



Kick-off Workshop “What’s up, Switzerland? Language, Individuals and Ideologies in Mobile Messaging” (University of Zurich, 10/06/2016)

The Indexical Order [of Graphic Variation]

Outline

1. Core concepts (*Indexicality, Enregisterment, Indexical Orders, Ideologies of Communication*)
2. *Implications* for linguistic analyses

1 Core concepts

1.1 *Indexicality*

Indexical Signs

“Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity, and not upon association by resemblance or upon intellectual operations.” (Peirce 1932: 172 [= CP 2.306])

Indexicality and Context

“Indexicality is just the principle of contextualization of linguistic and other signs-in-use, seen as a component of the meaning of the occurring sign-forms. Indexicality is revealed in the way that, by degrees, linguistic and other signs point the users of these signs to the specific enveloping conditions in which they use them.” (Silverstein 2009: 756)

“Signs point to context in two ways: indexical signs link users to contextual conditions of which users have knowledge, independent of the occurrence of the particular indexical sign at issue; indexicals also link users to contextual conditions that, for those users, come into being only as a function of the occurrence of the indexical sign at issue [...]. For its users, the occurrence of an indexical sign is an event that, like a mathematical function, maps a context configured in a certain way into a context now configured in perhaps another way.” (Silverstein 2009: 756)

Indexicality as Social Meaning

“Apart from referential meaning, acts of communication produce *indexical* meaning: social meaning, interpretive leads between what is said and the social occasion in which it is being produced.” (Blommaert 2005: 11)

“Through indexicality, every utterance tells something about the person who utters it – man, woman, young, old, educated, from a particular region, or belonging to a particular group, etc. – and about the kind of person we encounter – we make character judgements all the time, and labels such as

‘arrogant’, ‘serious’, ‘funny’, ‘self-conscious’, or ‘businesslike’ are based almost exclusively on how people communicate with us. Every utterance also tells us something about the utterance itself. Is it serious or banter? Is this an anecdote, a joke, an order, a request? Is the speaker sure/sincere/confident of what s/he says? What kind of relationship between the speaker and the hearer is articulated in this utterance – is this a friendly or a hostile utterance? And every utterance tells us something about the social context in which it is being produced: is this a formal or an informal occasion? Are things such as social class, gender, ethnicity, or professional status played out in the utterance? Are social roles reinforced or put up for negotiation? Are social rules being followed or broken? And so on. Indexical meaning is what anchors language usage firmly into social and cultural patterns.” (Blommaert 2005: 11–12)

Indexical Presupposition and Entailment

“Now in relation to micro-social context in the most general sense, any such socially conventional indexical (Legi)sign [=type] is dialectically balanced between indexical presupposition and indexical entailment. That is, its indexical meaning is composed of two aspects. One is its indexical ‘appropriateness-to’ at-that-point autonomously known or constituted contextual parameters: what is already established between interacting sign-users, at least implicitly, as ‘context’ to which the propriety of their usage at t_o appeals. The other is its indexical ‘effectiveness-in’ context: how contextual parameters seem to be brought into being—i. e., causally and hence existentially entailed—by the fact of usage of the indexical (Sin)sign [=token] itself.” (Silverstein 2003: 195)

“In general [...] the social effects mediated by speech are highly context-bound or **indexical** in character: they are evaluated in relation to the context or situation at hand, including those aspects of the situation created by what has already been said or done. Either an utterance is felt to be appropriate to the situation as already understood, or it alters the context in some recognizable way, transforming it into a situation of an entirely different kind.” (Agha 2007: 14; orig. emph.)

Indexicality as Reflexivity

“[...] jeder sprachliche Ausdruck in unserer Sprachbiographie [ist] durch den Kontext indiziert [...], in dem wir ihn kennengelernt haben – jenseits seiner in Wörterbüchern explizierten Bedeutung bedeutet/bezeichnet jeder Ausdruck eben immer auch reflexiv die Situation, deren Artikulation er ermöglicht (hat).” (Maas 1989: 168)

[any expression in our linguistic biography is indexed by the context in which we experienced it. Beyond the meaning as elaborated in dictionaries, thus, expressions always reflexively refer to the situation which enable/d their articulation. (transl. J. S.)]

“[...] die soziale Praxis, und damit eben auch jede Sprachpraxis, [ist] reflexiv [...]: die Form jeder Praxis, also die Form, in der die jeweilige Praxis artikuliert worden ist, kann selbst zum Zeichen für diese Praxis werden.” (Maas 1985: 73)

[the social practice, and hence any linguistic practice, is reflexive [...]: the form of any practice, i. e. the form in which it has been articulated, itself might become a sign for this practice. (transl. J. S.)]

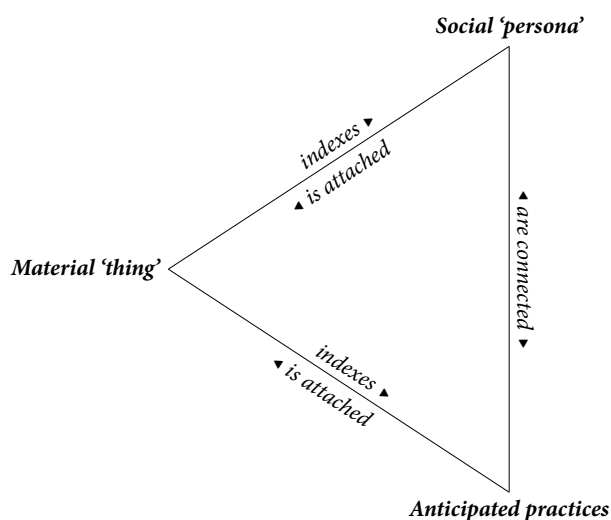
1.2 Enregisterment

Social Emblems, Registers, Enregisterment

“What is the rubric called ‘identity’ a name for? What are the things it names? It is a way of talking about the emblematic functions of signs in behavior. An *emblem* is a thing to which a social persona is attached. It involves three elements; (1) a perceivable thing, or diacritic; (2) a social persona; (3) someone for whom it is an emblem (i. e., someone who can read that persona from that thing). When a thing/diacritic is widely recognized as an emblem – when many people view it as marking the same social persona – I will say that it is enregistered as an emblem, or is an *enregistered emblem*. ‘Enregistered’ just means ‘widely recognized,’ and there are degrees of it.” (Agha 2007: 235)

“registers [are] culture-internal models of personhood linked to speech forms” (Agha 2007: 135)

“*Enregisterment*: processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and re-grouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population.” (Agha 2007: 81)



(Cf. Spitzmüller 2015)

1.3 Indexical Orders



- 1st-order *indexicality*: Linguistic forms that are linked to a specific sociodemographic context from the outside (e. g., by linguistic observation)
- 2nd-order *indexicality*: Linguistic forms that are linked to a specific sociodemographic context from the inside (i. e., by group members) and hence can be used as contextualization cues
- 3rd-order *indexicality*: Linguistic forms that are widely perceived as being ‘emblematic’ for a given sociodemographic context and that are thus often used in stylization [*connotation* sensu Hjelmslev ([1943] 1969: 114–125)] (Silverstein 2003)

Enregisterment as Higher-Order Indexicality

“The existence of registers, we can immediately see, is an aspect of the dialectical process of indexical order, in which the $n+1$ st-order indexicality depends on the existence of a cultural schema of enregisterment of forms perceived to be involved in n -th-order indexical meaningfulness; the forms as they are swept up in the $n+1$ st-order valorization become strongly presupposing indexes of that enregistered order, and therefore in particular of the ideological ethno-metapragmatics that constitutes it and endows its shibboleths with $n+1$ st-order indexical value.” (Silverstein 2003: 212–213)

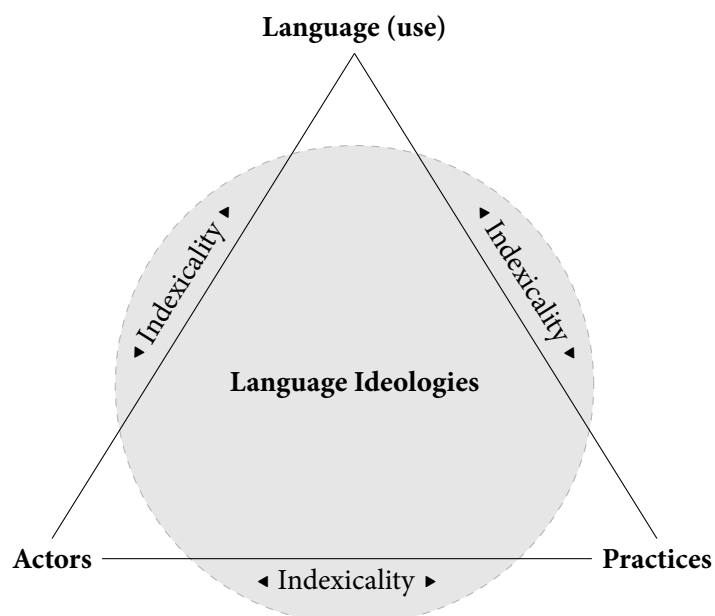
1.4 Ideologies of Communication

Language Ideologies

“I should clarify that ideologies about language, or linguistic ideologies, are any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” (Silverstein 1979: 193)

Graphic Ideologies

“[...] interactants not only display values and beliefs towards and by means of languages and varieties, but also towards and by means of the use of graphic elements. Alongside language ideologies, sociolinguistics thus also needs to consider what I shall call graphic ideologies here. [...] Drawing on Michael Silverstein’s (1979: 193) classic definition, graphic ideologies can provisionally be defined as any sets of beliefs about graphic communicative means articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived orders and communicative use of graphic elements. ‘Graphic communicative means’ thereby subsume all sorts of communicative means that use the visual channel and that are used in texts (this, in turn, excludes nonverbal visual phenomena such as gesture).” (Spitzmüller 2012: 256–257)

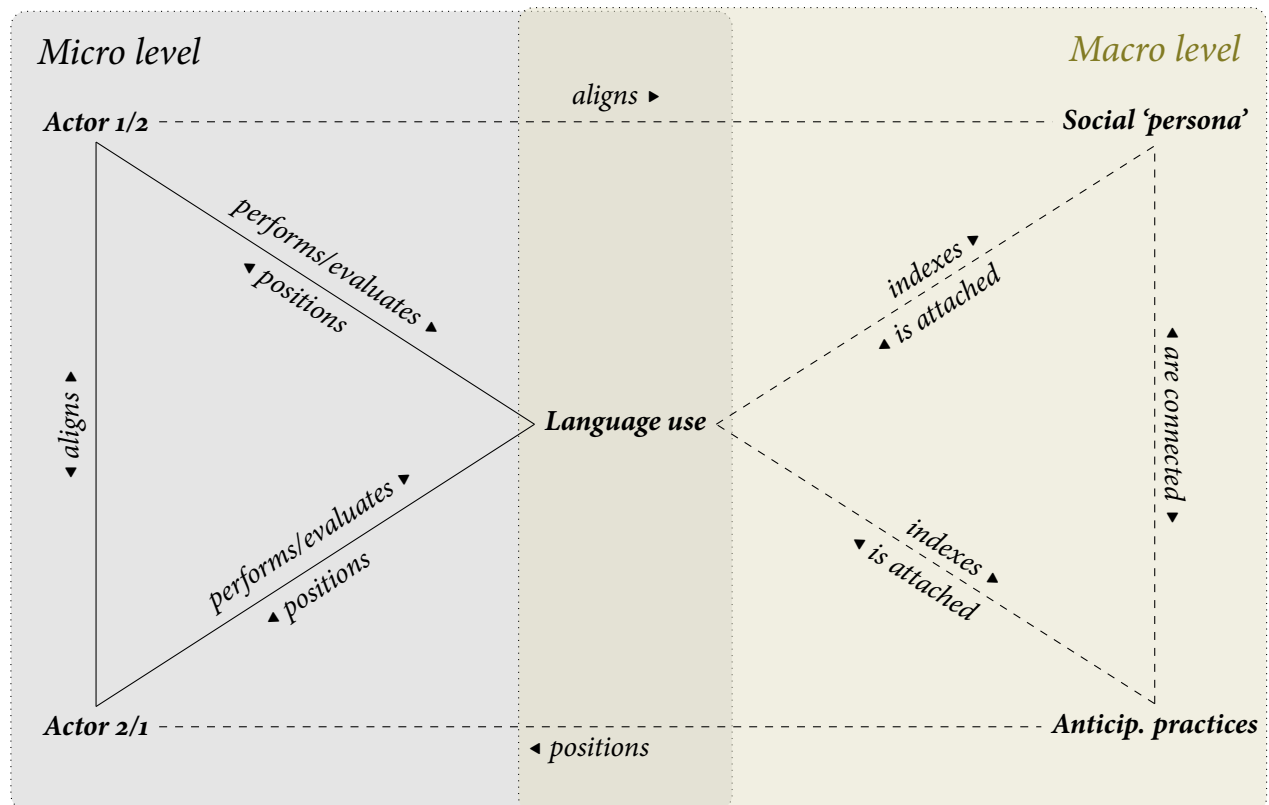


2 Implications

2.1 Orienting Function of Indexicality

“While performing language use, speakers [...] display orientations towards orders of indexicality – systematically reproduced, stratified meanings often called ‘norms’ or ‘rules’ of language and always typically associated with particular shapes of language (i. e. the ‘standard’, the prestige variety, the usual way of having conversation with my friends etc.). [...] Stratification is crucial here: we are dealing with systems that organise inequality via the attribution of different indexical meanings to language forms (e. g. by allocating ‘inferior’ value to the use of dialect varieties and ‘superior’ value to standard varieties in public speech).” (Blommaert 2005: 73)

2.2 Metapragmatic Positioning



(Cf. Du Bois 2007) (Cf. Spitzmüller 2015)

2.3 Indexical Orders and Levels of Analysis

1. Observable linguistic *practice* (*first-order indexicality*)
2. Reflexive *perception* (*second-order indexicality*)
3. Ideological *conceptualization* (*third-order indexicality*)

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