STANDARDS, STYLES, AND SIGNS OF THE SOCIAL SELF

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Abstract

Language standardization policies, usually enacted by state-designed national education systems, have an impact on the folk understanding of registers. The delimitation of registers and their social meaning are tested and assessed by the use of register shibboleths, which change over time. Registers are recognized metapragmatically and play a key role in group formation processes within a given political economy and its structures of power. This analysis, applied to US English, can also distinguish a barista register created, enacted and assessed by consumerist promoters of specialist coffees.

I.   Standardization

There's always that cringe-worthy moment, that can't-I-find-a-rock-to-crawl-under feeling for those of us whose work centers on language when we are out-and-about being social. Inevitably, someone will ask, 'What do you do for a living,' and, when offered the reply that one is a professor, and of matters linguistic at that, with a high degree of predictability comes the response, 'Oh, I better watch what I say then!' or 'I better watch the way I talk to **you**!' Language scientists, linguists, are inevitably confused with the diction enforcer, the grammar police, the alphabet soup Nazi. No amount of explanation will do that our deep – and, I can assure you, non-judgmental! – interest is in the variety of language in its socio-cultural context, and in culturally significant **difference** arising from the way language is used to social purpose. Nope. Laypersons in our kind of language community associate anyone interested in language – even in language as socio-culturally contextualized – with what is, in their experience, perhaps the most salient characteristic of their own – of our – language: the fact of standardization. Standardization is a very particular condition of language: while every language, like every culture, is a value system with underlying norms of how to do things, however in flux, only some languages have undergone standardization. English, like all its European counterparts, has indeed undergone standardization – in fact, multiple standardizations as it has spread globally.

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Standardization as a cultural condition pervades and transforms people's consciousness of their own language. It becomes a lens through which they perceive, process, and evaluate the ubiquitous and inevitable situational variability of how language is actually used. To those within the language community, the standard seems like a fixed and **non**-situational way of using language to communicate about, to represent the universe of experience and imagination, a form of language spoken or written 'from nowhere' – that is, from anywhere and everywhere within the sociological envelope of the language community. Standard is what one **should** be using. Period. Although we all know that for some folks – like all of us? – and for some situations – like most! – dat ain' də way we talk. My nervous conversational partners know this, and are somewhat embarrassed to think they will be using non-standard to a language maven. Here, then, is a depiction of how the culture of standard construes it as 'the voice from nowhere':
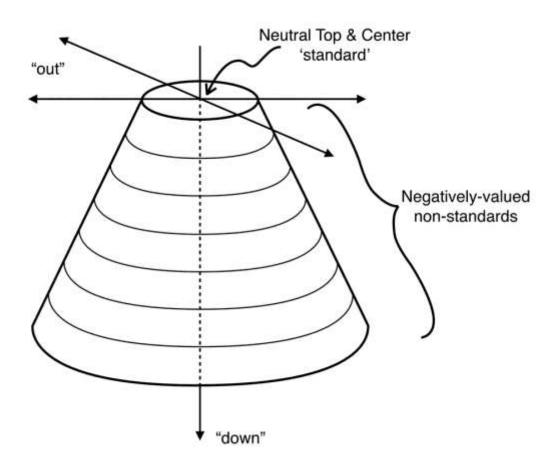

Fig. 1. Conic standardization model

Remember, this is a cultural model, the natives' point of view. It is a conic, multi-dimensional radial topology of variation of verbal behaviors in the language community, in which any noticeable deviation from standard points to – INDEXES is the technical term – some identifiable ascribed social characteristics of speakers, of their addressees, or, in short, of anything characterizing the situation in which forms of the non-standard occur. Such deviations from standard are, in general, thought of in negative terms – what I label as degrees of 'down-and-out'-ness (for comic, as well as conic, effect). And when the conical model of standardization and divergence from it is concretized as a representation of a political economy of social stratification, speakers inevitably locate themselves in class fractions by the degree to which their language use approximates or fails to approximate to standard usage. You may recall the old saying, 'Speak so that I may know who [that is, of course, sociologically speaking, **what** social kind] you are!' And you may recall George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (first staged in 1913, published in 1934), transduced into Lerner & Lowe's Broadway musical, *My Fair Lady*, in which the flower-seller Eliza Doolittle is passed off as a countess by the linguistics Professor Henry Higgins by changing her London Cockney phonetics into the phonetics of British Standard, called 'RP' (Received Pronunciation), and by substituting standard syntax and phraseology for vernacular forms. Plus the sartorial make-over, of course, to which we will return. Shaw and the upwardly (and inwardly) mobile acutely understand the stakes of the cultural cone of standardization. (I love the way the Broadway production has the angelic Shaw ultimately pulling the strings on Julie Andrews's Eliza; the film poster, replacing Andrews with the visually stunning Audrey Hepburn fronting for the musically impressive Marnie Nixon, is much less sophisticated. But, in keeping with my theme in this article, note the unmistakable stylistic transformation in going from Broadway to Hollywood in both graphic and **icono**graphic styles.)

Fig. 2. My Fair Lady posters (Broadway and Hollywood). See Copyright notice at end.

II.   Cultural ideology and allegiance to the standard

The cone of standardization, as I said, is a **cultural** model of variation in a language community like ours – an *ethno-metapragmatic* or *ideological* model, we like to say, that makes sense to the natives. And its strength, its force as an effective cultural standard influencing people, has, like all ideological formations, a characteristic social distribution within the population. People who use language within a standardized language community reveal differential allegiance to the standard and to the whole conical model to which those most in its thrall are anxiously oriented. This was elegantly demonstrated a half-century ago by William Labov's studies of urban American English, principally in New York City and in Philadelphia (1966), where statistical curves plotted of rates of observed standard and non-standard usage tell an interesting story about cultural ideology more generally (see ibid.: Fig. 3, reproduced below).
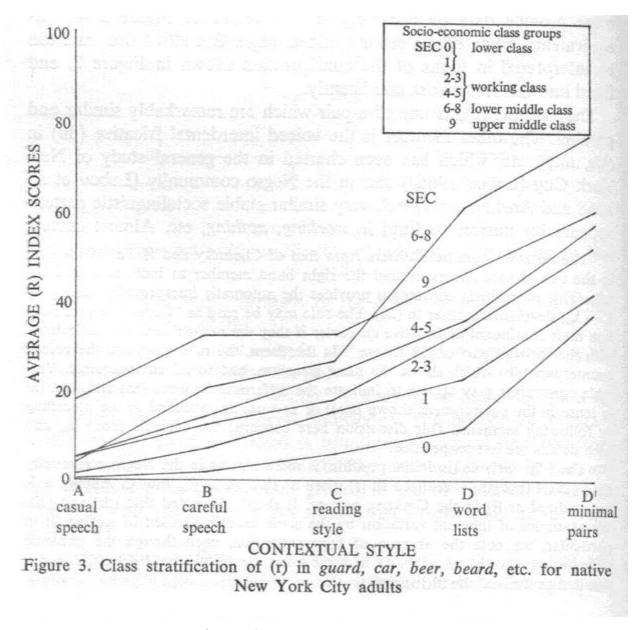
Figure 3. Class stratification of (r) in *guard, car, beer, beard*, etc. for native New York City adults

Fig. 3. Post-vocalic (r) curves from Labov's NYC survey. 1971: 196. Used with permission.

Shown here are the results for speakers of New York City English on Manhattan's Lower East Side, the long-ago immigrant neighborhood of tenements and ethnicity. These data come from surveys and in-depth interviews of the early 1960s, when that area in Manhattan was just beginning to gentrify in earnest. The scale on the ordinate, the *y*-axis, derives from the percentage of standard-like performance of syllables with an /r/ following a vowel in standard pronunciation – note the examples of such forms at the bottom, guard, car, beer, beard – where the local NYC vernacular notoriously lacks it (thus rhyming, in effect, with god, cod [without the

final –d], <u>be</u> <u>a</u>, <u>be</u> <u>a</u> followed by a word with initial [d-]…). The post-World War II standard 'He [sɒˈɾd] high above the [fɒɾθ flɔɾˈ]' vs. vernacular non-standard 'He [sɔːˈd] high above the [fɔːθ flɔː].' The curves in the plot of rates of production separate the speakers in Labov's sample by an independent demographic measure of socio-economic class level, from what Labov terms the 'Lower Working Class' at the visual bottom to the 'Upper Middle Class,' number 9, at the top. Running horizontally along the abscissa, the x-axis, are contexts of speaking, producing articulate language, arranged in increasing order of the way that the task demands of producing speech seem to call speakers' reflexive attention – mid-way through the series, at C – to reading aloud and at the extreme right, at D-prime, the task of having phonetically to differentiate two isolated words spelled with minimal difference, like <sawed>, the past tense of <u>saw</u>-, and <soared>, the past tense of <u>soar</u>-, visually differentiable only in the middle letters. Plotted on the extreme left, at A, are measures of people's usage when they were recorded unawares and unbeknownst to them in intimate, in-group conversation – something our human subjects Institutional Review Board will probably no longer let us do. Next, at B, is the context defined by a one-on-one interview inquiring about language and about the interviewee's perception of his or her linguistic usage, as well as the usage of others. The next position on the abscissa, at C, is when the speaker is asked to read a passage from a page of print (a passage with lots of words where standard would require post-vocalic [r]-pronunciation in fact, though the speaker is not informed of this). Then, in context D, the interviewee is asked to read aloud slowly lists of printed words, with target words interspersed among them to test particular pronunciations of this variably standardized sort. And finally, at D′, the so-called minimal graphic pairs test: look at the two words, and then pronounce them aloud.

The results are plotted separately by socio-economic class demographics of speakers. First, note that the most horizontal curves, the ones with low slopes of change across these tasks, occur at the bottom and at the top of the scales. The folks at the bottom are comparatively unaffected by the different task demands of speaking, maintaining, with a slight but indeed noticeable increase, a fairly non-standard pronunciation throughout. They are not, as we can see, very much mobilized to or apparently behaviorally motivated by cultural concepts of standard speech. (In fact, in subsequent work in comparably urban locations in the British Isles and elsewhere, it was demonstrated that working-class speakers have allegiance to, and are behaviorally motivated in their usage, to speak distinctive and local working-class non-standard, misinterpreted by

sociolinguists as 'negative prestige.' Culturally, of course, the 'prestige' of being a non-cosmopolitan local is anything but 'negative!' It is being *genuine*.) The Upper Middle Class folks in category 9 at the top produce relatively standard speech in all of these contexts of performance, perhaps a bit more carefully standard in usage when graphic minimal pairs are given to them. The interest lies in the middle groups, all of whom, as we can see, are relatively speaking as non-standard as the lowermost group in their spontaneous in-group conversational usage. However, as soon as the folks that Labov terms the aspiring, upwardly mobile Lower Middle Class are presented with something to read aloud, their standard-cone-anxiety manifests itself in the sudden jump in their standard-like pronunciation. When we look at this group's performance in the word-list and graphic minimal pair conditions, D and D′, their attempts at standardization far exceed those of the Upper Middle Class, which sets a kind of benchmark of usage for the whole population in such regimes of standardization. The anxious Lower Middle Class speakers – as Labov terms it – 'hypercorrect' by producing too much of what is culturally evaluated as 'a good thing,' that is, standard-like postvocalic [r]s, so much so that they put them in, as it turns out, where they don't even belong according to the rules by which one converts visual into spoken, when one looks at print and pronounces its forms aloud. I see this as standard anxiety of a hair-trigger acuity, and Labov confirmed this with numerous correlated attitudinal measures of what he terms 'linguistic insecurity' before standard register. His Lower Middle Class interviewees were maximally influenced by or maximally adherent to the ideological culture of standardization, maximally anxious about fulfilling its dictates, and acute in monitoring and criticizing the performance of others. (Many could not even recognize themselves when listening to recordings of their own spontaneous usage in contexts A and B played back for them to review!)

All this exemplifies a classic fact about ideologically permeated cultural forms, language included. At any given socio-historical moment, there is a collection of salient linguistic prescriptions and proscriptions, of 'do's and 'don't's, in other words, that serve as what we term 'standard shibboleths' to which adherence is demanded as one is, or aspires to be, at the conic top-and-center in local ideological perspective. Yet we know that the actual contents of the collection of shibboleths changes over time, an inevitable conclusion we arrive at from studying the printed record of long-term standardized communities – or, as we know even from interacting with our grandparents and other elders, who deplore our inattention to former

shibboleths no longer salient! ('I shall go to school' but 'You will go to school,' in the 1920s; 'With whom do you wish to speak?' of that time versus our acceptable 'Who do you want to talk to?') As well, the institutions and organizational sites that inculcate, monitor and police people's adherence to standard sometimes shift as well, as the social organization of standardizing authority and its paraphernalia transform over time. Fierce standardization achieves a truly pervasive and ubiquitous orientation of large percentages of language users to the correctness of standard register and the gradient – if sociologically colorful and indicative – incorrectness of any linguistic production that falls short, thus marking its user as someone coming from a disprivileged – or at least identity-laden – 'somewhere.' Fiercely achieving standardization of a state language has been a major project of the modernist nation state, thus projecting a language community into a maximal polity in the Enlightenment order of things, what I've termed, after the writer Washington Irving (1977 [1807]), the project of 'logocracy' such as we live under in the United States and other nation states of the Euro-American 'North.' And the fiercer that identifiability of language community and maximal polity, the more under siege are vernaculars within a nation state's borders as well as other language communities, whether indigenous or immigrant, whether their languages have been standardized elsewhere or not – as has long been the case in the United States. (Think of the Spanish within the U.S. borders, standardized for most speakers in either Mexico City or San Juan, but devalued nonetheless in our fiercely monoglot logocracy.)

So standards are cultural forms, configurations of linguistic culture, locatable in time: indeed, they are organized around ever-changing and socio-historically specific prescriptions for one among a range of variants and proscriptions of certain others that nevertheless generally persist within overall community usage. They are used by those who do not speak well or – as we say – who speak not up to standard. Yet, at all times the standard forms have ever been ideologically justified or rationalized by interests that support them in terms of myriad ascribed virtues – essential properties such as truthfulness, transparency to 'reality,' beauty, cognitive and expressive power, communicative efficiency, etc. – that come to be identified as the virtues of the very forms of standard themselves as well, in a certain logic of iconic consubstantiality. The technical term from Peirce is 'rhematized' (1977 [1904]), identified as the virtues of the very people who can display them properly. By contrast, the opposite vices, needless to say, come to be identified with non-standard forms and, by similar indexically based association, with the

users of non-standard linguistic forms, who, on the basis of language, are understood by those anxiously oriented to the top-and-center to be, by contrast, stupid, muddled vis-à-vis 'reality,' brutish, unaesthetic, uneducable, and so forth. I'm sure that you have seen such ideologically driven pronouncements in print, and have heard them in broadcast and web media – and perhaps even in various face-to-face situations such as the social gatherings with which I began. A person's deficiency in or – heaven forfend! – total lack of standard English bespeaks and is an index of that individual's lack of something essential for success, for citizenship, for being, in short, right with the modern world. And, in a regime of standardization, that may indeed at least be the outcome, if not the cause.

III.   Registers, register shibboleths and emblems of identity

Now standardization and its resulting standard shibboleths, salient by degree to language users, constitute what we term a standard REGISTER of language. The term 'register' itself metaphorically alludes to the pipe-organ, where different registers provide distinct timbral envelopes or shapes for what is otherwise precisely the same melodic sequence of pitch-over-time, a chunk of musical text. A linguistic register is an evaluative measure of a stretch of discourse – a verbal 'text', as it were – one intuitively understood dimension of coherence of which rests precisely on its being appropriate to and indicative of the particular interactional contexts in which it has occurred or, normatively, could occur. We feel this coherence of appropriateness-to and effectiveness-in context, and we react to its violation, whether such appropriateness to/effectiveness in context is defined by who is doing the communicating, to whom the communication is directed or before whom it occurs, or any other way we can characterize a context as a social site for use of the language code. The register concept corresponds to the empirical fact that everywhere that variations in usage have been investigated, the users of language conceptualize how language varies by context as different context-indicating ways of denotationally saying the same thing' or illocutionarily performing 'the same kind' of social act by speaking, where the forms used can differ at whatever plane and level of analysis – pronunciation, vocabulary, turn-of-phrase.

> He went to the eye-doctor vs. He consulted his ophthalmologist.
> Sit down! vs. Might I ask that you please be seated?
> [fɔːˤθ flɔː] vs. [fɒɾθ flɔɾʹ] (like we [sɔˤ bɪfɔːˤ] – oops! I mean to say, in register appropriate to my role at this occasion, 'as we have already encountered.')

Such isolable differences of usable linguistic form constitute for the users a (sometimes gradient) set of alternative indexical signs, signs pointing to normatively distinct contextual conditions; in short, the differences of form along this dimension of cultural meaning constituting an indexically loaded or 'pragmatic paradigm'. Speakers have intuitions, and sometimes even explicit normative stipulations, of how elements of several such paradigmatically differentiated indexes can appropriately – congruently and coherently – co-occur across textual stretches, and this congruence of indexicality – recall, pointing to similar or at least non-incoherent social characteristics of the context – lands them in the same register. Such principles of textual compatibility define for the users a DENOTATIONAL-TEXTUAL REGISTER of their language, an intuition (and, in the cases of standardization resulting, for example, in style manuals and explicit teaching, a **stipulation**) of which textual elements go together with which others, and which ought to be excluded from textual co-occurrence or occurrence altogether, save for producing (bringing about or entailing) special effects by sudden violation that calls attention to itself (and inevitably to the social dynamics of the communicative situation). You may recall the gently sexist old joke about the debutante arriving to be presented at a cotillion who, getting out of the limousine arranged for the evening – compare the plot of Cinderella – yells out, 'Oh, Shit! I just stepped in some doggie-do!' Expletives tend to be register- if not also gender- benders. Registers are in essence languages – ways to say what you want to say about the world – that are indexically particular to context because they are diagnostic of such a context, whether in positive or negative stipulation. So, if one adds up all the registers in a language community, that is, as simplistically represented in the Venn diagram, if one performs the set-theoretic union of
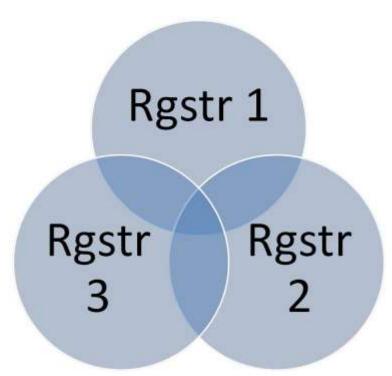
Fig. 4. Venn diagram of intersecting registers.

all the elements of all the registers in a community, sociolinguistically viewed, this constitutes the inclusive envelope of the community's 'language'. Not everyone in the language community controls all the registers that intersect in the population. We frequently recognize many registers and can even decode an indexical value – what's this usage revealing about social context? – for many of them: think of technical registers like this one! even if we cannot produce enregistered text ourselves that passes muster as register-coherent. (Recall here Labov's Lower East Side folks, whose own everyday usage was very far from standard, but who were hai -trigger-sensitive to the shibboleths of standard register: aspirational identity among the socially mobile to make it to the Upper Middle Class, as he analyzed it. Educational institutions – the University of Oxford or the University of Chicago, for example – try to inculcate in the young reverence for various disciplinary technical registers too, with varying degrees of success in creating comparable anxiety.)

All registers, not just standard ones, emerge from folk models, projections of linguistic variation organized in people's consciousness around 'register shibboleths', the most salient anchors of being 'in register,' that provide anchoring cues to unconscious intuitions of indexical – context-indicating – coherence in discourse. For language, the idea is that there is a mode of

folk-consciousness (an ethno-metapragmatics) of linguistic variability that organizes such variability by presuming the existence of distinct, indexically contrastive ways of saying what counts as 'the same thing,' i.e., communicating the same denotational content over intervals of text that differ as to their appropriateness to and effectiveness in conceptualized contexts of use (recall our examples in American English above). These contexts may be defined along any of the usual sociolinguistic dimensions describing who communicates with what forms to whom about whom/what where and under what institutional conditions. Register shibboleths serve as stipulative anchors as salient pillars of co-occurrence in specific contexts for other, less salient areas of denotational textual form. Language users may pay less explicit attention to non-shibboleths, but all the while they systematically use them in regular contextualizing ways we can study from corpora of language sorted on the basis of context of usage. We can even study regularities of enregisterment cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. Everywhere, registers of 'honorification', for example, ways of communicating so as to perform an act of deference to the Receiver of the message, to the message's Audience, and/or to the Referent being communicated about in the message – all these kinds of systems and their overlaps are attested – tend to focus ideological attention on, and thus make register shibboleths of, subtle distinctions among deictics of ('second' or 'third') person (in French shall I say *tu* or *vous*?), on personal proper names, as in American English (<u>Professor</u> <u>Silverstein</u> or <u>Mikey</u>?) and other address terms derived from status nominal (<u>pop</u> vs. <u>father</u>; <u>doc</u> vs. <u>Dr Smith</u>), and verbs predicating 'transfers' of things, including messages (hence, metapragmatic verbs like 'promise' and 'request,' as well as 'donatory' [Martin 1964: 408] ones like 'give to'/'transfer to'/'proffer'/'bestow upon'), though much more is involved in using what people evaluate as well-formed honorific discourse. (How many people use, but couldn't put their finger on, the distinction I cited earlier, 'Sit down!' in what we term the zero-inflection or 'bald' imperative vs. 'Might you please be seated?' with reverently modalized agentless passive form?) In European languages, indexes of 'honorification' have indeed been saliently enregistered around second-person personal deictic usage, form of terms of address, and certain formulae for mands/requests/orders, but many other indexically loaded variants within pragmatic paradigms concurrently operate at many different planes of language so long as they compatibly co-occur with the more salient shibboleths. In languages like Japanese, Javanese, Tibetan, etc., honorification is enregistered around the density of special lexical items, usage of which constitutes a performance of deference-to-addressee and/or

deference-to-referent. The number of such indexically special lexical items within contrastive paradigms of indexical value differs as a function of the particular area of denotation one is communicating about in-and-by the use of a member of that set. Many Javanese sets, for example, have only two members; second-person deixis seems to include at least five, and perhaps more contrastive forms, so such registers are gradient affairs, the co-occurrence of some shibboleths of which, rising to consciousness and explicit normativity, have as well conventionally led to ethno-metapragmatic names (see Errington 1988; Silverstein 1979, 2003).

The key point about enregistered forms, especially certain register shibboleths, such as those of standard registers and their negations, and many others, is that they become EMBLEMS OF IDENTITY of their characteristic users within differentiated social orders (that is, within the conventions of a language community, **naturalized** icons as well as indexicals pointing to their use by stereotypical categories of persons; see Agha 2007: 190-232). We fashion – or, if you will, we 'style' – ourselves as identifiable social types through the control of a repertoire of registers, and especially of their emblematic shibboleths. Such emblems of identity, deployable as such in deliberate self-fashioning usage and endowed with all this naturalizing ideological infusion, are the indexical foci of now intentionally performable identities – the Judith Butler kind of identities (1988) – that is, identities *indexically entailed* in-and-by the use of certain language forms. 'Oh! This person speaks like a …' – fill in whatever identity you want. When, some 25 years back, I spoke to the guy in charge of the fish counter at my local supermarket in basic academic standard, he immediately asked me, 'You a professor or sometin'?' (And, until his unforeseen death a couple of years ago, he always introduced me to other personnel as 'the professor' and addressed me as such, an identity I have not been able to escape halfway across town from campus.) Language use creates the image, as Shaw and then Lerner & Lowe so wonderfully illustrated. This is the very paragon of performativity, the performativity of identities in-and-by the use of particular enregistered forms, where the effect requires only that certain salient shibboleths of identity-conferring register be displayed by someone to someone's interpreting consciousness for the rest to be interpreted in conformity with the salient.

IV.   Enregisterment as the institutional power to give meaning

I hope that you are beginning to see that the register perspective – the universal perspective of users of language on the contextual variability of their language as denotational code – is a social

fact composed of three interlocked factors. One is the existence of pragmatic or indexical paradigms, forms that contrast by the particular context they index or point to. A second is the notion of congruent co-occurrence in discourse, where certain paradigmatic forms seem to set expectations about the discourse unfolding over a stretch of (in this case) verbal behaviour, in short, over a text the indexical coherence of which we automatically search for in interaction. And the third is the folk understanding of the social meaning or value of the register shibboleths and thence of the register itself within a language community (see diagram below).

The existence of *pragmatic* or indexical *paradigms*, forms that contrast by the particular context they index or point to:

$$
\begin{array}{c}
(\,form_1\,) \\
(\,form_2\,) \\
(\quad . \quad) \\
(\quad . \quad) \\
(\quad . \quad) \\
(form_n\,)
\end{array}
$$

The intuition of *congruent co-occurrence in discourse*, where certain paradigmatic forms seem to set expectations about the discourse unfolding over a stretch of verbal (in this case) behavior, in short over an indexically cohesive text:

$$
\text{Paradigm}_A \qquad \text{Paradigm}_B \qquad \text{Paradigm}_C \qquad \text{Paradigm}_D \;\ldots
$$

$$
(form_i) \quad \approx \quad (form_k) \quad \approx \quad (form_m) \quad \approx \quad (form_p) \;\ldots
$$

The folk understanding [= "ethno-metapragmatics"] of *the social meaning or value of the register shibboleths* and thence of the register itself within a language community:

$$
\text{Register shibboleth } (form_p) \;\rightarrow\; \text{Speaker has social characteristic } X
$$

People are differently invested in the way register shibboleths and hence registers ought to inform their usage and the usage of others. As we saw in Labov's example of standard American English in New York City, the distribution of people's investment in a register can itself frequently be sociologically characterized. (You will recall that he found a distribution roughly by socioeconomic class and aspiration for upward mobility within a class structure.) And people's ideas of what are, in fact, the registers with respect to which they produce and interpret

usage may themselves differ as a function of where people are located in social structures; people of different social condition are differently mobilized to structures of enregisterment – sometimes not at all. Think, then, of the power of educational organizations in this regard, as agents of nation-state projects, to draw the young, who are already perfectly fluent speakers of one or more vernaculars, into anxieties of enregisterment before a state-sponsored standard register of one language, declaring this to be the entrance ticket to the socioeconomic and social mobility suggested by the conical model. Before and after pictures: before the state's intervention, we see a happy-go-lucky, perhaps even polyglot kid; after a 'successful' intervention, an anxiety-riven asymmetric bilingual, who intuitively understands the lessons of the cone of stratification around the state's language standard.

As this example demonstrates, 'enregisterment,' the spread of a register structure in a population, is a matter of the power of institutional agents to give meaning – indexical meaning – and value to in this instance language signs, transforming people's intuitions and perceptions both of language and of its users by organizing how cultural texts – cohesively arrayed material signs – are produced and interpreted. You don't have to be a government or para-state organization to exercise the power to enregister elements of what people come to think of as their personal – even individual – style. And, importantly, what is reflexively true of language in this way is also true of every other meaningful code of culture. The cultural meaning of everything in its social context emerges in this way via enregisterment: in-and-by being able to 'do things' – engage in consequential social action – with words or with any other kind of meaningful cultural stuff. The fact that cultural stuff is shot through with meanings infused in it by register structures defines what the social context is, and who – recall: what social kind of person – is acting in that context. And language is, in fact, the leading medium through which all the **other** cultural codes come to be enregistered; language – discourse – always has the potential to give ideologically conforming shape to the enregistered configuration of meaning and value of every other cultural code.

V.   Fashion as indexically meaningful

Think of fashion, focused on indexically meaningful as well as wearable sartorial objects: here, a way of *talking about* clothes – what Roland Barthes called the 'rhetoric' of fashion (2013) – in

every form of media, comprises the structuring verbal and pictorial glosses that make sense of good and bad examples as instances of fashion come to our attention.

Fig. 5. Presenters of TV show, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. *See Copyright notice at end.*

Fig. 6. Presenters of TV show Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. *See Copyright notice at end.*

Do you recall the personal makeover program, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*? In food and wine; in home decoration; in clothing and accessories; in hip cultural activities; in coiffure. So a makeover picture:

Fig. 7. Stills from TV show Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. *See Copyright notice at end.*

On the left, ['Oh, this is problematic!'] and on the right ['Wow! What a change!'] makeover pictures? (Note that the two sartorial texts are equivalent piece-by-piece as coverings for bodily regions, but differ dramatically as to the coherent overall text they comprise. Best-Dressed Awards ['Here's how to do it'] and Worst-Dressed Awards ['Here's how not to do it']?). These folks specialize in how to fashion indexically coherent enregistered texts of the self. The discourse emanates from a sometimes self-authorizing social location, but one, if successful, that is increasingly legitimate because it declares its authoritative status in broadcast mode to a willing public of interlocutory others, the viewers. The evaluative descriptions of such fashion discourse make salient to those increasingly under the sway of their enregistering potential the visible elements of contrast of silhouette, color, drape, weave, etc., in a composite outfit or ensemble – 'Don't wear brown shoes with a black belt!' – just the same way that norms of 'correct' and 'incorrect' apply to how one reads aloud those minimal graphic pairs that Labov presented to people in his interviews, <S-O-A-R-E-D> vs. <S-A-W-E-D>. The contrastive elements of non-verbal culture are enregistered with distinct values along particular dimensions

by the way discourse about them calls attention to significant difference, thus making it all the more salient as enregistered stuff.

VI. Enregisterment and the recognition of groups

Think as well of identity groups in a politics of recognition. We frequently do not understand the degree to which the circulation of discourse and the enregisterment of discourse constitute the central facts on which is based society's recognition of the groupness of a part of the population, along with the group's asserting to the outside certain conditions-of-life. For in a politics of recognition, it is the right of a category of people to stipulate their own distinctively shared identity-project within a political economy and its structures of power. 'Power' in this sense is the autonomous power of enregisterment. Think of discourse about a category of people that has the potential to be racially or ethnically or religiously or otherwise offensive. In a politics of recognition, one asserts the right of a so denoted group to stipulate the nature and limits in discursive usage of those outside giving offense and of those inside taking offense. The so-called 'sexist' language of Second-Wave Feminism's decade or more of 'consciousness raising' comes to mind, which created a whole register effect in English and similar European languages, inoculating all exposed language users with a sense of care not to give offense by denoting sex or gender when it is stipulatively deemed to be irrelevant, especially when denoting those who monitor an emerging lexical register for **not** denoting sex as always indexically relevant: 'Say server, not waiter vs. waitress.' 'There's no need for the expressions lady plumber or male nurse; plumber and nurse will do.' So thorough have been the lexical changes in at least educated vernacular that the very descriptor sex, as, for example, on government forms to fill out or online airplane reservation forms, has been replaced by what we have come to see as the socially constructed category of 'gender' – which is precisely what government forms, ironically enough, are **not** asking for in their traditional heteronormative descriptive binary! And the innovative form Ms., intended to replace the earlier women-only distinction by marital status, unmarried Miss vs. married Mrs., is now used in such publications as the *Chicago Tribune* to replace Miss, still in contrast to Mrs.: innovation with persistent gender chauvinism, I daresay! Observe that the reform of so-called sexist language had an enregistering effect for a whole generation, re-ordering in effect the social relations between Speakers and Addressees (or Writers and Readers) as pre- and post-consciousness-raised – eventually differentiating the old from the young – and,

in so far as sexist and non-sexist usages belong to two registers, indexing consciousness of the very groupness of gendered claimants to political self-awareness, and perhaps even power within a political economy of recognition. (As a student of political communication, I can hardly wait for the next presidential round to begin in earnest, presuming it will include the candidacy of Mrs. – did you catch that usage in the media? – Clinton, or is it Ms. Rodham Clinton, or perhaps just the celebrity identity, Hillary? 'Hil-lah-ry—Hil-lah-ry—Hil-lah-ry!' we can foresee at the 2016 nominating convention, like Op-rah! Op-rah! Op-rah! Note also a recent *Huffington Post* headline in this connection; see illustration below.)

6-Year-Old Asks Hillary Clinton If She Wants To Be Called 'Madame' Or 'Mrs. President'

The Huffington Post | by Paige Lavender
Posted: 04/10/2014 8:33 am EDT Updated: 04/10/2014 8:59 am EDT

VII. The barista register

So: 'indexical inoculation' is the process of summoning members of a cultural community to understand and even to use new register effects, and indexical inoculation is all around us. Enregisterment is central to the work of all culture, we should think as well in our state of existence under late – super-ripe – capitalism of organizations or networks of organizations directed at this or that aspect of consumerist consumption, what goes under the vernacular term 'lifestyle' (where we cannot but note the form style lurking). Think, in other words, of myriad social formations with inoculating claims upon our reflexive sense of the enregisterment of our very life's style through our relations to commodities. Think Starbucks™ and its imitators and successors.

> **Extract from a Starbucks Corporate Flyer from 1990s**
> While many "in the know" customers have discovered the wonders of Mocha Sanani as a by-the-pot coffee, fewer know its virtues as an espresso. Properly brewed, it yields a cup that combines unrivalled intensity of aroma with thick, creamy body and bittersweet chocolate finish.
> **Ethiopia Sidamo**: This is a delicate yet sprightly new crop coffer from the high plateau country of south-central Ethiopia. Flowery bouquet (with a hint of eucalyptus), light and

elegant body, and a honeyed natural sweetness make this coffee one of the most seductive of all African varietals.

I would be remiss ill didn't mention that this washed Ethiopian coffee, together with its near-relation Ethiopia Yergacheffe, is in extremely short supply this year. This is due to a combination of short crop, over-zealous pre-selling of same, strong demand and (last not least) ongoing civil war. Enjoy it while it's here, for we expect to be out of both coffees for most of the year.

Kenya: Kenya's relentless focus on quality in all stages of coffee production has made it the world leader in coffee quality. Even everyday coffees from this country offer clean, satisfying *arabica* flavor. At the very top of the mountain (literally and figuratively) lie coffees like our current offering, a superb "AA" (largest bean size) purchased directly at auction in Nairobi. This coffee, like a fine Bordeaux, balances heft and heartiness with bell-like clarity of flavor and blackcurrant fruitiness.

Other African varietals:

Our current varietal offerings are classic "self-drinkers:" coffees whose balance of body, flavor and acidity makes them ideal for straight, unblended enjoyment.

Another famous coffee in this category is **Ethiopia Harrar**, a carefully cultivated coffee with a flavor that's usually anything but cultivated! The Chianti-esque, slightly gamy aroma gives Harrar a certain rustic charm that has family tics to Mocha Sanani (though it usually lacks that coffee's complexity, balance and breed . It is, in the words of Kenneth Davids (in his book *Coffee: A Guide to Buying, Brewing and Enjoying*), "a coffee for people who like excitement at the cost of subtlety."

Harrar's traditional role at Starbucks is as a substitute for authentic Yemen Mocha during those all-too-frequent instances where the latter is either of mediocre quality or simply unobtainable. Occasionally lots of Harrar of exceptional quality become available; we're always on the look-out, and offer them when circumstances permit.

Other African coffees include **Tanzania** and **Zimbabwe**, both of which are reminiscent of a softer, somewhat toned-down Kenya, and **Malawi**, which is a nice and very typical African blending coffee. In fact, all these coffees are arguably better used in blends than as varietals, since their flavors, while pleasant, arc much less clearly delineated than those of better Kcnyas and washed Ethiopians. The same comments apply to a lesser Ethiopian coffee, such as Djimmah (or Ghimbi), which tastes like a coarser version of Harrar.

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This extract from an early 1990s corporate flyer from Starbucks, for example, in which the connoisseur of prose can discern the distinctive register usually used for the connoisseurship of wine, what I have termed, jokingly, *oinoglossia*, 'wine talk'. The point is, a verbal register used for the cultural texts – here, material texts in one area of life, wine consumption – becomes the stipulative and directive register for re-structuring the very dimensions of encounter with, and appreciation of, cultural texts in another area of life, coffee consumption. Since enregistering cultural consciousness creeps on little cat's feet from one area of life to another, analogy, you can see, is destiny. Observe first off the way the tasting note genre that proceeds from visuals to

aromas to tongue-tastes to aftertastes to vaporous after-effects is used just the same way one does for wine-tasting.

> Mocha Sanani: 'Properly brewed [as espresso] … combines unrivalled intensity of aroma with thick, creamy body and bittersweet chocolate finish.'

> Ethiopia Sidamo: '…a delicate yet sprightly new crop coffee…Flowery bouquet (with a hint of eucalyptus), light and elegant body, and a honeyed natural sweetness…one of the most seductive of all African varietals.'

> Kenya 'AA': 'At the very top of the mountain (literally and figuratively) [t]his coffee, like a fine Bordeaux, balances heft and heartiness with bell-like clarity of flavor and blackcurrant fruitiness.'

> Ethiopia Harar: '…a carefully cultivated coffee with a flavor that's usually anything but cultivated! The Chianti-esque, slightly gamy aroma gives Harar a certain rustic charm that has family ties to Mocha Sanani (though it usually lacks that coffee's complexity, balance and breed). It is…'a coffee for people who like excitement at the cost of subtlety'.'

> Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Malawi: '…better used in blends than as varietals, since their flavors, while pleasant, are much less clearly delineated…'

Compare professional tasting notes of wine, and their structural analysis according to phases of the tasting encounter:

> 2007 Puligny Montrachet, Folatieres (Girardin, Vincent) (750ml) - $49.50 per bottle

> '93 out of 100...Girardin's 2007 Puligny-Montrachet Les Folatieres mingle aromas of malt and toasted brioche with sea breeze, fresh citrus, ripe white peach, and myriad floral perfumes. Vivaciously and brightly brimming with primary fruit, yet silken in texture and suffused with salinity and notes of toasted grain, this finishes with almost startling grip and tenacity. Anything it might lack in complexity today vis-à-vis the very best of the vintage it compensates for in sheer energy and in promise. Expect more excitement over the next 7-10 years.' – Wine Advocate

> '93 out of 100…Perfumed nose offers lovely lift to the aromas of flowers, violet and saline minerality. Juicy, stony and high-pitched, combining a strong impression of saline minerality with obvious chewy extract. Seriously sexy, precise wine, finishing vibrant and long.' – Stephen Tanzer

and as diagrammed:

Wine Advocate on 2007 **Puligny Montrachet**, **Folatieres** (Girardin, Vincent) (750ml)

Overall Point Evaluation		93 out of 100...Girardin's 2007 Puligny-Montrachet Les Folatieres
II. Olfaction	mingles...with...and myriad...	*aromas* of malt and toasted brioche ...sea breeze, fresh citrus, ripe white peach, ...floral perfumes
III. Taste and Tongue-Feel	Vivaciously and brightly brimming with... and suffused with...	...primary fruit, yet silken in *texture* ...salinity and *notes* of toasted grain
IV. Finish	...almost startling grip and tenacity	this *finishes* with...
Overall Comparison & Futurity	in sheer energy...more excitement...	Anything it might lack in *complexity* today vis-à-vis the very best of the vintage it compensates for...and in *promise*. Expect...over the next 7-10 years.

Stephen Tanzer on 2007 **Puligny Montrachet**, **Folatieres** (Girardin, Vincent) (750ml)

Overall Point Evaluation		93 out of 100
II. Olfaction	...offers lovely lift to...	Perfumed *nose*...the *aromas* of flowers, violet and saline minerality.
III. Taste & Tongue-Feel	...high-pitched...combining a strong impression of...obvious	Juicy, stony and...saline minerality with...chewy *extract*
(2) IV. Finish	…vibrant and...	*finish*ing...long.'
(1) Overall Impression	Seriously sexy, precise...	...wine, ...

The text genre so used to describe what one is purchasing has become a way implicitly to make the argument that at least Starbucks™ coffee – if not all those McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts-'n'-whatever cheapo kinds – is not only a consumable commodity to be drunk, but an aesthetic object of olfactory and gustatory richness to the coffee connoisseur, comparably complex of dimensionality in a quality-space like the one in which wine has long been considered to exist. **This** coffee is a prestige consumable that has a kind of aesthetic structure as a drinkable text. The explicit comparisons in the notes to Bordeaux (west-central France) and Chianti (Tuscany in

Italy) should be carefully noted here. But more importantly, these tasting notes put the consumer on notice that, in learning to experience coffee-as-drunk in this fashion, he or she will become defined as a consumer by refined tastes, by an aesthetic perceptual encounter, that will have learned to discern and thus knowingly to favor this or that among the offered possibilities; the Starbucks™ coffee drinker is thus invited to take on an identity of an aesthetically enriched consumer. Note how the Bordeaux comparison goes with the highest-end coffee varietal, while the comparison with Chianti explains that it is 'coffee for people who like excitement at the cost of subtlety.' Ouch! You can purchase it, but you'll get the old fish-eye from the barista serving it to you.

The important point for us to see is that the inoculated enregistered discourse **about** Starbucks™ coffees [1] emanates from the very source, the company that is the purveyor of the potable, [2] summoning the customer to think of the experience of drinking Starbucks™ coffee as akin to drinking fine wine, and therefore [3] structuring the consumable comestible as an aesthetically dimensionalized one, for which one's sensorium should strive for subtle discernment, the very index of the true connoisseur fit to drink and appreciate the aesthetic object. Starbucks™ coffee has, in effect, been 'vinified,' metaphorically turned into wine. Speaking of the 'vinification,' as it were, of coffee, note one of the most extraordinary visuals in this editorializing tenor – a picture in a full-page glossy advertisement truly worth a thousand words – from the importers of Colombian coffee.
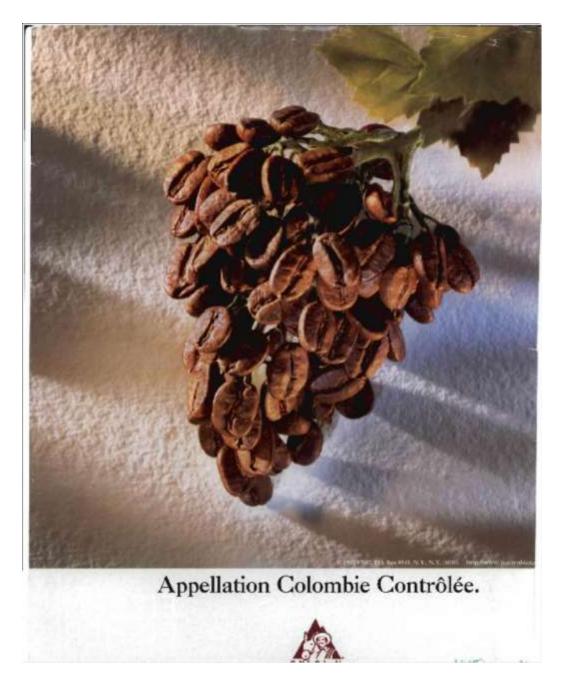
Appellation Colombie Contrôlée.

Fig. 8. Colombian Coffee Growers Publicity material. See Copyright notice at end.

So concerned have the corporate folk at Starbucks Co. been about the total contextualization of their products in relation to those who drink them that they have corporately licensed a certain persnickety attitude on the part of the retail vendors, the baristas and other endpoint faces of the corporation, who, like missionaries recruiting adherents to religious experience, insist on having would-be customers use the corporate-specific formulaic genres in ordering their drinks when they belly up to the coffee bar. Paul Manning has written brilliantly about Starbucks barista

register expectations and the realization of the register in the stylized genre of the drink order (2008). On the one hand, note in this material excerpted from the corporation's own guide to ordering (see text below) that **of course** there is no '*right*' and '*wrong*' way to order; it's just that 'barista talk,' i.e., the actually preferred and normative register and constructional genre, seems to impose itself as the verbal currency in such establishments because of its denotational efficiency.

> How to Order
> If you're nervous about ordering, don't be.
> There's no 'right' way to order at Starbucks. Just tell us what you want and we'll give it to you.
> But if we call your drink in a way that's different from what you told us, we're not correcting you. We're just translating your order into 'barista-speak'—a standard way our baristas call out orders. This language gives the baristas the info they need in the order they need it, so they can make your drink as quickly and efficiently as possible.
> 'Barista speak' is easy to learn. It's all about the order of information. There are five steps to the process…
> (1) cup (a cup for hot, cold, or 'for here' drinks), (2) shots and size, (3) syrup, (4) milk and other modifiers, to (5) the (kind of) drink itself.

Startbucks ordering guide, 2003 (no page numbers):

In principle, then, the descriptors for each of those categories are to be formulated in the same order as they are needed in the production process itself, so that the 'correct' order mirrors, or serves as an icon of, the process of production. The Starbucks' guide illustrates the Starbucks syntax using the following example of a maximally complex coffee order (also from Starbucks 2003, quoted in Manning 2008):

I'd like to have an

ICED,	DECAF, TRIPLE, GRANDE,	CINNAMON,	NONFAT, NOWHIP	MOCHA
CUP	*SHOTS AND SIZE*	*SYRUP*	*MILK AND OTHER MODIFIERS*	*THE DRINK ITSELF*
1	2	3	4	5

In other words: Don't use it at your peril! And this verbal currency is again one that constructs the coffee-based commodities for purchase at a Starbucks location as a whole paradigm of

complexly textualized objects for purchase, made up of substances primary and secondary, shapes, sizes, etc. in what purports to be the most accurate description, i.e., construal, of them – and hence the quasi-standardized mode of thinking about this item of culture. Thus customers' violations of bellying up to the coffee bar with the proper formula articulated trippingly from their thirsty tongues stimulate 'barista rants,' as Manning terms them (2008), on the corporate website. Here are a couple of my favorites:

Example 1:
    Me: Hi, what can I get for you today, sir?
    Man: A small
    Me: You would like a tall what sir?
    Man: I said I want a small.
    Me: Would that be a tall coffee sir?
    Man: No I want a small regular, I don't want to supersize my drink.
    Me: No sir, tall is small. Here at Starbucks small is tall, medium is grande and large is
    venti.
    Man: Well, what I want is a small.
    Me: Okay, tall traditional it is *grinding teeth* *get him the drink and give it to him*
    Man: *Takes off the lid* I thought I told you I wanted a small regular. This is just black.
    Me: Sir, you can find milk and sugar for your coffee over at the condiment bar. We have
    various types of dairy for your coffee and also many different types of sweeteners.
    Man: What I want is a regular small coffee. Why can't you do this for me? Is that too hard for you?
    At what I am paying for a cup of coffee, you should be able to put the milk and two spoonfuls of
    sugar in for me.
    Me: Well, sir, here at Starbucks we feel that you are better served by arranging your coffee
    however you like. That will be $1.52.
    Man: Are you sure? I can't get this for free, being that it has taken over five minutes just to
    get me a small coffee and ring me up?
    Me: I am sorry that took so long. That will be a dollar and 52 cents for your TALL TRADITIONAL
    cup of coffee.

    Why Oh why do we have to go through this EVERY FREAKING DAY!!! Why!!!!

Example 2:
    SCOWS (Stupid Customer of the Week stories)
    Yesterday I had an annoying customer experience I'd like to share. I'll try to remember the details as
    best as I can.
    Stupid lady walks in.
    Me: Hi, how are you?
    Stupid: Yeah. . . can I get an. . .. *mumbles inaudibly*
    Me: Excuse me, I didn't catch that?
    Stupid: *Looks at me like I'm an idiot* I'll have a no-fat coffee.

Me: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

Stupid: What do you mean? All you coffee places have no-fat coffee drinks now, with all the new drinks you're coming out with all the time!

Me: Well, if you want regular coffee, that doesn't have fat to begin with. Is that what you want?

Stupid: No! That has fat in it once you add the sugar and the whip' cream and the fatty milk.

Me: That doesn't sound like you want a regular coffee, it sounds like you're talking about a latte.

Stupid: No! Once you add the latte or cappuccino it's fatty.

Me: Ma'am, lattes and cappuccinos are drinks we offer. We can make those nonfat if you'd like.

Stupid: Well, what would you give to someone who came in and asked for a no-fat coffee?

Me: I wouldn't give them anything until I figured out what a nonfat coffee was. If you came in here and just asked for a regular coffee, I would've given you a regular black coffee.

Stupid: No, I don't want it black. *makes a face of disgust* I don't know how anyone could drink that stuff, it's disgusting.

Me: Did you want us to add milk?

Stupid: No, that makes it fatty.

Me: Ma'am, we could make almost any drink on that half of the menu with nonfat milk.

Stupid: What about her, *points to my coworker, Kristie* can she get me a nonfat coffee?

Kristie: *notices Stupid is pointing to her* Excuse me, what can I get for you?

Stupid: I want a nonfat coffee, and he doesn't know what I'm talking about, and I know all you coffee places have those nonfat drinks now.

Kristie: Coffee is nonfat to begin with, I guess I don't understand what you're asking for.

Stupid: *sighs loudly* I guess I'll have to ask the manager about this. Who's the manager?

These rants demonstrate the venomous condescension of the servers toward those who apparently have pretensions to the value of the Starbucks drinking experience, but are thought by the service personnel to be distinctly unfit to consume Starbucks liquids, since they have not yet learned or – can you imagine? – they resist learning the rarefied uniqueness of genre and register for ordering them. There is, once more, a conical sociological model of distance-from-the-authorizing-top-and-center involved that is no different from the distance indexed by the inability to experience and notate wine's distinctively dimensionalized aesthetics in the act of drinking wine. The caption to a 1937 cartoon of James Thurber's offers only the indexical snootiness of characterological anthropomorphism, but none of the usable descriptive terminology of the wine-

tasting note! 'It's a naïve domestic Burgundy without any breeding, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption' (not reproduced here, but see Thurber 1945).

I should imagine that the idea is that, as goes wine connoisseurship, so – analogy being destiny – goes the connoisseurship of fine coffee: the two stipulatively go together as just two aspects of knowing about and enjoying 'the finer things in life,' as I believe is the cover expression. Two realms of a consistent or coherent individual's, as one says, 'life-style' – which, of course, existing at the intersection of myriad such register-creating regimes, each striving to inoculate us with register-anxiety, is anything but 'individual!' This what we might term the Starbucks™-type of sociology of style distinctly reinforces what we call a generational effect in fractionated consumptive class, the key kind of class distinction in the project of late capitalism, always looking to the horizon of the next market boom in the 18-to-24 demographic. The reflexive sensing of one's consumptive class membership by one's comfort with properly enregistered textual commodities of various kinds – consumables, wearables, drivables, live-in-ables, collectibles, etc. – drives people's anxieties of personal identity; the success of verbally driven enregisterment – discourses that set values in all these various realms that emanate from corporate interests – in the instance, bespeaks the centrality of consumption style in contemporary First World cultural conceptualization. We are located in social space by all the ways we believe there are authoritative formulations in what is to be said about and thus experienced through what we use and consume. It looks very much like the standardization register effect, doesn't it, centered on aggressively inculcated conical structures of inoculation at every turn?

Well, I hope you see that semiotic analysis is very far from thinking about language as an inert representation of true-or-false states-of-affairs in the experienced or imagined world – and indeed it is! For it becomes clear that the cultural processes resulting in enregistered language are precisely of the same general semiotic type as the cultural processes in every other medium through which, by deployment in sign-using social contexts, we continuously make – but mostly come to be subjectivities made by – our cultural universes: our cultural universes of sign systems, the only kind there are.

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