C]
I guess →
I’m
at SSA →
Well ; … it’s a school in turmoil right at the moment
I think
Well →
you know
it’s a school
what SSA
stands for
Okay uh I’m in the uh – traitement - sequence
of the school ↓
There’re the three sequences →
actually several experimental programs
one of which →
I’m in is coordinated social treatment →
which →
is coordinated →
from the sense of combining your – ühm - methodología
which is case work –
and grupework research –
and um your → practicum →
which is like fieldwork →

úmm↓ -
hów (long) →
How Knowledge Begets Communication

... for the year --

then -- I'll have to -- decide whether I go into -- uh

research --
or go and do casework
or groupwork
or cr -
you know -
some

thing

more common

... it's --

I'm in my second year here --

and

it's uh really really horrible --

it's the worst experience I've ever had -- (oh yeah) --

I don't know --

oh I just in --

and they keep pushing and pushing and pushing

and I -- really -- it's --

[I'm] really sick of it after a while --

and right (now) I think is about the low point of the year --

cause -- everything's piling up and --
and getting worse

and worse 'nd

úh ah

I don't know

I guess a lot

I'm from the East

also which

I don't know

If I don't like this area either

here

Are you from out here — or er ↓

ah yéah —

I'm —m from a place called New Rochelle

where are you

where'd you live

in The City

or what —

Óh óh óh

old Cór-
nell

oh yeah (are there zik) —

I lived with a gúy for part of the —

at the end of the summer —

from Cornell as a matter

who was a research assistant

at SSA ↑

yéah —

'y'm

mmm

Nó — originally South Dakóta —

but I lived in

New York

last year —

where’s ↑

where - in the East —

New Rochelle ↑

No I lived in Ithaca —

upstáte

yéah right
Oh –

... did you go to a school in South Dakota or er

Oh

I went to a place in a Washington called Georgetown

I don’t know

like-

I’m very sure I were an Eastern born and bred

I guess –

and coming out here was really

it was really a change

Oh

what’s

No

I went outside of Chicago here -

Valparaiso Indiana

how about you –

where’d you go to under grad –

Oh

M-

mm

yeah ↓

How’d
— a path not taken to social work, as Robert Frost might have had it. And he restates his complete ignorance: “Really? I — I have no idea — conception at — at all of what [it is they do].”

Figure 6

At this point Ms C simply begins to teach Mr A all about the various rubrics of the curriculum, indexing schematic conceptual knowledge of taxonomies, meronomies, serial structures, etc., as shown in Figure 7. Now it becomes quite clear later on in the conversation that Mr A probably has a very good idea about what goes on in “SSA,” as he notes, in relation to a sequence of geographical locations with which Mr A and Ms C identify each other, that he has had some experience with the school: “I lived with a guy for part of the — at the end of the summer — from Cornell as a matter [of fact] who was a research assistant at SSA.” So his professions of ignorance are merely part of a strategy of conversational dismissal, a self-distancing to “count as” a put-down, that Ms C simply responds to cheerfully with full informational overload: Mr A has to hear the full story, as shown in the transcript and figure, whether he wants to or not.

What Mr A seems to want to do, in fact, is to complain. As soon as Ms C obliges with the
counterpart question for Mr A, “Yeah →-- so tell me, what school you’re in and what year,” uttered just as he is saying that Ms C’s SSA curriculum “sounds about as exciting as law school,” Mr A launches into a long interactional phase in which he confesses his misery as a second year student in The University of Chicago Law School.

By referencing the map provided in Figure 8, we see that Mr A tries to diagnose his misery in terms of where he comes from, “the East,” an American phrase that always means the Northeast and Middle Atlantic states, the focal point of which is New York City, not Washington, D.C. This initiates a long and interesting segment in which the geographical knowledge indexed by the participants in their choice of deictic phrases and place-names serves to place them one with respect to the other in a most precise way. As soon as Mr A uses the phrase “out here” for Chicago (see Figure 9), one of the path deictics rather than the place deictics – in his query “Are you from out here – or er l” – we know that the
Figure 8
deictic *origo* of his computation to reach “here” starts relatively more easterly in the United States, a transposed deixis for a transported identity. As he adds “the East,” Ms C must pick up on the east coast centrism of his perspective and, having described herself as growing up in (“coming from”) South Dakota – going east to west, even further “out here” than Chicago! – she adds that she grew up “originally [in] South Dakota – but I lived in New York last year” – and she goes on in this turn to resume his phrase about having come from “the East,” asking “where in the East” Mr A has come from such that he is so miserable at The University of Chicago.

Figure 9

“A place called New Rochelle,” says Mr A, formulating this denotation in such a way as to presume that Ms C, the South Dakotan now in Chicago “out here” would not know anything of the geography of New York State (seen in Figure 10). New Rochelle, as it turns out, is a respectable but hardly rich suburb of New York City, in Westchester County just a few miles north of the city Borough of the Bronx. He even doubles his presumptuousness by asking, “Where’d you live, in The City or what?” using the phrase “The City” to refer to Manhattan the way people in both the other boroughs as well as the immediately
surrounding suburbs refer to it. Ms C, not to be outdone, reveals that she lived elsewhere in New York State, “in Ithaca,” to which she immediately adds, “upstate,” using the very term that people in the New York City metropolitan area deploy deictically to indicate their -onomic perspective on the geographical distinction between two regions of the state. “Upstate” begins north and west of the bedroom suburbs of New York City. It was completely gratuitous of Ms C to add the designator “upstate”; that she did shows her complete assimilation to the deictic presumptions of Mr A. (Another adaptable future social worker?)

Mr A, somewhat characteristically, one may say, does not catch the subtlety of Ms C’s move, and proceeds to add an institutional descriptor, “Oh, oh, oh! Old Cornell!” – compare his “Oh Oh Oh Oh Oh!” in recognizing Loyola University of Chicago as he introduces the schema of Jesuit institutions in conversation with Mr B – that will become important as well for Mr A and Ms C as the conversation of “Getting to Know You” proceeds to the undergraduate schools they attended before The University of Chicago.
“Old Cornell,” indeed, is a phrase that lives in the same kinds of discourse as the phrase “old [Jesuit] boys.” Indeed, as Ms C explains of Ithaca, New York, that “it’s not just some little town located in rural New York →” Mr A turns the conversation to previous institutions, in relation to Ms C’s having said that she came from South Dakota – “Did you go to ↑ school in South Dakota or er” – and Ms C reveals that she went to Valparaiso University in Indiana just outside of Chicago, “here.” To the symmetric query of where he went to undergraduate school, Mr A again makes a very elaborate, almost ceremonial show of his presumption that Ms C might be ignorant of its significance, that he “went to a place in a Washington called Georgetown” (compare his earlier, “a place called New Rochelle”). As in the conversation with Mr B, like Ms C also a student from the School of Social Service Administration, Mr A again ultimately has his self-assertion taken down a few pegs as the interlocutor punctures his pretensions to be speaking down to a lower social form. (In the course of the conversation involving Mr A’s complaint piled on complaint about The Law School, the City of Chicago, the Midwest, she ultimately tells him in effect that he has not experienced enough “out here” to have opinions!)

So we see the interactional role played by invoking -onomic knowledge in the strategic negotiations resulting in the mutual placement of interlocutors one with respect to another. Key here is the work of defining, maintaining, and transforming people’s group-relative interactional identities in the course of making text, as one is also accomplishing other institutionalized ends for which they communicate. (See now Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Silverstein 2004; Manning, ed. 2003; Hastings & Manning, eds. 2004; Kiesling 2006; Agha 2006 for modern statements on this.) Revealing one’s familiarity with particular areas of socio-empirical knowledge, for example realms of the technical, or aesthetic connoisseurship, rests on being able to communicate like someone with expertise; being able to place or identify some communicating other in respect of regimes of expertise likewise is part of one’s communicative competence in respect of identity formation and maintenance. Mr A appears to play the role of the disdainful New Yorker with a prestige undergraduate degree, for some reason experimenting with being in Chicago at Chicago; the façade crumbles, however, with the increasing irrelevance of the knowledge schemata he deictically introduces at the outset of his conversation with Ms C as he later shows he has not, in fact, experienced much of Chicago or the Midwest. (Perhaps it is not without interest, then, that in his second, subsequent conversation with Mr B, he goes to elaborate lengths to demonstrate knowledge of Iowa, its geography and industries, when Mr B says he has lived there.)

Several factors must be singled out among all the complexities of these essentially indexical processes of social differentiation involving socio-empirical conceptual knowledge. Considered over a whole population, characteristically asymmetric distribution of such schema-indexing ways of communicating divides the population relative to such indexically signaled knowledge in any area of life. This is the above-cited “sociolinguistic division of denotational labor,” to be sure. Yet, both the competence in indexical practices – facility in learning to send just the right signals of one’s position and that of one’s
interactional alter(s) – and the metapragmatic knowledge of what, precisely, such indexicals signal about a person – thus, being able plausibly to interpret whom one is interacting with are involved here, so that one can have grosser or finer abilities at both these planes of social knowledge. (“She sounds like a professor, but I can’t fathom what might be her field of expertise!”; “Listen to his acute analysis of Kant’s Critique, all in one-syllable words! He is clearly intellectual, but he doesn’t sound like an intellectual or realize he is one!”)

Observe how Ms C is able to place herself in respect of the New York City dweller’s knowledge of New York State geography, matching Mr A’s assumption of this persona, in her gradual ascendency in the conversation; she seems to sense the importance of this to him in the flow of conversation. So we see that in addition to the projection of denotational context that includes an information structure of communicable -onomic knowledge about some area of experience, there is a second, sociologically anchored layer of context created by indexical shibboleths among all the verbiage, points of salience as social indexes that mark in-group vs. out-group membership – or perhaps degrees of such membership – of the individuals discoursing about the topic in which expertise and therefore authority come to reside as possible social differentiators.

Among all the verbiage of communication, what kinds of key, potent or active semiotic shibboleths, accomplish these ends? In exploring this, we observe that language used in particular contexts comes to form a register of expected, recurring collocations of words and expressions in particular kinds of constructional (grammatical) arrangements and semantic (-onomic) coherence structures, in short a lexicosyntactic register with generative properties (Whorf [1956] termed this a “fashion of speaking”), the mastery of which is part of demonstrating identity as such, and hence in-group/out-group distinctions across social boundaries (cf. the classic paper of Ferguson [1983] on “sports announcer talk,” for example). Mastery of a register, a characteristic way of talking about some area of experience, indexes one’s membership in the social group that characteristically does so; professional or avocational registers (medicine, plumbing, computers, linguistic anthropology, oenology and viticulture, sports fandom, bird watching, etc.) are highly salient divisions of the total vocabulary and phraseology of a language like Japanese or English.

The fact of enregisterment, the generation of new registers and maintenance of a leading edge of innovation in registers that already exist, emerges from the sociolinguistic dialectic pointed out long ago by Gumperz (1968: 383-84) and emphasized by Labov (1972: 192-206). Within a linguistic community, the fact is that indexical variation is perceived through the lens of “different ways of ‘saying the same thing’,” alternants in such pragmatic paradigms of presumed denotational equivalence coming to constitute registers for the community. As explained in Silverstein (2003 [1996] : 212) or Agha (1998; 2004: 36-38), in the interdiscursivity across contexts of usage speakers develop a stereotypic -onomic knowledge of genres of discourse and associate these with particular institutionalized sites, roles, and kinds of people recruited to these roles. The fact of ideological stereotypification transforms what Gumperz called “dialectal” indexicality –
indicating that a certain demographically identifiable kind of person was sending a message – into “superposed” indexicality – indicating a role-relationship, one among several possible, currently inhabited by the sender of a message, among a whole repertoire of roles that such an individual could occupy. The oscillation from the first to the second essentially involves stereotypification (Agha 1998), generally as a function of larger scale ideological formations sweeping linguistic variation up into processes producing widespread knowledge of how people of certain social types interacting in certain roles use – or ought to use – language. Needless to say, this also becomes the stuff of parody and imitation.

So the identity work associated with discourse is indexically creative. It requires analysis as part of the fractionation of any so-called language into a union of registers, not just a monolithic structural norm, which is, of course, nowhere empirically locatable. It is in these terms that the language users experience language from the indexical variability that is both the essential condition of all socio-empirical knowledge and, dialectically, its emergent product.

*This is a slightly modified version of the address of the same title given to the annual meeting of the Rikkyo Intercultural Communication Society at Rikkyo University, Tokyo, on Saturday, 27 May 2006. I thank especially Professor Wataru Koyama, of Rikkyo University, and Professor Sachiko Ide, of Japan Women’s University, for many kindnesses big and small connected with my trip to Tokyo and with the occasion of giving this paper.

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