INTRODUCTION

For some time now, those who study discourse from a contextual perspective have expressed dissatisfaction with the classic linguistic model of the communicative act: the isolated sentence tossed (like a football) by an anonymous Speaker, whose qualifications for play are specified only as “competence,” to an even more anonymous Hearer who supposedly catches it. Several aspects of this model have provoked criticism: the difference between sentence, utterance, and turn at talk; the relation between the utterance and the rest of the discourse of which it is a part; and the sociological conditions of play and qualifications of the players, to name only some. What I focus on in this paper are the concepts of Speaker and Hearer, and relevant Others—the structure of participation in the game.

The classic model’s participant roles were devised to account for grammatical phenomena such as person and the various kinds of deixis relating thereto. Newer versions have attempted to relate these phenomena to a greater sense of the complexity of the social occasions in which talk occurs, and to the relationship between participant role and social identity. Here I pursue some of the same themes, but with attention to the problem of intertextuality links between an episode of talk and other episodes, real or imagined.

Intertextuality may be a poor term for these purposes, because it suggests that we focus only on “text” as a special form of discourse distinct from (say) ordinary conversation, and because it tends to obscure the discourses’ social origins. Moreover, both this term and dialogicality carry some intellectual bag-

I am much indebted to Stephen Levinson for his stimulating paper and comments. I would also like to thank Jane Hill for conversations relating to another project (Hill and Irvine 1993) on which I draw extensively in the present paper. Wolof examples in this paper are based on fieldwork in a village in the Préfecture de Tivaouane, Senegal, in 1970—71, 1975, 1977, and 1984. Financial support for that fieldwork was provided by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and Brandeis University.

132

gage from their roots in literary criticism which one may not want entirely to retain, for example an implication that literary discourse is one’s principal subject matter. The point, however, is that those scholars who are concerned with intertextuality and dialogic relations, and those who are concerned with the sociolinguistics of
discourse, converge on some similar questions about participant roles, although posing them in different terms.

Our focus, then, is on participant roles as a special nexus of grammar, pragmatic relations, emergent stretches of talk, and context (social, cultural, and diachronic). Questions about participant roles and questions about textuality, I suggest, have a great deal to do with one another.

THE INITIAL PROBLEM: MAPPING ROLE STRUCTURES ONTO PARTICIPANTS

In recent years, several writers have questioned the utility of the classic categories of participation. As Goffman wrote (in “Footing,” 1981: 129): “It is my belief that the language that students have drawn on for talking about speaking and hearing is not well adapted to its purpose.... It takes global folk categories (like speaker and hearer) for granted instead of decomposing them into smaller, analytically coherent elements.” To this end, in Frame Analysis (1974: 517ff.), Goffman had distinguished several possible realizations of a “speaker:” as Principal, as Animator, and as Figure, among others. The Principal (or Originator) is the party held committed to the position attested to by the content of an utterance, while the Animator is the party who physically transmits it. The Figure, perhaps most obviously realized in theatrical performance, is the character, persona, or entity projected into the audience’s imagination by means of the performer’s actions. Similarly, Dell Hymes (1972: 58—60), also questioning these categories, distinguished Speaker (or Sender) from Addressee, and Hearer (or Receiver, or Audience) from Addresser; and the distinction between Hearer and Addressee has proved analytically important in several respects (see, e.g., Levinson 1983: 72, Clark and Carlson 1982). It is now widely agreed that Addressee is often the more central and useful notion, even within the traditional model.

While Goffman’s work was essential in calling attention to the complexity of participation structures constructed in the speech event and indexed in the speech signal, he did not systematize the analysis to the extent that some of his readers looked for. Recently, in a characteristically stimulating paper, Levinson (1988) has addressed himself to that task, taking up Goffman’s suggestion that the concepts of Speaker and Hearer (or, Addresser) should be de-

133

composed into a set of underlying constituent concepts. Instead of the usual concepts of Speaker and Addressee there are sets of roles, some on the production end and some on the reception end. Levinson arrives at some seventeen participant roles, hierarchically organized and systematized in a scheme of defining feature matrices. Thus, for example, in his scheme the “ordinary speaker” (termed Author) is a participant holding responsibility for several different aspects of message production simultaneously: for motivating it, for supplying its form, and for actually
transmitting it. Author is therefore defined as [+MOTIVE], [+TRANSMISSION], and [+FORM]. Were these responsibilities not to coincide, the same features (MOTIVE, TRANSMISSION, and FORM) would define such roles as Relayer ([+T, —M, —F]), Sponsor ([—T, +M, —F]), Ghostor (ghost writer; [—T, —M, +F]), and so on. Several more components are required to bring the total of the roles they define up to seventeen. These roles and components are considered basic and primary—candidates for linguistic or sociolinguistic universals.

The crucial examples, for Levinson and other authors taking a decompositional approach, are those where the participant role fragments are inhabited by different persons. A global role such as Speaker must be decomposed, it is argued, because there are many forms of talk in which it would have to be mapped onto several persons, who take on different aspects of the role. Goffman points out, for example, that “When... John answers Mary’s phone call and as a favor to her turns to Harry and says, ‘Mary wants to know if you can come here tonight,’ then John would seem to be no longer functioning in a dual capacity. He is the emitter of an invitation, but Mary is its responsible origin, even though, as we say, she did not convey it ‘in person’” (1974: 517 —18). Note that, according to this view, these “persons” need not all be physically present. Even Mary’s electronic trace on the telephone is not really required, since John might equally well relay Mary’s invitation after the phone call from her is over. And Ghostor is a participant in Levinson’s scheme by virtue of having formulated the talk relayed by someone else, not because of physical presence at the time of the relay.

This mapping problem has been recognized by a number of scholars. Schegloff (1987), for instance, without specifically advocating a decompositional approach, distinguishes between participants (that is, persons) and parties (roles and alignments), on the basis of examples of group conversations showing different kinds of simultaneous talk and, therefore, various forms of coparticipation.

However, the mapping problem arises not only in cases where there are too many individuals for the roles of Speaker, Addressee, and Other to accommodate; it also arises when there are too few. Consider self-talk, for example, where Speaker and Addressee coincide in the same person (though not, perhaps, in the same “self”). Similarly, consider the expression of “role distance” (Goffman 1961: 143), where a person subdivides, as it were, into the self who performs a line of talk or action and the self (or selves) who comment upon it. As Hymes has noted (1974: 54), “the common dyadic model of speaker-hearer specifies sometimes too many, sometimes too few, sometimes the wrong participants.”

The distinctions these authors make are useful ones, and I do not disagree with them; indeed, I shall borrow from their terminology and their examples. But I believe that Levinson and others who would decompose Speaker and Addressee into a set of analytically primary components have got the analysis back-to-front. To
focus on the role fragments, rather than the fragmentation process, reifies the fragments and, presumably, limits them to a finite number. Yet, one might well suspect that the number of such participant roles (PRs) arrived at by the decompositional approach may prove endless. Certainly I can think of some not yet provided for in Levinson’s scheme, the most complex decompositional model to date. Consider, for instance, the person quoted against his or her will; the absent party named in an accusation (the “Fingeree?”); the role in a stage play, as opposed to the actor playing it; ‘the person a child is named after, who may (if living) then have certain specified responsibilities toward the child—all these possibilities seem to me unrepresented in Levinson’s system. We will at least still need some way to arrive at further distinctions. Will we end up having to propose “primary” PRs that are highly culture-specific?

More important, however, is the question of context. How, if at all, is the analysis of participation in an “utterance event” to consider the ways in which the many contextualizations of an utterance, including a context of other discourses, impinge upon it? The problem of participation structures is not separate from the other problems of the classic model, mentioned above—its iso-

1. As mentioned earlier, in this regard Goffman (1974) distinguished among the Figure (theatrical character or persona projected by the actor), the Animator (the actor), and the Author (composer of the play). Despite the theatrical examples, Goffman suggests that these distinctions are not limited to the stage but apply, as well, in everyday life. Levinson does not seem to take up the idea of Figure as a basic participant role, however.

2. Note Levinson’s important distinction between speech event and utterance event. These two levels of organization potentially define different kinds of participant roles. Like Levinson, I focus on the utterance-event level. See discussion in a later section.

135

lated, decontextualized sentences. For, if a sentence’s context of use includes other sentences and other discourses, it also includes their participants. If one tries to remedy the classic model’s deficiencies by complicating it, taking some features from its erstwhile “context” and building them into the model, but retaining the classic model’s universalism and boundedness, then the problem of context is simply pushed back a step. This, I believe, is a danger with decompositional approaches to participant roles, if the role fragments are still conceived of as primary, universal, and finite in number. The PRs in Levinson’s “feature” model are as decontextualized as in the classic model, though more numerous.

It has long been a hallmark of sociolinguistic work to explore how linguistic forms relate to, presuppose, or creatively define a “context of use,” or depend upon such context for their interpretations. But those explorations have inevitably raised questions about the dimensions and boundedness of context itself, indeed about the very notion of context. As Goffman (1976) recognized, one cannot predict from the form of an utterance the aspects of its context that may be critical to its interpretation; nor can one expect the relevant aspects of context to be finite or
bounded. The problem of participant roles is part of this larger set of issues: an utterance’s conversational “reach,” backward and forward; the interpretive frameworks on which participants draw; the social personae whose voices are echoed, commented upon, or responded to; whether participants acknowledge that they are engaged in a joint conversational activity at all; and so on. A communicative act has a relation to other acts, including the past, the future, the hypothetical, the conspicuously avoided, and so on, and these relations—intersecting frames, if you will—inform the participation structure of the moment.

For these reasons I think it more useful to retain a quite simple set of primary participant roles (Speaker, Addressee, and third parties present and absent), while deriving the more subtle types (Sponsor, Ghost writer, etc.) from a notion of intersecting frames and dialogic relations. Here I draw in part upon the work of Bakhtin and his circle (Bakhtin 1981, 1984; Voloshinov 1973 [1930]), whose discussions of “voice” and authorship raise issues similarly touching the problem of participant roles. Arising from literary concerns about forms of narration and the representation of speech in the novel, as well as from the linguistic analysis of reported speech, the Bakhtinian notion of multivocality focuses on the forms of discourse that cannot be attributed simply to the act of an individual Speaker or Author. The “double-voiced utterance”


is the utterance whose form and significance presuppose a second voice—another party—whose utterances are invoked by the one at hand because they are partly imitated, quoted, or argued against.

The best approach to the mapping problem, then, may be to resist the temptation to try to arrive at a single, all-purpose solution that thrusts the problem into the background as merely the rationale for a scheme of PRs. Instead, the mapping problem itself—the process by which participation structures are constructed, imagined, and socially distributed—is what should come to the fore. It is not only an analytical problem; it is also a participants’ problem, to which there are creative, if often evanescent, solutions.

AN EXAMPLE: THE PERFORMANCE OF WOLOF INSULT POEMS

In illustration of some of these issues, let us consider a situation that might suggest a need to distinguish among many participant roles. In the rural community in Senegal where I have worked there is a form of insult poetry called xaxaar, performed at weddings after the bride moves into her husband’s household. The poetry session, which lasts about two hours, is sponsored by the new bride’s co-wives and the other women who have married into her husband’s patrilineage and household (his brother’s wives, for example). But although the co-wives sponsor the
insult session, if they are high-ranking they do not normally perform in it. The insults are actually performed by lower-ranking women, usually griots (i.e., women of the low-ranking bardic “caste”). However, the sponsoring women, and other local women of high rank, may take part in composing the poems. So, for a few days before the event, griot women visit their patronesses to prepare poems as well as other aspects of the wedding festivities. Although these preparatory meetings are usually private, sometimes women can be seen huddled together in a corner, in pairs or threesomes, their mumbled conversation punctuated by shrieks of laughter as they jointly put together poems for the wedding.

Still, the composition process remains sufficiently secret and collusive that at the actual wedding a particular poem cannot be definitively identified with an individual author. The griot woman uttering it can claim to be doing only that—merely acting as a transmitter, with no responsibility for substance, while the sponsoring women can claim that they sponsored the event only in general, and have no personal responsibility for the special nastiness of a particular poem. And some of these poems are truly nasty—personal, cleverly worded, and wounding.

4. For a longer description and discussion see Irvine (1993).

Thus the responsibility for an insult’s occurrence is dispersed over several parties: the actual utterer (Transmitter); the Sponsor, who pays for the event and is responsible for there being a session of insults, but not for its particulars; and the (unidentifiable) Formulator/Composer, responsible for the main wording of a particular poem. Moreover, one could also distinguish several different parties on the receiving end of the insult utterance. First there is the bride, ostensibly the poem’s Addressee. The performer points at her, and she is usually the referent of most of the poem’s second-person pronouns. Then there are also the bride’s kin, who are often the subject-matter and targets of the insults; for, following the principle that the bride may be insulted through insults to her family and friends, the poems tend to reach toward the most prominent of her relatives, persons whose doings (especially if scandalous) are of community-wide interest. Though most of these people are not present at the poetry session, word of a clever insult is sure to reach them. Finally there is the audience, consisting of the groom’s family and guests, even onlookers and passers-by. The audience, in gradually widening segments, joins in and serves as chorus during the poem’s performance, alternating with the soloist and repeating the initial couplet of the poem. These people are also likely eventually to repeat the insults to other audiences in later conversations.

Consider, then, the following passage from a xaxaar poem performed at a wedding in a noble-ranking family:

Example 1

Choral couplet:5
M— G— né na, baalal ma Màka— M— G— said, “Forgive me, Màka—”

M— G— said, “Forgive me, Màka—”

Soloist: sa xaj gi demul. your pilgrimage didn’t work.

Soloist: sa xaj gi demul. your pilgrimage didn’t work.

M— G— moo jénax tookër lan M— G—, he is a bush-rat; whatever

M— G— moo jénax tookër lan M— G—, he is a bush-rat; whatever

he saw, he grabbed, mounting it (and spoiling it).

he saw, he grabbed, mounting it (and spoiling it).

Du ko laaj—mu dajéwoon. He didn’t ask—he just coupled.

He didn’t ask—he just coupled.

The soloist performing here is a griot woman; the drum accompanists are griot men. The choral refrain is first taken up by an inner circle of (mainly) griot women, those who will be soloists in other poems, but after several repetitions other women in the audience join in. Eventually, then, the chorus is chanted by women of many ranks—all the authorized guests, that is, since the sponsoring hostesses, the bride’s own party, and any unofficial onlookers (such as high-ranking men) do not speak. But just as the guests did not compose the insult, which they merely repeat, so the soloist herself owes (or can claim to owe) the essentials or the entirety of the poem to an earlier, joint composition process involving high-ranking women who motivate and help compose but do not perform. The noble women who sponsored the xaxaar session, some of whom may have helped compose poems, are present but keep well in the background. Meanwhile,

Table 5.1: Personnel at a Wolof Xaxaar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Personnel</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reception Personnel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soloist</td>
<td>Foreground center</td>
<td>Bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus (inner)</td>
<td>Inner circle</td>
<td>Invited audience; Onlookers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drummers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus (outer)</td>
<td>Outer circle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsoring co-wives</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Bride’s kinswoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulator (unidentified)</td>
<td>Background or absent</td>
<td>Groom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unidentified or absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as high-ranking men) do not speak. But just as the guests did not compose the insult, which they merely repeat, so the soloist herself owes (or can claim to owe) the essentials or the entirety of the poem to an earlier, joint composition process involving high-ranking women who motivate and help compose but do not perform. The noble women who sponsored the xaxaar session, some of whom may have helped compose poems, are present but keep well in the background. Meanwhile,
although the bride herself is present, most of her kin are not—including M— G—, her classificatory mother’s brother, a prominent village elder and the subject of the poem. In fact M— G—’s alleged goings-on with the wives of other men, such as a certain man named Mãka (note the pun with Mecca, pronounced mïka in Wolof), whose wife of many years was so smitten with M— G— that she divorced Mãka to marry him, are favorite topics for waxaar poems at weddings even of his most distant kin. (See Irvine [1993] for further discussion of this case, including the cumulative effect of insult poems on M— G—’s political career.)

A clearer picture of the involvement of these parties in the situation at hand can be seen from Table 5.1, which divides the parties into production personnel and reception personnel.

In terms of participant roles, then, for each insult utterance one might distinguish Sponsor, Formulator, Speaker (i.e., Transmitter) and Co-Speakers, Addressee, Hearers, and Target. Indeed Levinson, citing this very example from an unpublished paper of mine, further distinguishes Indirect Targets (the bride’s kin if present) from Ultimate Destinations (the bride’s kin if absent).

I agree that these distinctions are appropriate, but not that they are primary or that there is a fixed, finite, universal list of PRs of this sort. To begin with, the list of PRs noted so far is not complete. For example, we have not yet distinguished between personnel whose roles have an indexical relation to the utterance and personnel explicitly named in the utterance (surely an important distinction if we want to be able to relate participant roles to grammatical phenomena). That is to say, there is a difference between persons named or denoted in an utterance text and persons only situationally linked to that text by their presence or their relationship to other relevant personnel. M—G—, identified so far as a Target (or Ultimate Destination), stands in both relationships to the text, since he is named in it; the bride’s mother, on the other hand, though also a Target, stands only in an indexical presuppositional relation, since the text does not refer to her. One reason I point out this difference is that the bride’s mother, by virtue of her close kinship with the bride and responsibility for the bride’s moral upbringing, is implicitly a Target of any insult poem addressed to the bride. M—G—, however, as a more distant kinsman, must be named if he is to be involved at all. The same is true of Mãka, “addressed” by the chorus when it takes on (animates) the role of M—G—. In fact, the choral couplet of the poem presents a particularly complex PR structure because of its use of quotation and address forms.6

But there is another issue here that is more important, since it concerns the very reason for distinguishing among PRs in the first place. Notice that in this Wolof example the distinction between Sponsor, Formulator, Transmitter, and so on, only arises because the insult utterance can be presumed to be part of a sequence of utterance events (and of speech events). Presumably, the insult has not been
composed on the spot. Instead, there has been an earlier conversation in which the present Transmitter was instructed in what to say—in which she was Addressee, not Speaker. Presumably, too, there are likely to be conversations in the future in which the insult will be repeated, its utterers on those occasions being persons who are now present only as members of the audience (Levinson’s notion of Ultimate Destinations presumes this)—and so on. Whether or not those past conversations actually occurred, or whether the future ones do, is not the point. They are implicated anyway, and the significance of the insult—perhaps even the possibility of daring to insult an important person, or wording the insult sharply—depends on this complex of implicated dialogues. The insult utterance’s relationship with a presupposed earlier utterance event, whose participants cannot all be firmly identified, helps the performer get away with making a seriously wounding statement. And the in-

6. In partial explication, the choral co-utterers take on the role of M-G when they quote him as addressing Maka, but they abandon that role in the next line when referring to “your pilgrimage.” Here they have switched to addressing M-G, an El-Hajj who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca (in Wolof, Maka). Village gossip alleges that M-G made the pilgrimage to atone for his philandering, but (it is claimed) to little avail.

140

sult utterance’s relationship with likely future utterance events, in which the insult is to be repeated, helps make the insult hurt.

Thus an utterance has implicit links to many dialogues, not only the present one, which together inform its significance, influence its form, and contribute to its performative force. To distinguish Sponsor, Formulator, Transmitter, Addressee, Hearers, and Targets for the Wolof insult utterance is to invoke its presupposed diachronic contextualization. The relationship between the immediate utterance event and these implicated dialogues—projectively constructed by interactants as part of the pragmatic reasoning by which they interpret an utterance and understand its significance—gives rise to the fragmentation of participant roles.

UTTERANCE EVENT VS. SPEECH EVENT

Although the discussion of participation frames has focused so far on the utterance event, utterances are set within larger wholes which also have a bearing on how participation is organized. An utterance, that is, occurs within a dialogue which is in turn part of a speech event—an organized stretch of discourse with some internal structure, performance conventions, and an overarching structure of participation.

As Levinson (1988) points out, it is crucial to distinguish these two levels of organization of participant roles: the PRs applicable to the utterance event, and those relating to the larger, more inclusive speech event. The roles discussed in the Wolof insult-poetry case, for example, apply at the utterance level. Only there do they have
consistent incumbents. Thus someone who is Formulator for one utterance may be Transmitter for another, and so on. Meanwhile, other roles might be defined that applied only to the speech-event level. At the Wolof wedding, the chorus (the set of persons who repeat an insult couplet or refrain, between a soloist’s verses) might be such a role; the prosecutor in an American trial would be another example.

In identifying utterance-level PRs, it is important not to confuse them with roles that apply at the speech-event level. The prosecutor is sometimes Speaker, sometimes Addressee, for example, as he or she interacts with witnesses, judge, and others. The Wolof xaxaar chorus members are sometimes (co-)Speakers, when the refrain is actually being uttered; sometimes Addressees, when the soloist teaches the refrain to them; and sometimes merely audience, when they listen to the soloist’s performance between refrains. But while the speech event is not what is immediately at issue in defining utterance-level PRs, it does provide an important contextualization frame for the utterances that occur in it—for their dialogic relationships. In a sense this relationship is diachronic, involving an utterance’s implicational “reach” backward and forward within the event. But it is more than that, since the speech event represents a structuring of discourse relationships, not merely a sequence.

Again, Wolof insult poems provide some illustrations. For instance, in Example 1, the chorus only joins in on the choral couplet (lines 1—2) after they have heard it uttered several times by the soloist. In such performances they become Co-Speakers only after occupying the role of Addressees the moment before (when the soloist usually gazes at them and may even direct them to “Repeat after me”). At the end of the whole performance session, however, comes a final poem which the chorus performs in unison without any such instruction by a soloist. The chorus could not do this, of course, had not some substantial subgroup colluded on what the poem was to be, during conversations in the days before the wedding. A similar discourse history has occurred, therefore, but outside the bounds of the speech event as a whole rather than within it. The effect of the final choral utterance differs from that of the other choral couplets. Not only does the final chorus signal the close of the event, but the representation of community opinion is summarized and hammered home by this final outpouring of united voices whose message has no traceable individual source.

As another example, consider what happens when a Wolof griot approaches a noble in a public place. On calling out the noble’s name in greeting, the griot may then attempt to launch into a performance of praise-singing—loud, stylized recitation of the noble’s family history, for which payment can be demanded on the spot. Nobles who are worried about their financial resources may try to evade the
encounter, or to postpone it by engaging the griot in an immediate tête-à-tête (in which later performance opportunities are promised). They will fail if they do not act quickly to preclude the griot’s engagement of a larger audience, before whom they would be shamed if they could not pay.\(^7\) The moment of greeting, therefore, is a moment of creative contextualization. Which speech event does the greeting herald, a public performance of praise-oratory or a private conversation? Are other people within earshot drawn into the circle of participation as audience, or excluded from it? Two different sets of speech-event PRs, and consequent dialogues, are implicated as possibilities.

7. Nobles do not always wish to avoid praise-singing; they enjoy it and consider it important to their reputations. They merely worry about their ability to pay for it. The griot, for his (or her) part, is not necessarily being specially aggressive or demanding, only advertising the noble to others. If griots do not celebrate their nobles, the nobles eventually get quite miffed.

I shall return to the matter of diachronic contextualization in a later section, to illustrate its complexity; but it is not the only kind of intertextuality, or implicated dialogue, that needs to be considered. To identify some of these other types, let us first take up some grammatical phenomena relating to participant roles.

**DEICTIC FIELDS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION FRAMES**

For many linguists the classic picture of the communicative act, with Speaker tossing a sentence over to Hearer who decodes it, has served only as backdrop to an analysis in which the two participants could thereafter be ignored. Where they could not be ignored, however, is in the study of such grammatical phenomena as person. Perhaps the most seminal work on grammatical person is that of Emile Benveniste (1971 [1946], [1956], [1958]), who, in the process of examining its grammatical realizations, argued that the linguistic status of “person” is the very foundation of subjectivity, even of self-consciousness (1971 [1958]: 224). For Benveniste, the “speaking subject” exists not in nature but in culture, constructed in the deictic field created in the moment of speaking.\(^8\)

The personal pronouns *I* and *you* are not simply tools fabricated to label a Speaker and Hearer somehow existing independently of language. Instead, it is through verbal dialogue that human beings constitute themselves as self and other, “within the condition of intersubjectivity” (1971 [1958]: 230).\(^9\)

That the personal pronouns are so fundamental in human life is, for Benveniste, evidenced in part by their universality: “a language without the expression of person cannot be imagined” (1971 [1958]: 225). Not all the pronouns included in the usual grammatical paradigms actually have the quality of “person,” however. As some earlier grammarians had also done, Benveniste distinguished between *I*/*you* and *he* (and other so-called third-person forms). *I*/*you* are pronouns “characterized by the
sign of person” (1971 [1946]: 200) because, as shifters, they refer only within the particular acts of speaking in which they occur, while the “third person” is really the nonperson, that which the Arab grammarians had called the “absent.” Yet, because of its impersonality, Benveniste suggests, the third-person form is well suited for special uses, “as a form of address with someone who is present when one wishes to remove

8. I owe this point to Jane Hill.

143

him from the personal sphere of ‘you’” (1971 [1946]: 200), either to show respect or to insult. In a similar vein Benveniste examines several kinds of what we might call “slippage” of person and/or number, such as the royal we. In the first and second persons, he argues, “plural” forms are not really plural at all but, instead, are “amplified” persons, enlarging the personal I or you by annexing some non-I, or non-you—some possibly impersonal Other. Number slip-pages are thus interpretable as harnessing the potential impersonality of the annexing form. Benveniste’s examples also include concord violations such as the Franco-Provençal nous suis and literary expressions such as Rimbaud’s je est un autre, as special effects derived from entangling personal with impersonal realms (1971 [1946]: 202–04).

If the personal pronouns I and you establish a deictic field at the moment of speaking, and in so doing constitute a set of basic social relationships (the speaking subject I, the exterior person you, and a realm of nonpersons), then, Benveniste’s analysis suggests, the deictic field admits complications, slip-pages, and amplifications. A useful way to look at these complications is as multiple deictic fields or participation frames superimposed, as it were, on one another. That is, slippages involve complex participant role structures arrived at by imposing alternative deictic fields on the pragmatic present, through creative blendings and mismatchings of deictic categories with their interactional context. 11 11 The strong sense of a divided and alienated self in Rimbaud’s statement is thus accomplished by imposing, on the speaking subject je, an alternative deictic field that excludes it from the realm of the personal (i.e., of potential subjectivity), in est un autre. In this concord “violation,” thirdpersonhood is not only predicated of the grammatical subject je but projected back over it.

Benveniste did not examine deictic complexities in stretches of discourse beyond the sentence. Snippets of dialogue may, however, reveal properties similar to the slippages and complications in his examples. Consider, for instance, the dialogue in Example 2 (from Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1978: 29; cited in Levinson 1988):

10. Another way to think of nonpersons might be as “nonsubjectivities.” Note, however, that Fillmore’s (1971) analysis of the pronoun we may suggest the need to distinguish, within the realm of nonpersons, between entities/beings with the potential for subjectivity and those lacking
such potential. As Fillmore points out, when someone comes to a door and asks, “May we come in?” the we would normally be taken as including some other human being, or possibly the speaker’s pet dog, but not (say) fleas inhabiting the speaker’s clothing.

11. For an influential discussion of shifters and creative indexicality, see Silverstein (1976).

144

Example 2

SHARON: You didn’t come tuh talk tuh Karen?
MARK: No, Karen—Karen’n I’m having a fight, (0.4)
       after she went out with Keith an’ not with (me)
RUTHIE: Hah hah hah hah
KAREN: Wul, Mark, you never asked me out.

In this bit of dialogue, when Mark is answering Sharon’s question, and apparently addressing her, he refers to Karen in the third person even though Karen is present. We may infer that Karen, with whom he has had some minor misunderstanding, is the Target of his utterance: she is present but she is treated as if she were absent (with linguistic third person). The structure of an as-if conversation in which Karen is absent is superimposed on the situation where she is actually present.

Notice that this inference, and the assignment of Karen to the role of Target, depends on our being able to assume that Mark intends Karen to become aware of what he said. Either he knows she is within earshot, or he assumes there is a relationship between Sharon and Karen such that Sharon will convey the message. The analysis must be different if, at the moment of Mark’s utterance, Karen is hiding behind a tree and she and Sharon have never previously met. But if Karen’s physical position obviously places her within the geography of Mark’s view and potential addressees, Mark could hardly deny knowing she would hear what he said. The visual field, and its organization through gaze, positioning, and gesture, are crucial to an interpretation of participant roles. Just as a Speaker’s gaze and gesture may select an Addressee in the absence of any you pronouns, so does visual evidence imply a deictic field which may or may not coincide with the field constituted through linguistic means.

Visual contextualization must therefore be added to the diachronic contextualization suggested in the discussion of Wolof insult performances, as another way of constituting complex participation frames. In any situation of physical copresence, the participant roles constituted verbally will inevitably be compared with those constituted (or suggested) visually. In fact, the pragmatic effects of many (most?) types of person or number slippage depend on a disjunction of linguistic form with visual evidence. The French pronoun vous

12. Actually, other conditions would also have to be met. For example, there would have to be evidence that Karen is conscious and reason to believe she is mentally competent to understand Mark’s utterance.
is only honorific if it cannot be interpreted as plural—as it might be if several potential Addressees are present and the Speaker’s gaze wanders among them.13

Grammatical person is of course not the only aspect of linguistic form relevant to participation frames. Gumperz’s work on contextualization cues (e.g., 1982) is suggestive in this regard, and points toward code-switches as an especially likely contextualization strategy. Example 3 shows how code-switches, in addition to person and gaze, implicate at least two different participant role structures that fluctuate over the same personnel during a few seconds’ talk. This bit of conversation took place early in my fieldwork in a Wolof village in 1970.

In Example 3, M and S have come to visit me one evening in my workroom (located within M’s compound). S, a high-caste man, has been persuaded to tell a folktale, although his high rank makes it not really appropriate for him to do so. M, another high-caste man, is S’s political and economic patron, formerly also his brother-in-law. Also present is A, an American visitor who speaks French (the official language of Senegal) but not Wolof. I (JTI), who speak both Wolof and French, am present in the background, preparing coffee for the guests.

Example 3
The underlined utterances are in French.1

M. (laughs) am piil—pas besoin de piles, (laughs) A battery—no need for
ce machin.

2 A. Parce que c’est très sensible.
3 S. Ah oui.
4 A. C’est très sensible.
5 M. Eh bien, défé—défé am
6 doole, dëram, bu mu jógé
7 sa gëmmiñ.

batteries in that thing.

Because it’s very sensitive.

Ah yes.

It’s very sensitive.

Well, because—because his
stammering will provide the
power, when it comes out of your
mouth.

Though focusing on loud speaking rather than upon the folktale performance per se, M is teasing S about behaving inappropriately for his rank. Ostensibly M addresses his remarks to A, looking at A and the machine in lines 1—5, switching into French, and (in line 6, dëram ‘his stammering’)

13. Though visual evidence of singular Addressee may be crucial, it is not sufficient, since the plurality of second-person plural forms may (nonhonorifically) refer to absent others, for example, as comembers of Addressee’s social category: “You (vous) mailmen have new uniforms this year, don’t you?”
referring to S in the third person, as if S were absent. But M’s switch into Wolof in line 5, and his later switch to a second-person form for S in line 7 (sa gëmmiñ your mouth’) suggest S as Addressee. Thus there is a slippage both of person and of code here, as if two dialogues—one in which M addresses A in French while S is absent, and one in which M addresses S in Wolof while A is absent—were superimposed on one another.14

So far, then, analysis of these examples suggests a set of basic participation relations consisting of Speaker, Addressee, and Third Parties.15 Complex pragmatic effects then derive from signs implicating other participation frames as alternative or supplementary deictic fields. One such complexity concerns how a linguistically constituted participation frame relates to a visually suggested deictic field (visually evidenced at least by who is present/absent, but also manipulated through body position, gesture, and gaze). Special effects and combinations are also accomplished by person-switches and by code-switches, as well as by a presumptive history of discourses.

These examples suggest to me that the complex laminations of participant roles are best thought of as the result of multiple framing processes. We can use a notion of multiple contextualization frames for the analysis of participant roles, for an utterance is situated not only in the dialogic relation immediately given in grammatical person forms, but in many such relations, overt, covert, and implicit. Overt signals implicating participation frames are of many kinds; Gumperz’s (1982) discussions of contextualization cues provide insight into their variety.

PARTICIPATION FRAMES IN REPORTED SPEECH

Although I have given some prominence to an analysis of grammatical person as constituting participant roles, person forms do not only refer to such parties as the pragmatic utterer and his/her Addressee. As Urban (1989: 29) has pointed out, “the ‘I’ of discourse is not only an actual in-the-world subject, indexically referred to by means of the first person form. The discourse ‘I’ can

14. The teasing strategy was quite effective. S clammed up and produced practically nothing. See Irvine (1993) for further discussion.

15. Among Third Parties it may turn out to be useful to distinguish, at a more subtle level, Alignable Parties—that is, those participants who can be aligned with Speaker or Addressee as extra first or second persons—from Excluded parties. Examples of Alignable parties might include myself (JTI) in the preceding dialogue (example 3), or the Speaker’s dog in Fillmore’s 1971 discussion. Fillmore’s flea, or any other being having no right to participate in dialogue, would be Excluded. On the other hand, the condition of “potential subjectivity” discussed in note 10 may make this distinction unnecessary.

also be any being or entity, imaginary or not, capable of being reported as speaker.
The central question here concerns the relationship between this reported ‘I’ and the indexical referential ‘I’ that points to a subject.” If I utter a sentence with a direct quotation, such as that given in Example 4, the I of the embedded quotation is not me (the pragmatic speaker):

**Example 4**

“He said, ‘I am going.’”

Instead, the embedded I refers back to the subject of the main clause, *he*. All languages permit this kind of construction, in which (to use Goffman’s terms) the speaker “animates” the persona of another, taking on another subjectivity for the duration of the reported speech.

With reported speech forms, then, the speaker constructs or represents a projective relation among dialogues: a projecting one (i.e., the pragmatic present) and a projected or implicated one, whose utterance is quoted (see Rumsey 1990: 347). In Example 4 the projection reaches into the past, reporting the quoted speech as having occurred earlier, and now merely being repeated by the present speaker. Although such “historical” projections are common, projections may also reach into the future, or into a hypothetical case, as in Example 5.

**Example 5**

“He might say, ‘I am going.’”

Notice that while constructions like Examples 4 and 5 spell out the relationship between projecting and projected dialogues by constructing the projected one referentially (in the main clause), reported speech need not always display its framing overtly. In English, if the projected dialogue is lengthy, some sentences will omit the “He said” clause of Example 4, the frame being retrievable from an earlier portion of the discourse.16 It is also possible, however, for quotative framing to be implicated, or “understood,” when no actual quotative clause or marker has appeared in the dialogue at all. Proverbs, for example, in Wolof as in many other languages, are understood to be quotations received from ancestral generations. Recognizable by genre conventions and metaphorical content, they are not marked by any quotative construction. What makes them recognizable, actually, is a stripped-down morphology and syntax

16. Languages apparently differ on this point, some insisting on overt quotative marking on each sentence—even, in Ge’ez, on each major constituent within a quoted utterance (see Bender, Fulass, and Cowley [1976]).

lacking such deictic forms as might attach to the pragmatic present, as in Example 6:
Example 6

Iambi muus, jénaax du ca bàkku

‘At the cats’ wrestling match, the mouse does not contend’ (literally, ‘is not heralded’ [sc., as a contestant]).

This proverb sentence has none of the markers of tense, or of spatial or discourse deixis, that would normally characterize a Wolof conversational utterance. Since it is not necessary for a Wolof proverb to be familiar to its audience to be accepted as such, presumably a speaker might be able to invent one and have it be taken as ancestral wisdom. As in the invented traditions discussed by Hobsbawm (1983), a dialogue among ancestral speakers would thus be implicated by the proverb form, although it would have no actual historical basis.

The signs that implicate quotative framing need not, in all cases, even be linguistic. In Weyéwa (Indonesia) rituals described by Kuipers (1993), the timetable of a ritual sequence suffices to implicate quotative framing. In these rituals, orators represent the statements and intentions of ancestors, and by a certain point in the lengthy sequence of rituals the projection of ancestral intent should have been thoroughly achieved—so thoroughly that an orator’s performance needs no quotative forms to be understood as quotation. Indeed, to include a quotative form at this time might inappropriately call attention to the pragmatic present, as if it were not completely dominated by the ancestral voice. And among Wolof again, as among several adjacent peoples, quotative framing is virtually implicit in the social identity of griot, so central is quotative ‘transmission’ (jottali) to the very definition of the griot’s place in society. That is, quotative framing is implicated (at least as a possibility) simply by the social identity of a sentence’s utterer, if the utterer is a griot. Projected dialogues may thus be implicated by a variety of means, nonlinguistic as well as linguistic.

Now, in this relationship between the implicated (projected) speech situation and the projecting one, how permeable are the participation frames? In reported speech, when do aspects of one frame “leak” into the other? The Wolof insult performances described earlier depend on a relative imperme-

17. A morpheme-by-morpheme analysis would look as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{llllll}
\text{lamb} & \text{i} & \text{muus} & \text{jénaax} & \text{du} & \text{ca} & \text{bàkk} & \text{u} \\
\text{wrestling of} & \text{cat/} & \text{mouse/} & \text{neg/} & \text{there/} & \text{praise-} & \text{inversive} & \\
\text{match/} & (\text{pl.})/ & & & & & \text{drumming/} &
\end{array}
\]

ability of frames. Performers utter scathing and obscene statements, accusing important people of sexual misconduct, crime, and witchcraft. Sometimes the allegations are taken to be quite credible. Yet neither the performers nor the people who later repeat the accusations in conversation can be held responsible for the
opinion thus articulated. Quoting insulates the pragmatic speaker from personal responsibility for the quoted words.

Consider, however, Example 7, from a Mexicano (NahuaTL) speaker recorded by Jane Hill (Hill and Irvine [1993:13]). A bilingual woman explains that one important benefit of speaking Mexicano is to understand and respond to insults Mexicano speakers address to strangers who come to their towns:

Example 7

Porque quemanian amo nicmatiz de ome, hasta nechtehuicaltiliz in nonantzin, pero in amo nictenderoa tlen nechilia, hasta nechiliz, “Chinga tu madre,” con perdón de Diós, quen nicmatiz tlen nechilia?

Because if I didn’t speak two languages, someone might say something about my mother, but when I don’t understand what he is saying to me, even if he says to me, “Fuck your mother,” begging God’s pardon, how would I know what he is saying to me?

As Hill writes, “Here, even though the obscenity is assigned to a third party, the speaker has still uttered it in her own voice; in Goffman’s terms, she has ‘animated’ the utterance. Yet she clearly does not see herself as morally neutral in this role; she must ask God’s forgiveness for the obscenity, even though it is not ‘hers.’”

The danger of leakage seems, in this example, to be related to the obscenity of the quoted text; but in other cases the danger may derive from something else. A Wolof griot, for instance, telling me a story about the kings and heroes of two centuries ago, quoted a remark by the king of Kajoor in which there was a grammatical anomaly. The griot interrupted his tale to make absolutely sure I realized it was the king, and not the griot reporting his speech, who was responsible for the grammatical “error.”

While these examples show speakers guarding against the danger of leakage from the quoted material (the “source” dialogue) onto the quoter, leakage may also go in the other direction. To animate another’s voice gives one a marvelous opportunity to comment on it subtly—to shift its wording, exaggeratedly mimic its style, or supplement its expressive features. In Nukulaelae (Polynesia), as described by Besnier (1993), for example, speakers use reported speech as a vehicle for affective expression, culturally devalued. The speaker’s own affectivity leaks into the quoted voice. By similar means, but

150

with more positive cultural value attached, the Wolof griot supplies affective animation to the message of the noble for whom he or she acts as transmitter. Indeed this is part of the cultural rationale for the griot’s role. Griots are supposed to be volatile people, excitable and exciting to others, and endowed with the rhetorical skills to move an audience. Nobles, supposedly more stolid and laconic, must
engage griots to address the audience on their behalf. The arrangement in which the griot animates the noble’s voice is thought to benefit both parties. Notice, however, that most of the benefit gained by the griot comes in the form of cash rather than from the act of animation itself. The benefit leaked onto Wolof griots from the sources they animate is small and slow-acting compared to that which a Pentecostalist, speaking in tongues, is thought to acquire from the Holy Ghost whose voice is thus transmitted.  

These examples give some idea of the complexity of relationships between participation frames—those in the pragmatic present and those implicated, intended, and imagined. Cultural frameworks and ideologies contribute to the values attaching to these relationships, and to the kinds of participants who may be implicated (such as spirits who possess their human animators). The examples also suggest that just which linguistic features leak between participation frames is, in part at least, culturally determined.

Our examples have not illustrated indirect quotation, however, where (some have argued) grammatical constraints might be more important. Indirect quotation requires deictic features—minimally, person—to be imported from the main clause into the quotation clause. Importation of person and tense in English is shown in Example 8 (compare Example 4):

Example 8

He said that he was going.

In the relationship between the clauses, various aspects of the language’s syntactic system come into play. These have provided an important line of evidence for linguists’ examining the linguistic representation of “point of view” (Chafe 1976) and the decomposability of the “speaking subject” —a problem relating to the fragmentation of the Speaker participant role.  

Kuno (1976) and Banfield (1982), for example, maintain that point of view is syntactically constrained, so that a given syntactic domain cannot manifest more than one. Banfield further proposes, however, that there are actually several types of subjectivities: Speaker, Self, and the S (speaker) of pragmatics are different (and syntactic constraints limit their co-occurrence). The analysis thus suggests a complex set of participation frames but certain limits on the forms of “animation” that can be expressed.

Banfield’s work is based primarily on the analysis of literary genres, especially the representation of subjectivity in novelistic discourse. Other students of novelistic discourse, however, notably Bakhtin and his circle, propose that the representation
of subjectivity is the result of a far more complex combination of voices. Echoes of the speech of others appear in one’s discourse not only in overtly marked constructions (the overt representation of their talk, whether in direct or indirect quotation, or even “free indirect style”), but in many covert forms as well—forms that imitate, stylize, or parody the stylistic features associated with other persons, genres, times, and places (Bakhtin 1981 [1934–35]). Although an author may manipulate the evocations of other speakers, it is not clear that he or she may avoid them. So pervasive is this process that it puts in doubt the very possibility that a sentence might represent but a single subjectivity. Words, forms, and styles bear the traces of those who have used them in the past. In the Bakhtinian view a multiplicity of frames is inevitable, as a consequence of language’s participation in society and history.

Bakhtin’s arguments are not limited to literary discourse, although that was his starting point (but see Voloshinov 1973 [1930]). The idea of intertwined voices recognizes the complexity of the sources on which a speaker draws, and the complexity of the speaker’s commentary on those sources, which are included in an utterance. The “double-voiced utterance is one whose form and significance presuppose a second voice, another speaker, whose words are borrowed, mocked, responded to, or given provocation. The double-voiced utterance has a complex history, in this sense, and a complex future. But the notion of voice, and the emphasis on subjectivity and authorship in the novel, perhaps tend to weight the analysis more in the direction of production processes than is suitable for our present purposes. Rather than multi-vocal, we might consider a speech situation to be multiply dialogical: it is not just the speaker who is doubled (or multiplied) by other voices, but a set of

20. In a recent paper, Alan Rumsey (1990) has further argued that cultural ideologies contribute to the syntactic features of reported speech. Not all languages have the same kinds of constructions for reported speech as English; some languages, Rumsey argues, make no syntactic distinction between direct and indirect quotation, and in other constructions as well do not distinguish between reporting the gist of a message and reporting its wording. That they do not, he suggests, reflects an associated ideology in which words are forms of action—as opposed to a Western ideological disjunction between language and the world. Note, however, that the presence of such an ideology may not be a sufficient condition for the grammatical phenomena Rumsey discusses. Thus one could argue that Wolof share a linguistic ideology in which words are actions, not merely labels; yet their language does provide for both direct and indirect quotation.

dialogic relations that are crucially informed by other sets—shadow conversations that surround the conversation at hand.

Unlike some of the other analyses discussed in earlier pages, this one is open-ended. There is no preconceived limit to the contextualizations, or the shadow conversations that a speaker might have in mind or an interpreter might imagine, in retrospect, to be pertinent. Consider, for example, the “secondary dialogues” with
absent interlocutors, discussed by Crapanzano (1988: 3)— those “silent but forceful secondary, or shadow, dialogues that accompany any primary dialogue (e.g., the dialogue between the student of anthropology who engages silently with his mentors back home and all they symbolize as he converses with his friends in the field).” As Bakhtin’s comments on stylization and parody suggest, we must also consider dialogues that are implicated by being imitated, or by serving as model (stylistically, perhaps) for the conduct of the present one—as, for instance, if one were to imitate courtroom talk or the language of international relations when negotiating a family dispute. And, finally, a dialogue may be implicated by being conspicuously avoided. Thus political antagonists, finding themselves invited to the same cocktail party, may tacitly agree to limit themselves to innocuous small talk, or to evade engagement as much as possible, in order to avoid confrontation; yet their antagonism may be obvious to everyone from the very manner of their avoiding the expression of it.21

WOLOF INSULT POEMS REVISITED: TEXT AND DISCOURSE

Let us return now to the Wolof xaxaar insults for a more complex view of diachronic contextualization and participation frames. The xaxaar insult poem discussed earlier and excerpted in Example 1 was recorded at the time of its performance. Yet, it was suggested, the performance of an insult poem is but

21. Some of Grice’s examples of conversational implicature involve utterances that are conspicuously avoided. Consider, for instance, the dialogue in the following example (Grice 1975), where B avoids responding to A’s remark (refusing uptake, one might say, characteristic of the role of Addressee):

A. Mrs. X is an old bag.
B. (pause) The weather has been quite delightful today, hasn’t it?

Consider, too, his example (ibid.) of a recommendation letter whose writer says only positive things about a job candidate but conspicuously avoids mention of crucial aspects of his qualifications. This example, incidentally, illustrates the contribution of cultural frameworks and inter-subjectivity to the implicature process. The person who receives this recommendation letter will interpret it as negative only if he or she can assume its author shares an understanding of what it should have contained. Only then can the omissions be taken as intentional. Anyone who has experience reading recommendation letters from abroad will be familiar with this problem.

one moment in a diachronic chain of discourses, a moment which presumes earlier moments and in which later moments are already envisioned. To illustrate the complexity of the relationships among these implicated dialogues and their participation frames, let us consider a xaxaar poem retrieved at a later point in such a chain. As it happens, although diachronic contextualization is obviously important in this example, some of the other forms of dialogic implication are illustrated as well.

This poem was presented to me as a written text, recorded and read aloud to me
by a local griot, Majaan M—. Some days earlier I had asked Majaan to act as ‘journalist’ and fill a notebook with local news and items of interest. One of the items in his notebook, titled simply “Xaxaar” without attribution of authorship, was the Wolof text in Example 9. The conversation in which he read it aloud to me and discussed its language and its history took place in my workroom in the village chief’s compound. Just outside on the veranda, presumably within earshot, was S—G—, the chiefs senior wife, president of the village women’s political organization.

In Example 9, the Wolof poem is rendered in standard orthography rather than in Majaan’s idiosyncratic spelling. The contextualizing part of what Majaan told me is presented in translation and derives from my written notes on the conversation. I did not tape-record this session, since Majaan considered tape recordings as “performances,” and the text he read to me came from a women’s genre which he, as a man, had a right to report but not to perform. Majaan reported the insult poem as follows.

**Example 9**

“This xaxaar (insult poem) was addressed to Khadi N—, the Imam’s wife, when her daughter got married:

1 Mbaa Khadi N— dikkul? Hasn’t Khadi N— arrived?
2 Khadi mii tàkk tubéy te du góór, This Khadi ties on trousers and isn’t a man,
3 te loo nas mu nocci. and whatever you thread your needle
4 Moo! Khadi N— yow ba ngga dajé ak with, she lifts it off.22
5 Mar M—, moo loo cijilé? Well! Khadi N—, you, when you meet with
6 Bëqté wu réy, ran goon yu né mbacc, Mor M—, well!, What do you take away?
7 ku ne’ ber-ub kelem? A big load of snot,23 tears openly flowing,
8 Yaa di buur bu sol màn tô— (because) each (of you) has to have a
9 jiitali dagam. separate plate? 24
10 Ne léén ko “nyaala gaayna go” You are the king wearing the royal
11 looloo di ag peyam. mantle—
12 Awu léén ko: mu riir-a-riir Lead us in pursuit of him.
13 te riyaax te tâlltàli, Tell them, “The Greatest Person”

22. That is, she steals your men.
24. That will be his reward.
25. Repeat after me:26 She goes rumble,
26. thump and clatter,
Thus sounds the *rirandol* (earth drum) accompanying the *sabar* (dance drums).

You are thunderstones.

Whoever pounds your daily millet will be late eating supper.

You are thunderstones.

“This *xaxaar* was performed last year, about eight months ago, by S— N— M—, one of my sisters, who told it to me. These words are very rich. The woman was very angry and came after her, until S— N— was afraid. Now S— N— wouldn’t dare perform it again. You see, Khadi N— thought she was too high to be addressed in the *xaxaar*, because she is the wife of the Imam. She said, she had no scandal in her life. Well, as for that, if she didn’t want to be addressed in *xaxaar*, she shouldn’t have let her daughter get married.”

Majaan presents his written text as a record of a performance by his sister S— N—, collected retrospectively in a conversation with her in which she reported what had happened in the performance and afterwards. Majaan himself had not attended. From the evidence presented by Majaan, let us examine the participant role structures of the performance event. Although Majaan says the poem was “addressed to” Khadi, mother of the bride, she was not present. The second-person forms in lines 4, 5, 8, 10 (imperative), 15, 16, and 17 refer to her as if she were present, but in terms of the actual event, she is the poem’s absent Target, while its immediate Addressee is her daughter the bride. Other second-person forms (lines 3, 12) refer to the chorus and audience, in passages where Khadi is referred to in third-person forms. The poem thus shifts among participant role structures involving various different Addressees, including the “as-if” Addressee Khadi. It also involves several parties as Speakers: the performer, S— N—; Khadi, implicated (fictionally) as speaker in lines 10—11; and the chorus, projected (lines 12—14) as Co-Speakers when the performer instructs them to say something and then, presumably, actually Co-Speakers if they do repeat what they are told. (Line 1 would also be a choral line, uttered twice to make a couplet.)
The gist of the poem is to accuse Khadi of getting above herself—of claiming higher rank than her alleged behavior would reveal her to have—perhaps even caste climbing. But while the poem makes its accusation only within the confines of a traditional genre of ritual insult, the conversations that repeat the poem accuse her quite baldly. It is Khadi’s alleged reaction to the poem that, retrospectively, gives the poem special force and proves its point, since the angry reaction displays precisely the gossip-worthy behavior she had claimed was absent from her life. Apparently, her surprising anger, and her inappropriate blaming of the performer S—N—, also led villagers to wonder whether there might be some truth to the alleged involvement with Mor M—(a wealthy shopkeeper).

It is somewhat unusual for a conversation about a xaxaar poem to emphasize the identity of its performer so strongly as Majaan did. Why might he have done so? One reason may lie in his contention that it was inappropriate for Khadi to blame the performer; the fact that she did only shows what a skilful performer S—N— was. (But it does not assign responsibility to S—N— for motivating the insult—no xaxaar performer bears that. Recall that the genre presumes earlier conversations between sponsors and performers.) Another factor, however, is that Majaan needed to show legitimate access to the text, so that he could not be supposed to have invented any of it himself. He was merely reporting what his sister had told him. He was Transmitter, but he was not Performer (in the sense of taking responsibility for a display), Formulator, or Sponsor. In his presentation of the poem to me, reading from a written text allowed him to fine-tune his participant role particularly effectively. Whether by necessity or convenience, he read the text aloud in such a hesitant and affectless manner as to strip his utterance of the prosodic signs of a performer’s involvement. Narrowing his role to that of Transmitter, he animated only the informational minimum of his sister’s voice.

Majaan’s conversation with me implicates a discourse history of considerable length, a history of dialogues leading up to the present and, in being implicated, allowing him to frame his own participation as but a tiny fragment of a production role. But there are even more dialogues implicated here than these retrospective ones. To begin with, although I was clearly the present Addressee, Majaan was surely aware of S—G—’s presence just outside the door. Even if she did not hear him, there was the likelihood that I would talk about the conversation with her and, perhaps, with one or two other close associates. Since S—G— was an important local figure, who had been involved in marriage negotiations with the Imam’s (thus Khadi N—’s) family, I suspect that S—G— was also an intended destination for Majaan’s presentation. She too was being warned of the griots’ power over reputation. And finally, there is a projection into a more distant future and more distant place. When he presented his journalist notebook to me, Majaan could expect that I would take the material back to America to report the events of village life to
new audiences. The notebook’s destination had already been agreed upon. So Majaan, selecting texts and news for his notebook, must have envisioned a chain of discourse relations extending into the future—all the way, gentle reader, to you.

CONCLUSION

With this last example we move from the problem of participant roles to the problem of textuality. Several kinds of “texts” made their appearance: Majaan’s written presentation of a xaxaar poem; my edited version (changing orthography, punctuation, and adding translation and explanatory footnotes), based more on his oral rendering than on his written one; the “text” of our conversation; and, by implication, Majaan’s sister’s report to her brother, her own public performance earlier, and so on. A chain of discourse interweaves poem and conversation at many junctures. The chain we may reconstruct here starts with a conversation in which Majaan’s sister and her patroness(es) jointly initiate the composition of a poem. The poem’s performance—in which the earlier composition event is assumed—transforms it into an object detached, in a way, from its ongoing pragmatic relations. Genre conventions of meter, assonance, and other features that apply within the poem but not outside it help mark the boundaries of this linguistic object and help secure the impression that it has some independent existence, transcending the present moment and the present speaker. Unmoored from the present, it is more easily transported into the future. Understood as having already occurred in other dialogues, and destined to occur in still more, it is intrinsically tied to none.

Perhaps one would want to say that the independence, or pragmatic transcendence, of this set of utterances—what makes it a transferable object—is what gives it a sense of “textuality.” But if so, it is a textuality that presupposes the conversational moments it purports to transcend. As I have argued earlier, the xaxaar poems could not take the form they do if their utterers had to take responsibility for more than merely making public a statement constructed elsewhere. And the poems would not have the force they do if they did not presuppose the likelihood of future repetitions in subsequent dialogues. As the chain of discourse progresses, the “transcendent” text carries traces of its history along with it, as the conversations in which it is repeated provide new reportable material that add to its significance. Accompanied by an account of its discourse history, Majaan’s sister’s poem goes international.

There is no necessary limit to these contextualizations and discourse histories—to the sense in which a multitude of other dialogues are implicated in the one at hand. By the same token, I believe, there is no necessary limit to the participation frames that can be imposed on the pragmatic present, fragmenting its participant roles and recombining them, in a complex calculus of mapping roles onto persons present and absent (or, internally, onto aspects of selves). The intricate laminations of
participant roles, the many shadow conversations they reflect, and the discourses they inform belong to the same dialogic process.

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. M.

Banfield, Anne

Bender, M. L., H. Fulass, and R. Cowley

Benveniste, Emile

Besnier, Niko

Chafe, Wallace A.

Clark, H., and T. Carlson

Crapanzano, Vincent
Center for Psychosocial Studies, #24. Chicago: Center for Psychosocial Studies.

Duranti, Alessandro, and Charles Goodwin (eds.)

Fillmore, Charles

Goffman, Erving

Grice, H. Paul

Gumperz, John

Hill, Jane, and Judith T. Irvine

Hobsbawm, Eric

Hymes, Dell

Irvine, Judith T.
1982 The creation of identity in spirit mediumship and possession. In Semantic


Kuipers, Joel


Kuno, Susumu


Lee, Benjamin, and Greg Urban (eds.)


Levinson, Stephen C.


Rumsey, Alan


Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson


Schegloff, Emanuel


Silverstein, Michael


Singer, Milton


Urban, Greg

Voloshinov, V. N.