Formality and Informality in Communicative Events

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This paper examines the analytical utility of the concept of "formality" in social-cultural anthropology, particularly the ethnography of communication. A survey of literature indicates that "formality" actually incorporates several distinct descriptive dimensions that do not necessarily correlate. Separating these dimensions facilitates the comparison of social occasions, viewed in terms of their communicational structure. The occasions compared here are political meetings among Wolof (Senegal), Mursi (Ethiopia), and Ilongots (Philippines). It is suggested that formality in communicative events can serve not only the force of tradition or the coercive power of a political establishment, but also creativity and change. [formality, political meetings, ethnography of communication, sociolinguistics, situational analysis]

FORMALITY AND ITS OPPOSITE, INFORMALITY, are concepts frequently used in the ethnography of communication, in sociolinguistics, and in social anthropology to describe social occasions and the behavior associated with them. This paper examines the usefulness of those concepts in description and comparison. What might one mean by *formality,* in terms of observable characteristics of human social interaction? How might formality correspond to the cultural categories with which other peoples describe their own social occasions? Are the relevant distinctions best formulated as a dichotomy (as the contrast formality/informality might suggest), or as a continuum ranging between two poles, or as something more complex? Do whatever distinctions we decide are involved in formality/informality apply to every society? Will the same kinds of behavioral differences, or the same kinds of cultural categories, emerge everywhere?

I pose those questions in an attempt to further the development of a more precise analytical vocabulary, particularly for the ethnography of communication, which has perhaps invoked those concepts most often (although their relevance is not limited to that

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field). We now have a small number of case-history descriptions of ways of speaking in particular speech communities. But the terms in which those descriptions are made are often vague, lacking in explicit analytical content, too close to our own folk categories—inadequate for cross-cultural comparison, or even for description itself. Many anthropologists (and I include myself) have used terms such as formality without defining them or thinking about their definitions, simply assuming that the meanings are clear, when in fact the usages are vague and quite variable.

My object, then, is to give our usages more substance and to explore how they might then better serve cross-cultural comparison. I shall first consider what has been meant by formality and informality in the recent literature—that is, what various authors seem to have intended those terms to describe. The literature I draw upon comes mainly from sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking although some works in other fields will be cited as well. I shall then restate these various senses of formality in what I hope is a more explicit fashion and argue for the usefulness of the more detailed formulation for comparison, both within and between speech communities. A third section of the paper attempts a more extended comparison; it examines the formality of certain social occasions in two African societies, the Wolof and the Mursi, and compares them with a third society, the Ilongots of the northern Philippines. The fourth, and final, section asks whether the cover term formality remains useful at all.

The last section also considers some broader issues in social theory to which these terms and concepts relate. Actually, this is the larger object of the essay. Refining an analytical vocabulary is not simply a matter of improving the quality of empirical data; the terminology also reflects and incorporates more general assumptions about the nature of the social order. To discuss the descriptive and analytical vocabulary, therefore, is also to address those assumptions.

WHAT HAS BEEN MEANT BY FORMALITY IN THE LITERATURE

A look at some recent literature in sociolinguistics, the ethnography of speaking, and related fields (e.g., Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Sanches and Blount 1975; Fishman 1968; Bloch 1975; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1976; papers in *Language in Society; Working Papers in Sociolinguistics*) suggests three principal senses of formality, which are potentially confused with each other. These different senses have to do with whether the formality concerns properties of a communicative code, properties of the social setting in which a code is used, or properties of the analyst's description.

For instance, many authors use formality in the sense of an increased structuring and predictability of discourse. Here, formality is an aspect of code, such that the discourse is subject to extra rules or some greater elaboration of rules. In this vein, for example, Bricker (1974:388) and Gossen (1974:412), both writing on the Maya, and Fox (1974:73) who writes on the Rotinese, all describe "formal speech" as marked by special structuring—notably redundancy, and syntactic or semantic parallelism. Others have emphasized the predictability of structured discourse; they have argued that a "formal style" reduces the variability and spontaneity of speech (see Joos 1959 and Wolfson 1976). For example, Rubin's (1968) paper on bilingualism in Paraguay discusses formality in terms of limitations on the kinds of behaviors that are acceptable and on the amount of allowable variation (conceived as deviation from a norm).

Other authors use formality/informality as a way of describing the characteristics of a social situation, not necessarily the kind of code used in that situation. The relevant characteristics of the situation may have something to do with a prevailing affective tone, so that a formal situation requires a display of seriousness, politeness, and respect. For instance, Fischer (1972), describing ways of speaking among Trukese and Ponapeans,

discusses the use of "respect vocabulary" and "formal etiquette" as displays of politeness marking a formal situation. In Fishman's (1972:51) discussion of "lecturelike or formal situations," formality seems to be understood as the opposite of levity and intimacy. Ervin-Tripp (1972:235), too, relates formality to politeness and "the seriousness of such situations." Not all authors agree on just what formality means about a situation, however. Rubin (1968) lists formality as a situational variable separate from "degree of intimacy" and "degree of seriousness." For Labov (1972:113), formality of situational context is what makes a speaker pay increased attention to his or her speech.

Finally, many authors use formal to refer to a technical mode of description, in which the analyst's statement of the rules governing discourse is maximally explicit. Although most linguists apply this sense of formality (as "explicitness") only to the statements made by an outside observer,[1] some anthropologists also apply it to a people's own analysis of their social order. When Murphy (1971:159), for instance, speaks of "the formal, conscious models of society held by its members," he refers to those conceptions of society and behavior that informants can present in explicit verbal statements. For other anthropologists the explicit statements need not be verbal; see Leach's (1965:15-16) discussion of nonverbal ritual as a way in which social structure, or a people's ideas about social structure, are made explicit and "formally recognized."

These three senses of formality have often been merged or interrelated. For example, when formality is conceived as an aspect of social situations, it is common to extend the term to the linguistic varieties used in such situations, regardless of what those varieties happen to be like otherwise. Formal and informal pronouns are a case in point. Their formality lies in what they connote about a social setting in which they are appropriately used; they do not necessarily differ in the number of elaboration of syntactic (or other) rules governing their use.

Some authors go further, blending all three senses of formality and arguing that formal descriptions are most suitable (or only suitable) for the more structured discourse that occurs in ceremoniallike formal situations. Here, one wonders whether it is not just the use of the single term formal for a kind of description, a kind of discourse, and a kind of situation that makes the three appear necessarily related. Discourse that is spontaneous is still rule-governed, as linguists working with syntax have been at pains to point out; indeed, a major effort of linguists in the past 20 years has been to show how and why rules of grammar permit the utterance and comprehension of sentences that have never occurred before. Explicit formulation of those rules cannot, therefore, be limited to specially rigidified or redundant discourse. So, with Halliday (1964), I would seek to avoid confusing the technical sense of formality (explicitness of the observer's description) with senses that concern the behavior and conceptual systems of the people described.

Still, some ways of interrelating different senses of formality are potentially fruitful. Maurice Bloch (1975) has recently argued, for instance, that code structuring and situational formality are causally related, so that increased structuring of discourse necessarily brings about increased politeness and a greater display of respect for a traditional, normative social order (and perhaps a coercive political establishment). That argument has various antecedents in social anthropology, although they are less clearly articulated and do not give particular attention to speech. One such forerunner is Durkheim's conception of ritual, as expressing and confirming the solidarity of the group and constraining the individual to conformity. A related matter, too, is the widespread view in structural-functional anthropology that connects structure with norm and tradition, and with order, coherence, and stability—a view of structure as essentially static.

Bloch's argument is an important one and I shall return to it later. Now, however, the point is that these basic questions about structure and action in discourse can be addressed only if the relevant variables are first disentangled. Arguments that do so (such as

Bloch's) are much more useful than those that merely slide from one sense of formality to another, leaving implicit the connection between formal situations and frozen, rigidified speech (or other behavior).

FOUR ASPECTS OF FORMALITY THAT APPLY CROSS-CULTURALLY

Leaving aside questions of causal relationship for now, I will restate, in a more detailed way, what considerations one may have in mind when describing social occasions as formal or informal. A search of some available ethnographic evidence, inadequate as it is for the purpose—and filtered as it is through ethnographers' descriptive vocabularies—suggests that the discourse aspect and the situational aspect of formality should be broken down into finer distinctions. Four different aspects of formality emerge that seem to apply to a wide variety of speech communities, perhaps to all. The four kinds of formality often co-occur in the same social occasion though not always (hence their presentation as separate variables).

Increased Code Structuring

This aspect of formality concerns the addition of extra rules or conventions to the codes that organize behavior in a social setting. Although I focus on the linguistic, any code (such as dress, gesture, or spatial organization) can, of course, be subject to degrees of structuring. It is important to recognize, however, that a social occasion involves many codes that operate at once, and the degrees of structuring that they variously display may differ. Even within the linguistic code one should distinguish among the various levels of linguistic organization that may be subject to the additional or elaborated structuring, such as intonation (including pitch contour, meter, loudness, and speed of talk), phonology, syntax, the use of particular sets of lexical items, fixed-text sequences, and turn taking. Increased structuring need not affect all these aspects of linguistic organization equally or at the same time.[2] Some speech events formalize different parts of the linguistic system and so cannot be lined up on a simple continuum from informality to formality.

For instance, among the Wolof[3] there are two distinct speech events, *woy* ("praise-singing") and *xaxaar* ("insult sessions"), which differ from ordinary conversation in their structuring of intonational patterns (among other things). But different aspects of intonation are affected. In praise-singing, the pitch contour of utterances is more structured than in ordinary talk but meter remains relatively loose; in insult sessions, meter is strictly regulated (with drum accompaniment), while pitch remains loose. It would be impossible to say that one form of discourse is more formalized than the other, although one could say that both are more formalized than ordinary conversation (and less formalized than some types of religious singing, which structure both pitch and rhythm).

Similarly, among the Yoruba, two speech events, both associated with the Iwi Egungun cult celebrations, formalize different aspects of the discourse (Davis 1976). In one event, speakers use highly structured utterances, often fixed texts, on conventional topics, whereas turn taking among speakers is unpredictable, with much of the interest for the audience residing in the speakers' competition for the floor. In the other type of speech event, turn taking is quite strictly regulated (as though in a play), but the topics can be creative and novel. The formalization of discourse here cannot be thought of as just a progressive rigidifying and restriction on creative potential. Instead, what is involved is a focusing of creativity onto a certain aspect of talk, which is highlighted because other aspects are redundant and predictable.

Code Consistency

A second kind of formalization involves co-occurrence rules. At many different levels of linguistic organization and in other avenues of communicative expression as well, speakers select from among alternatives that have contrasting social significance. Co-occurrence rules provide for the extent to which these choices must be consistent. In the kinds of discourse that ethnographers have labeled more formal, consistency of choices (in terms of their social significance) seems to be greater than in ordinary conversation, where speakers may be able to recombine variants to achieve special effects.

For example, among the Wolof, differences of pitch, loudness, and speed of talk (as well as other discourse features) may connote something about the speaker's social rank: high pitch, high volume, and high speed all suggest low social rank, while low pitch, low volume, and a laconic slowness suggest high social rank. Sometimes a speaker can mix choices (e.g., high pitch + low volume + low speed seems to indicate baby talk, used by adults to address infants; for some other mixes and their uses, see Irvine 1974); but in some kinds of discourse—which one might call the more formal—choices for each discourse feature are consistent in their social connotations.

Another example comes from Friedrich's (1972) paper on Russian pronouns. Friedrich notes that usage of the second-person pronouns *ty* and *vy* (for singular addressee) can be consistent or inconsistent with facial expressions. More formal situations are characterized by greater consistency—as opposed to "ironic" uses that combine the pronoun *vy* (usually called the formal pronoun) with a contemptuous expression ("paralinguistic *ty*"). Similarly, Jackson (1974:63) indicates that among the Vaupés Indians, "language-mixing"—for example, the use of Tuyuka words in a conversation that is syntactically Bará (and Bará in the rest of the lexicon)—is likely to occur only in informal discourse. In settings that she calls "more formal," co-occurrence rules are stricter so that the social connotations of lexicon and syntax are consistent (connotations of longhouse and descent-unit identity).

Because many authors describe co-occurrence violations with terms such as *irony, levity, humor,* or *local color,* it appears that some of what is meant by the "seriousness" of formal situations is actually a matter of behavioral consistency and adherence to a set of co-occurrence rules that apply to these situations and not to others. As Ervin-Tripp remarks (1972:235), co-occurrence rules are especially strict in formal styles of discourse "because of the seriousness of such situations."

But why should co-occurrence rules and "seriousness" be linked? Perhaps the clue lies in the fact that code-switching and code inconsistencies are so often used as distancing devices—ways of setting off a quotation, making a parenthetic aside, mimicking someone, or enabling a speaker to comment on his or her own behavior (see Goffman 1961; Irvine 1974; and the code-switching literature summarized in Timm 1975). By code inconsistency the speaker can detach himself from the social persona implied by one type of usage and suggest that that persona is not to be taken quite "for real"; the speaker has another social persona as well. Code inconsistency, then, may be a process of framing or undercutting one message with another that qualifies it and indicates that in some sense, or from some point of view, it doesn't really count (cf. Bateson 1972; Goffman 1961, 1974). In contrast, the code-consistent message has to count; it has to be taken "seriously" because no alternative message or social persona is provided. Each aspect of the speaker's behavior shows the same kind and degree of involvement in the situation.[4]

Invoking Positional Identities

A third aspect of formality has to do with the social identities of participants in a social gathering. More a property of the situation than of code *per se,* it concerns which social identity (of the many that an individual might have) is invoked on a particular kind of occasion. Formal occasions invoke positional and public, rather than personal, identities (to use a term proposed by Mead [1937] and applied to speech events by Hymes [1972]).[5] Public, positional identities are part of a structured set likely to be labeled and widely recognized in a society (that is, it is widely recognized that the set of identities exists and that persons X, Y, and Z have them). Personal identities, on the other hand, are individualized and depend more on the particular history of an individual's interactions. They are perhaps less likely to be explicitly recognized or labeled and less likely to be common knowledge in the community at large.

This aspect of formality is involved in what many authors have interpreted as the formal event's emphasis on social distance (as opposed to intimacy) and respect (for an established order of social positions and identities). For example, Albert (1972), writing on the Burundi, distinguishes two speech events that she calls formal and informal visiting. Formal visiting requires an open acknowledgment of differences in social rank, and it usually occurs between persons whose positions are clearly ranked in a publicly known, apparently indisputable sense (such as feudal lord and vassal). Formal visiting is characterized by other aspects of formality as well: special structuring and planning of the discourse; use of formulas; special stance; and "seriousness" (which I take to imply some constraints on topic, intonation, facial expressions, and gestures, and consistency of these with social rank).

Because positional identities and formal (structured) discourse go together in the example just cited, one might suppose that this type of social identity is necessarily invoked by the structuring of discourse and need not be considered an independent variable. But another part of Albert's description suggests otherwise. Here, Albert discusses a speech event she calls "semiformalized quarreling," a "symbolic fight" between persons who represent the bride's and groom's families at a wedding. It seems that the major factor contrasting "semiformalized quarreling" with other (unformalized) quarreling is that the identities of the participants are positional rather than personal. True, enough information is not really given to know whether there are also differences in the organization of discourse in these two kinds of quarrels. But Albert's statement that there is always a great danger that the symbolic fight might become a real fight suggests that the major difference between them lies less in the organization of the discourse than in whether it applies to personal identities.

Of course, societies can be compared as to what social identities are structured in this positional (or formal) sense; and, within a society, communicative events can be compared as to which positional sets are invoked and the scope of the social relations organized in them. For instance, among the Wolof, kinship positions, although publicly known, organize relations among a smaller group of persons than do society-wide identities, such as caste. An individual Wolof man is patrilateral cross-cousin to only a certain group of people, and that identity is relevant only to his interaction with them, whereas his caste identity is relevant to his interaction with everyone. Whether the identities invoked in a Wolof communicative event are society-wide or not has consequences for many aspects of the participants' behavior. It is convenient to say that the wider, or more public, the scope of the social identities invoked on a particular occasion, the more formal the occasion is, in this third sense of the term.

Emergence of a Central Situational Focus

A fourth aspect of formality concerns the ways in which a main focus of attention—a dominant mutual engagement that encompasses all persons present (see Goffman 1963:164)—is differentiated from side involvements. Probably all conversations display this differentiation to some extent. Jefferson (1972) shows that even ordinary conversations between two persons clearly mark off certain sets of utterances as side sequences and distinguish them from the main, or focal, sequence. When a social gathering has a larger number of participants, however, it may or may not be organized around a central focus of attention that engages, or might engage, the whole group. An American cocktail party, for example, is usually decentralized, with many small groups whose conversations are not meant to concern the gathering as a whole; but a lecture is centralized even if members of the audience mutter asides to each other during the lecturer's performance.

The emergence of a central focus of attention for a social gathering parallels the process of focusing mentioned above for aspects of code. Participation in the central, focal activity is regulated and structured in special ways. For instance, it may be that only certain persons have the right to speak or act in the main sequence, with others restricted to the side sequences. In the main sequence, speech is governed by constraints on topic, continuity, and relevance that do not apply (or not to the same extent) in the side sequences (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1972:243).

This focusing process can be seen at work in the organization of events at a Wolof naming-day ceremony. Much of the ceremony involves decentralized participation: the guests sit in small groups, chatting and eating. At various points, however, a *griot* (praise-singer) may start shouting bits of praise-poems in an effort to capture the attention of the crowd and establish a focus of attention for his performance. If he succeeds, the situation changes character, altering the patterns of movement and talk for all participants, and bringing caste identities (rather than more personal relations) into the foreground.

Similarly, David Turton (1975), in his writing on the Mursi of southern Ethiopia, distinguishes among three kinds of political speech events according to criteria that seem to resemble this focusing process. Turton calls the difference between "chatting," "discussion," and "debate" in Mursi society a difference in "degree of formality": what the more formal events entail is a process of setting off a single central (onstage) speaker from his audience, by spatial arrangements and verbal cues. Only men of certain age-grades may speak in the main (focal) sequence; other persons are relegated to the audience or to side sequences.[6] In this way, central activities and central actors are differentiated from peripheral activities and actors.

For any society, that only certain kinds of activities and actors will be able to command center stage can be expected. At the least, the activities must be ones that all participants recognize as relevant to them. Because these distinctions are made by the participants themselves in the ways they direct their attention and in the ways they do or do not perform, the organization of a formal occasion must reflect ideas that the participants hold about their own social life. In this sense a people's own analysis of its social order is intrinsic to the emergence of a central situational focus, the fourth aspect of formality, just as it was intrinsic to the explicit labels for, and public knowledge of, positional identities.

A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON: WOLOF, MURSI, AND ILONGOT POLITICAL MEETINGS

I have suggested that these four aspects of formality may apply universally—that all speech communities may have social occasions that show different degrees of formality

according to each of these criteria or combinations of them. These four aspects of formality are useful for comparing communicative events within a given sociocultural system, as the previous examples are meant to illustrate. But how might communities differ with respect to formality and informality in social occasions? For cross-cultural comparison both the similarities and the differences among societies need to be seen in some systematic fashion. Using the definitions of formality here proposed, one can say that speech communities may differ: (a) in the specific details of each variable or aspect of formality (e.g., what social identities are available, or precisely which linguistic phenomena are subject to additional structuring?); (b) in the ways the four aspects of formality combine or are interdependent; (c) in additional factors that correlate with formality in a given community (that is, when formality in one or all aspects is greatest, what other characteristics will the social occasion display in that community?).

To show how such differences might work and what kinds of factors might explain them, I shall compare in more detail two societies, the Wolof and the Mursi (from Turton 1975), with respect to the organization of political discourse and action. Each of these African societies has special speech events concerned with politics, including some events that are more formal than others. In other respects the two societies are quite different. The Wolof have a large-scale, complex organization of castes and centralized political authority, with a strong emphasis on social rank and inequality. The Mursi are a small-scale society, with an acephalous political system, and recognize no fundamental differences in rank other than those based on sex and age.

The comparison between Wolof and Mursi will be supplemented with a comparison with a third society, the Ilongots of the northern Philippines (from Rosaldo 1973), that shows certain resemblances to each of the other two. This part of the discussion will allow me to return to some earlier questions about relations between formality and political coercion.

Wolof and Mursi Political Speech Events

Both the Wolof and the Mursi distinguish more formal political "discussions" or "meetings" (*methe* in Mursi, *ndaje* in Wolof) from casual "chat" about political topics. The more formal events contrast with the chats in all four of the ways that are being discussed.

First, the more formal events show a greater degree of structuring, both in spatial arrangements and in the discourse. Spatially, the Wolof participants are arranged according to rank; within this arrangement the speaker in the focal sequence stands (near the center) while others sit (or stand around the sidelines). The Mursi participants are spatially arranged by age-grades, with the focal speaker standing separately and pacing back and forth. In the discourse, in both societies each speaker opens with conventional phrases. Among the Wolof there are also conventional interjections by griots in the audience, and sometimes special repetitions by griots acting as spokesmen for high-caste speakers.

The more formal events also show greater consistency in the selection among alternative forms in all communicative modes. Among the Wolof, a speaker's movements, gestures, intonation, amount of repetition, and degree of syntactic elaboration are all consistent with his social rank, particularly his caste (and so will differ according to whether he is a griot or a noble, for instance), whereas in informal chatting he might vary one or more of these modes for special purposes. Among the Mursi, although Turton gives few details, it appears that the successful speaker is one who performs in a manner fully consistent with the social image of a wise elder. The speaker's movements should be forceful but he should not show "excitement," repetitiousness, or "unintelligible" enun-

ciation—from which I infer that there are co-occurring constraints on gesture and facial expression, intonation, rapidity of speech, choice of phonological variants, and the organization of his discourse.

In the more formal events in both societies there is a single main focal sequence, in which participation is specially regulated: only certain persons really have the right to speak "on stage," and that right has to do with their publicly recognized social identities. Among the Mursi, these positional identities involve sex and membership in particular age-grades; among the Wolof, they involve generation, caste, and tenure of labeled political offices.

There are, however, some clear differences between formal meetings of the Wolof and of the Mursi, differences that concern the organization and nature of participation among those persons who have the right to speak onstage. One difference lies in the regulation of turn taking. In Wolof meetings turn taking is relatively highly structured; the order of speakers may be announced at the beginning, or there may be a person who acts as a master of ceremonies. That is, there is usually one person who has the right to control the order of speakers in the focal sequence. In Mursi meetings, however, speakers compete for turns, and interruptions are frequent. A speaker may not be able to finish what he wants to say before the audience or another speaker interrupts him.

Another contrast concerns the nature of the speaking roles themselves. Among the Wolof, the more formal a speech event is (according to any of the four criteria, and depending on whether or not the occasion is explicitly concerned with politics), the more likely it is that speaking roles will divide into complementary sets, associated with high and low social rank. That is, even among those who participate in the main sequence of discourse, participation is differentiated into two asymmetric roles. All levels of linguistic organization show this differentiation. There will always be some participants who speak louder, at higher pitch, with more repetitive and more emphatic constructions (usages that connote low social rank), while other participants speak more softly, at lower pitch, with fewer emphatic constructions, and so on (usages that connote high social rank). This asymmetry of speaking roles is always a concomitant of formality in Wolof speech events. But I call it a concomitant because one would not want to say it is part of a *definition* of formality that might apply cross-culturally, since the Mursi speaking roles, for instance, seem to be more symmetrical. Among the Mursi there are no structured differences among speaking roles at political meetings. Even the behavioral differences between speaker and audience are fewer than among the Wolof because the Mursi audience interrupts and interjects loud comments in a way that the Wolof audience would not.

What aspects of social or political organization, which (as has been noted) are quite different for the two peoples, might be reflected in the differing organization of their formal speech events? One possible explanation for the Wolof asymmetry of speaking roles is that Wolof society shows a greater degree of role differentiation altogether. But that is not a sufficient explanation for a contrast in speech-event organization that is qualitative, not quantitative (asymmetry vs. symmetry, not really as a matter of degree). Rather, I think the explanation lies in the Wolof preoccupation with rank and hierarchy, as opposed to the Mursi outlook, which is more egalitarian—the only structured inequalities being sex and age. The rural Wolof view society as composed of complementary unequal ranks where the upper has a natural right to command the lower.[8] Political decisions are culturally seen as initiated and decreed from above, by a recognized leader; the role of followers is only to advise and consent.

As a result, Wolof village political meetings are convened not for the purpose of decision making but for announcing decisions made from above and answering questions about them. The complementarity of ranks is the source of the asymmetrical speaking roles; the centralization and autocracy of political authority is the source of the master of

ceremonies's right to determine the order of speakers. There is no competition among speakers for the opportunity to express opinions, since the expression of opinions and counterarguments is not the purpose of the meeting. Among the Wolof the expression of opinion and the exercise of debate go on in private, as does the leader's decision-making process.

Mursi political meetings, in contrast, are convened for the express purpose of decision making, by consensus, about future collective action. Each man of sufficient age has an equal right to participate in the consensus and to try to influence what consensus will be reached.

From the differences between Wolof and Mursi formal political meetings, however, it is not logical to conclude that political decision making is *actually* despotic among the Wolof and democratic among the Mursi. Wolof leaders need consensus support for their decisions, or their followers may fail to cooperate or may abandon them for other leaders. Conversely, for the Mursi, Turton notes that the decisions arrived at in formal meetings are sometimes such foregone conclusions that they were not reached during the course of the meeting at all. Private lobbying is as much a factor in some Mursi decisions as it is in the Wolof decision-making process.[9]

The differences between Wolof and Mursi formal political meetings do not reflect differences in the actual decision-making process so much as they reflect contrasts between what can be shown onstage and what happens offstage. The formality of the meetings has to do with what can be focused upon publicly; and it is in this sense that formality can often connote a social order, or forms of social action, that is publicly recognized and considered legitimate (regardless of whether political power actually operates through that public, formal social order or not). The organization of these meetings reflects political ideology, therefore, but it does not necessarily reflect political actuality.

Ilongot Political Meetings

We have seen that the Wolof and Mursi political meetings are both more formal, in all respects, than ordinary conversation about political matters. But is one *kind* of meeting more formal than the other? If so, does the more formal kind place greater restrictions on its participants' political freedom, as Bloch (1975) suggests? These questions are addressed more easily by turning from the Wolof and Mursi to a third society, the Ilongots of the northern Philippines (as described by Rosaldo 1973), among whom both kinds of meetings are found. One Ilongot subgroup holds political meetings that, in certain ways resemble the Mursi *methe;* another subgroup holds meetings that resemble the Wolof *ndaje.* Many aspects of language and cultural context remain the same for both Ilongot subgroups, however. For this reason, whatever difference the form of the meeting might make should emerge more clearly than it did in the initial comparison of Wolof and Mursi.

According to Rosaldo, the Ilongots are an acephalous, egalitarian society in the process of being incorporated into a larger Philippine national polity that is both more hierarchical and more authoritarian. This process has not affected all Ilongot communities equally, however; it has gone much further among coastal communities than it has inland. Ilongots are divided, therefore, into two subgroups, the "modern" and the "traditional," which contrast in a number of ways (and see themselves as distinct). Among other things, the two subgroups differ in their conceptions of how a political meeting should be organized. Like the Mursi, traditional Ilongots hold meetings in which there is no master of ceremonies. Speakers compete for the floor and interrupt each other frequently. Like the Mursi, too, speaking roles are relatively undifferentiated. Although some men "speak for" others, no one is bound by what another says, and the relevant parties may also speak for themselves. Modern Ilongots, on the other hand, disapprove of in-

terruptions. In their meetings a master of ceremonies calls on speakers one by one; and the people he calls on are "captains," who speak on behalf of their "soldiers" (men from their respective localities). The soliders, who remain silent, are considered bound to uphold what their captain says. In the regulation of turn taking and differentiation of complementary behavioral roles, therefore, modern Ilongot meetings have come to resemble the Wolof meetings described above.

As among the Wolof, this centralized type of meeting coincides, for the modern Ilongots, with a new ideological emphasis on rank and authority. The connection is surely not accidental. In fact, one of the interesting things about the Ilongot example is its implication that the kinds of political meetings seen among the Wolof and Mursi actually correspond to two very basic kinds of political ideology that are widely found in societies around the world.[10]

But which kind of meeting is more formal? The modern Ilongot meeting has a more centralized focus of attention: only one person speaks at a time, and the differentiation of central from peripheral participants is apparently maintained throughout, unlike the traditional meeting (Rosaldo 1973:204–205). In one sense, therefore, the modern meeting seems to be the more formal (that is, in terms of the fourth aspect of formality listed in this article). Yet, the opposite is suggested by linguistic aspects of the discourse. Oratory in traditional meetings displays much more linguistic elaboration and redundancy, such as repetitions of utterances and parts of utterances, reduplicative constructions, formulaic expressions, and so on. Modern Ilongot oratory lacks those elaborations although it does have a few stylistic conventions of its own. So, in terms of linguistic structuring (the first aspect of formality), the traditional meeting is the more formal. The Ilongots themselves perhaps recognize that linguistic elaboration when they call modern oratory "straight speech" and traditional oratory "crooked speech." From an analytical perspective, therefore, one could not say that one type of meeting is altogether "more formal" than the other. The two are just formalized in different ways. For the Ilongots, at least, the two ways seem to be complementary (and hence, mutually exclusive). Rosaldo suggests (1973:220) that much of the linguistic elaboration and redundancy in traditional oratory is a matter of maintaining continuity and relevance in the central sequence of utterances, and keeping that sequence distinct from peripheral discourse. Linguistic elaboration, in other words, is a way of organizing speakers' access to the floor, in the absence of a master of ceremonies; it is his functional equivalent in this respect, and one would not expect to find both extreme linguistic elaboration and extreme centralization in the same communicative event.

Because the various aspects of formality are not maximized on the same social occasions, formality/informality is not a single continuum, at least not for the Ilongots. Therefore, if one type of meeting somehow restricts the political freedom of its participants more than the other, it is not formality in general that brings restrictions, but only one aspect of formality (either centralization of attention or increased structuring of code). That the more elaborated, redundant oratorical style is found, among the Ilongots, in the less authoritarian political system suggests that increased code structuring (the first aspect of formality) is not necessarily an instrument of coercion manipulated by a political leadership. As Rosaldo comments (1973:222), "Linguistic elaboration, and a reflective interest in rhetoric, belongs to societies in which no one can command another's interest or attention, let alone enforce his compliance." In contrast, the centralization of attention in modern Ilongot meetings, with a master of ceremonies who not only prevents interruptions but determines which persons may be central speakers and which only peripheral, is the more restrictive of political expression, at least for some participants. Defined as peripheral, the Ilongot "soldiers" are not allowed to speak in the meeting at all. Their opportunities for creative statement are virtually nil.

Yet, what the Ilongot "soldier" can or cannot do onstage in the meeting tells little about what he might do offstage. That the captain speaks for his men does not show whether he is a tyrant or a mere figurehead. As among the Wolof and Mursi, the formal organization of political meetings among the Ilongots is more directly related to political ideology—conscious models of the way society ought to work, as held by its members—than to the way political decisions are actually made. It is not clear, therefore, that either kind of meeting has a coercive effect on its participants in the long run, although the modern Ilongot meeting does seem to restrict some participants' opportunities for creative expression during the meeting itself.

In sum, the argument that formalizing a social occasion reduces its participants' political freedom can hold true only in limited ways. (a) Only certain aspects of formality (particularly the fourth, centralization of attention) are relevant to it; structuring of the linguistic aspects of the discourse (the first aspect of formality) is less relevant. (b) Not all participants are necessarily affected. (c) Possibly, formalization is coercive only if a society's political ideology, which the formal meeting's organization expresses, is authoritarian. (d) Finally, any restrictions on participation in formal meetings do not necessarily apply to other contexts, which may be the ones where political decision making actually occurs and where political freedom is, therefore, more at issue.

"FORMALITY" AS A CONCEPT IN SOCIAL THEORY

Formality and Social Stasis

The foregoing discussion has concerned relations between formality (of social occasions) and political coercion. But there remains a broader kind of constraint: the force of tradition. Does formalizing a social occasion inevitably tend to reinforce a normative, traditional social order (regardless of whether that tradition prescribes an authoritarian political leadership)? Does formality always imply rigidity, stability, or conservatism?

To address those questions, the various aspects of formality must be distinguished from each other, since formality represents not just one, but several dimensions along which social occasions can vary. Not all aspects of formalization necessarily concern the public social order at all. The structured discourse of poetry, for instance, does not automatically have a special relationship to the social establishment. It need not have a public audience or a public subject matter. Nor do the ways in which the discourse in poetry is structured necessarily have to be traditional ways. If formality in speech events reflects, and in that sense supports, a traditional social system, it is the other aspects of formality that do so, not the structuring of discourse in itself. With the other three aspects of formality, the relation to an established public social system is more evident, since the social occasions that could be called formal in these respects would be those that invoke social identities and modes of participation that are publicly recognized and considered appropriate.

Certainly, these occasions concern the publicly known social system; they may even call attention to it. What is not quite so clear is whether they therefore *reinforce* it. By mentioning a thesis, for instance, one does in a certain sense support it, more than if it were allowed to fall into oblivion; but mentioning it does not mean that one agrees with it. Calling attention to something can also be a way of altering it—as when a rite of passage calls attention to an individual's social identity in order to transform it into another. Some anthropologists have argued that it is the very formality of such ritual occasions, which minimize personal histories and focus on the relevant social relationships, that makes the creative transformation possible (see, for example, Douglas 1966:77-79).[11]

Now, it might be objected that the transformation of social identities that goes on in a rite of passage, although a kind of creativity, is a superficial kind in that it operates only *within* a traditional system. It is not the same thing as change in that system, to which formalization might still be inimical. But formalization can be thought inimical to change only if one has a certain view of the social system to which formal occasions call attention—a view that the social system is monolithic, that the structure of a society prevents its members from conceiving of alternatives, and that all members of society have exactly identical conceptions of the social order. If members' political ideologies, for instance, differ, there can scarcely be a situation in which such differences become more apparent than in formal meetings whose organization, as we saw for the Wolof, Mursi, and Ilongot, is ideologically based. This ideological clash is just what happens among the Ilongots, when people from coastal ("modern") communities and people from inland ("traditional") communities have to hold joint meetings. When, on such an occasion, the Ilongots found they did not agree on how a meeting should be run, assumptions about how and why meetings are organized could not be left unquestioned. They had to be discussed (and, one gathers, some accommodation reached; see Rosaldo 1973:219). That is, the process of formalization forces the recognition of conflicting ideas and in so doing may impel their change. (There is also, of course, the inverse situation, in which a group with internal conflicts tries to avoid holding the formal meetings that might oblige those conflicts to be faced. Stability and communal harmony are thus achieved by *not* formalizing. See, e.g., the Israeli *moshav* described by Abarbanel 1975:152.)

The Ilongot example represents an acculturative situation, where the ideational conflict comes about because new ideas are introduced from outside. I do not want to suggest, however, that outside influence is necessary before formalization can induce change. To the extent that ideas about the social order vary according to the social position of those who hold them, any social system will generate differences of opinion, and that is quite apart from the possibility that the ideas themselves might be ambiguous, contradictory, or indeterminate. The point is that formalization does not automatically support stability and conservatism unless the social relations it articulates are fully agreed on by everyone and admit no alternatives. Whether that is the case depends on the particular social relations and on the cultural system in question; it is not implicit in the analytical concept of formality itself.[12]

Is "Formality" Useful as a Cover Term?

The various aspects of formality distinguished in this paper concern quite different kinds of social phenomena. Some concern properties of code while others concern properties of a social situation; some focus on observable behavior while others invoke the conceptual categories of social actors. For purposes of description and analysis, all such matters can and should be considered separately. But their separation in a research strategy does not mean that they are all fully independent variables. In fact, they must be interdependent, to the extent that cultural definitions of social situations and social identities must have a behavioral content.

This interdependence is something that social actors can exploit by altering their behavior to bring about a redefinition of the situation and of the identities that are relevant to it. The Wolof griot (praise-singer) who tries to capture the guests' attention at a naming-day ceremony illustrates this process (see the section on the emergence of a central situational focus). If he succeeds in attracting the attention of all the guests, a situation that began as a multifocused gathering coalesces into a single all-encompassing engagement; and, in consequence, positional identities whose scopes are wide enough to include all persons present will be invoked. Normally, caste identities are the relevant

ones, especially since the griot is acting in accordance with his own caste specialization. Because high-caste persons in general owe largesse to griots, invoking caste identities places high-caste guests under obligation to reward the praise-singer even if the words of his performance do not mention them. (Some high-caste Wolof report that in the hope that they will not have to pay, they pretend not to notice the griot unless he already has a large audience.)

In this example, the Wolof naming-day ceremony, the third aspect of formality (positional identities) is entailed by the fourth (emergence of a centralized situational focus). In fact, it is reasonable to suppose that centralization is always likely to entail positional identities if a large number of persons are present, because positional identities are the ones that are widely recognized and that organize people on a systematic and broad scale. Similarly, the third aspect of formality is also entailed by the second (code consistency), because the sociolinguistic variants among which the speaker selects usually express categorical, not individual, identities. Complete code consistency would mean, for instance, that a Wolof man who uses an intonational pattern associated with griots (extreme speed, loudness, high pitch) will consistently express griot identity in all other aspects of his behavior as well (syntax, posture, movements, and so on). Little scope would be left for individuality.

Yet, if there are certain ways in which the various aspects of formality are interdependent, there are other ways in which they are not. In the first place, the entailments just mentioned do not seem to be reversible. Thus no. 4 entails no. 3, but no. 3 does not have to entail no. 4. The griot can invoke caste identities even when privately addressing a single high-caste individual, and he can do so simply by declaring, "I am a griot." Although some of his intonational and gestural usages must be consistent with this statement if it is not to sound like a joke, not all of them need be. For instance, his speed of talk might be slow, unlike the rapid tempo normally associated with griots. By such means he can distance himself enough from the griot role to make some personal comment on it, even if he still intends caste identities to define the situation and to suggest his interlocutor's course of action.

Finally, there is no intrinsic reason why code consistency, positional identities, or centralization (no. 2, 3, or 4) should entail a change in the degree of structuring to which a code is subjected (criterion no. 1) or vice versa. Linguistic aspects of discourse in poetry are structured, for instance, but a poem's subject matter can be entirely private. Moreover, code switches and code inconsistencies in poetry are frequent and can contribute significantly to the poem's special effect. The first aspect of formality seems, therefore, to be independent of the other three; and this was also suggested by the Ilongot example, in which the same event cannot maximize both linguistic structuring (formality no. 1) and centralization (formality no. 4).

Is there, after all this, any sense in which all four aspects of formality are related—a sense in which *formality* remains useful as a cover term? I think there is, but it is so general that it is not very useful as an analytic tool. The only thing all four criteria have in common is that all of them concern the degree to which a social occasion is systematically organized. This sense of formality as "degree of organization" has some resemblance to Goffman's (1963:199) definition of formality/informality as "tightness"/"looseness." The thrust of my argument, however, is that being organized in one way does not necessarily mean being organized in other ways to the same degree or at the same time. In fact, the various ways in which a communicative event is organizable may be complementary or even antithetical, rather than additive.

I suspect, therefore, that it is appropriate in a few instances to speak of "formality" generally without specifying more precisely what one has in mind. Otherwise, there is too great a risk of mistaking one kind of formality for another or assuming that kinds of for-

mality are really the same. That an ordinary English word has multiple meanings—as we have seen in its multiple uses in the sociolinguistic literature—does not make those meanings essentially homogeneous, nor should we unwittingly elevate this word's polysemy to a social theory. As Leach has remarked (1961:27), "We anthropologists . . . must reexamine basic premises and realize that English language patterns of thought are not a necessary model for the whole of human society."

NOTES

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[1] The application is made except insofar as the linguist acts as his or her own informant and so combines the roles of observer and subject.

[2] Actually, to equate the relevant aspects of code structuring with addition of or elaboration of existing rules presents some problems. The notion seems to apply well enough to examples such as the Wolof insult sessions described in the section *Increased Code Structuring,* because speech rhythms in those sessions must not only conform to the usual metric principles of stress and length in ordinary speech but be further organized to fit a precise and repetitive drum rhythm. But it is not clear that redundancies of meter, rhyme, or syntactic parallelism in poetry should always be interpreted in terms of addition of rules. For instance, Sherzer's (1974) description of Cuna congress chants proposes that syntactic parallelism and redundancy are achieved by retaining underlying representations, i.e., by *not* following the usual transformational rules that would zero out redundant noun phrases and verb phrases. This suggests that the special aesthetic structure of chants is achieved by using fewer rules, rather than more. Yet, how do the rules of chanting provide for the fact that the usual reductions are not to occur? Is there any assurance that this provision is not best analyzed via extra rules that reinsert the redundant forms, since that analysis might better conform to general principles of markedness (if the chants are to be considered as marked discourse forms)? A similar problem arises for types of Western poetry in which, it is sometimes said, structuring of meter and rhyme is accompanied by syntactic and semantic "poetic licence." This argument suggests that extra structuring in one aspect of the discourse might be accompanied by loosening of structure in another. It is not clear, however, that "licence" is really the appropriate conception of poetic syntax and semantics. The issues here are complex and they reach far beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] Since my fieldwork was conducted in rural areas of the Préfecture de Tivaouane, when I speak of "the Wolof" I can, of course, mean only the villages I have myself observed and the extent to which they may be representative of Wolof villages more generally. This caveat is necessary because "Wolof" as an ethnic category now includes a numerous and diverse population, urban as well as rural, elite as well as peasant. I believe my comments here apply to the *Communautés Rurales* (Senegalese rural administrative units) in the core regions of Wolof occupation; they do not necessarily apply to urban Wolof.

[4] See Goffman's discussion (1963:198–215) relating formality/informality to degree of involvement in a situation.

[5] Other authors describe a similar distinction in somewhat different terms. Geertz (1966), for example, speaks of the "anonymization of individuals" in ceremonialized interaction.

[6] For another example, see Tyler's (1972) paper on the Koya of central India. A number of behavioral differences, including lexical choices, differentiate central from peripheral actors in Koya formal events.

[7] The occasions I refer to are public meetings conducted in rural villages or *Communautés Rurales.* Increasingly, Wolof call these meetings by the French term *réunion,* which (in Senegalese usage) distinguishes them more definitively from casual encounters than does the Wolof term *ndaje.*

[8] I leave aside the relation of the priesthood (*Imams* and *marabouts*), which ranks highest in a religious sense, to political decision making.

[9] On this point, Turton comments (personal communication) that "although the Mursi do indeed see their debates as decision-making procedures, I am less and less convinced that, from the point of view of the outside observer, they should be thus characterized."

[10] I do not mean to suggest that these two societal types, if types they are, exhaust all possibilities of political ideology and organized political discussion; our own society probably fits neither. Nor, on the basis of materials presented in this paper, do I propose to match such types to points on an evolutionary scale. That two forms of political discourse have a certain historical relationship among the Ilongots does not mean they will have the same relationship everywhere.

[11] See also Firth (1975) on "the *experimental* aspect of [formal] oratory" in Tikopia (emphasis in original). Firth argues that public meetings and formal oratory emerge in Tikopia under conditions of crisis and social change, not during periods of stability. The Tikopia *fono* (formal assembly of titled elders) cannot be dismissed as merely a reactionary reaffirmation of a threatened tradition. It is also a means of publicly exploring important issues, and a way for Tikopia leaders to find out whether a new proposal is likely to be acceptable (1975:42-43).

[12] Sally Falk Moore (1975:231) makes a similar point: "It is important to recognize that processes of regularization, processes having to do with rules and regularities, may be used to block change or to produce change. The fixing of rules and regularities are as much tools of revolutionaries as they are of reactionaries. It is disastrous to confuse the analysis of processes of regularization with the construction of static social models."

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STYLE CHANGES FOR *AA*

Editor-in-Chief D. L. Olmsted of the *American Anthropologist* has amended policies concerning the listing of the authors of multi-authored publications. Beginning in 82:1 of the *AA*, the first reference to a publication in the text of an article will contain the last names of all authors (e.g., Logan, Olmsted, Rosner, Schwartz, and Stephens 1955). Further references to the same work will follow the present style (Logan et al. 1955). Additionally, the list of References Cited will now give the names of all the authors (superseding the style specified in the current Style Guide and Information for Authors, *AA* 81:226-231). Also beginning in 82:1, an italicized capital *M* (instead of $\bar{X}$) will be used in all statistical material to indicate *mean*.