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**Journal Title:** Semiotic mediation ; sociocultural and psychological perspectives /

**Volume:**   **Issue:**  
**Month/Year:** 1985**Pages:** 287-310

**Article Author:**

**Article Title:** Errington, J. Joseph.; On the nature of the sociolinguistic sign; Describing the Javanese speech levels.

**Imprint:** Orlando ; Academic Press, 1985.

**ILL Number:** 73571091



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# On the Nature of the Sociolinguistic Sign: Describing the Javanese Speech Levels

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Recent theoretical studies in sociolinguistics have increasingly focused on the importance of integrating the study of language as a conventional code geared toward reference and predication, on one hand, with the study of language as a creative mediator of social relations, on the other. In this analysis of speech levels used by speakers of standard Javanese—the *priyayi*—Errington demonstrates that one crucial avenue to this theoretical integration involves correlating types of linguistic categories with degrees of speakers' awareness and hence potential for creative manipulation. The various speech levels used and recognized by Javanese consist of referentially synonymous forms which, when instantiated in discourse, function additionally to index aspects of social relations involving speaker, addressee, and/or referent along scales of symmetrical and asymmetrical deference. Errington finds that linguistic categories such as personal pronouns which are positively marked for both indexicality and for personal reference–predication show the greatest formal delicacy of coding, while categories unmarked for these variables show limited formal alternants. Correspondingly, Javanese focus on personal pronouns in both linguistic

usage (strategic manipulation in interaction) and in metalingual mention (talk about speech levels), while other categories reveal less "pragmatic salience" in both these functions. By extending the argument to encompass historically documented changes in Javanese speech levels, Errington then proposes that lexical categories, especially indexicals and personal pronouns in particular, are subject to more rapid change than other types of such stylistically significant alternations. Since pragmatic salience, defined semiotically in terms of encoded linguistic features, turns out to be crucial for understanding changes in speech levels, Errington concludes that the Saussurean doctrine of arbitrariness can be modified by a theory of relative nonarbitrariness. Changes in the language code are not random, as the conventionality position entails, but are in fact constrained to the degree that language is embedded in purposive, creative social interaction. The functions of language as a semiotic mediator of interaction cannot, thus, be relegated to the status of sociological aftereffect but must be included within an adequate theory of linguistic structure and change.

## INTRODUCTION

Those who believe that semiotics demands nothing less than "a general re-writing of the history of philosophy and culture" (Deely 1981:8) or a "history of mankind" (Romeo, quoted in Deely 1981:11) find the breadth of the project so conceived attractive and exciting. But such all-subsuming goals are potentially a major challenge to its viability and durability: "When a discipline defines 'everything' as its proper object, and therefore declares itself as concerned with the entire universe (and nothing else) it's playing a risky game" (Eco 1976:6-7). Insofar as the semioticians' ambitions remain frustrated, their project's feasibility will remain unproven, and far from being "the only game in town" (Deely 1981:xiv) it may well turn out to be, as Sperber says of a semiology which covers all objects of perception, "so distended that it loses all value" (1975:15).

The proper scope of a general theory of signs is a deservedly controversial issue, but I proceed here from a more modest, generally acceptable position. Any general theory of signs should develop not just from the "top down" as abstract philosophical metatheory superimposed on various fields; it must also develop from the "bottom up" through the individual subdisciplines it encompasses, receiving justification from the empirical richness and theoretical insights which result in each. Its worth depends on more than generality of scope or internal coherence, claimed or demonstrated. Besides showing anthropologists, linguists, literary critics, et cetera how they have been doing semiotics all along, it must provide new ways of approaching old problems, and suggest to investigators new analytic techniques and ways of defining objects of study in empirically revealing ways.

My purpose here is to provide an example of how this can be done by out-

lining a sociolinguistic analysis of Javanese linguistic etiquette in semiolinguistic terms<sup>1</sup>. The specific descriptive exercise turns out to have more theoretically suggestive implications for sociolinguistics, because the Javanese speech levels are revealingly analyzed with two very well known but very different models of sociolinguistic variation: one developed by Brown and Gilman (1960), the other by Labov (1972). Complementarities between them will be explained semiotically by explicating the nature of code-governed semantico-referential meaning (Silverstein 1976) and contextually derived social significance of actual use. Sociolinguistic findings can be brought to bear on the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, and sociolinguistics can be treated as part of the larger field of semiotics, each field thus informing the other.

### STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE JAVANESE SPEECH LEVELS

The Javanese speech levels are a complex set of speech styles which are used to mediate social relationships during linguistic exchange. They are made up of morphemes which share semantico-referential significances—that is, have the same grammatical functions or lexical meanings—but different pragmatic significances vis-à-vis different situations and occasions of use. The system of speech levels is fully integrated into the code of Javanese, and can be initially analyzed in classic linguistic-structural fashion independently of various situational significances. Examples in Figure 1 show how different kinds of morphemes belonging to different types of paradigmatic sets combine in precise categorical patterns to make up sentences of different speech styles. The sample sentences (reading left to right) typify distinct speech styles, marked as such by patterned combinations of members of five different sorts of paradigmatic sets (read vertically). All six sentences share a linguistic-referential meaning (as in the English translation) but each differs from the others in possible pragmatic significance, that is, in what it can index in possible situations of use.

The repertoire in Figure 1 exemplifies a slightly simplified version of one stage in the changing “standard” speech-level repertoire of Javanese, which has been defined since the colonial era as the dialect of the traditional *priyayi* elite of Surakarta, south-central Java. *Priyayi* are members of a complex traditional elite class who have resided in that royal polity for 200 years; since 1945, social pressures have greatly affected their position in a modernizing, multiethnic society. Concomitant pressures on use of the speech levels have affected the structure and function of these forms of linguistic etiquette in ways to be discussed later.

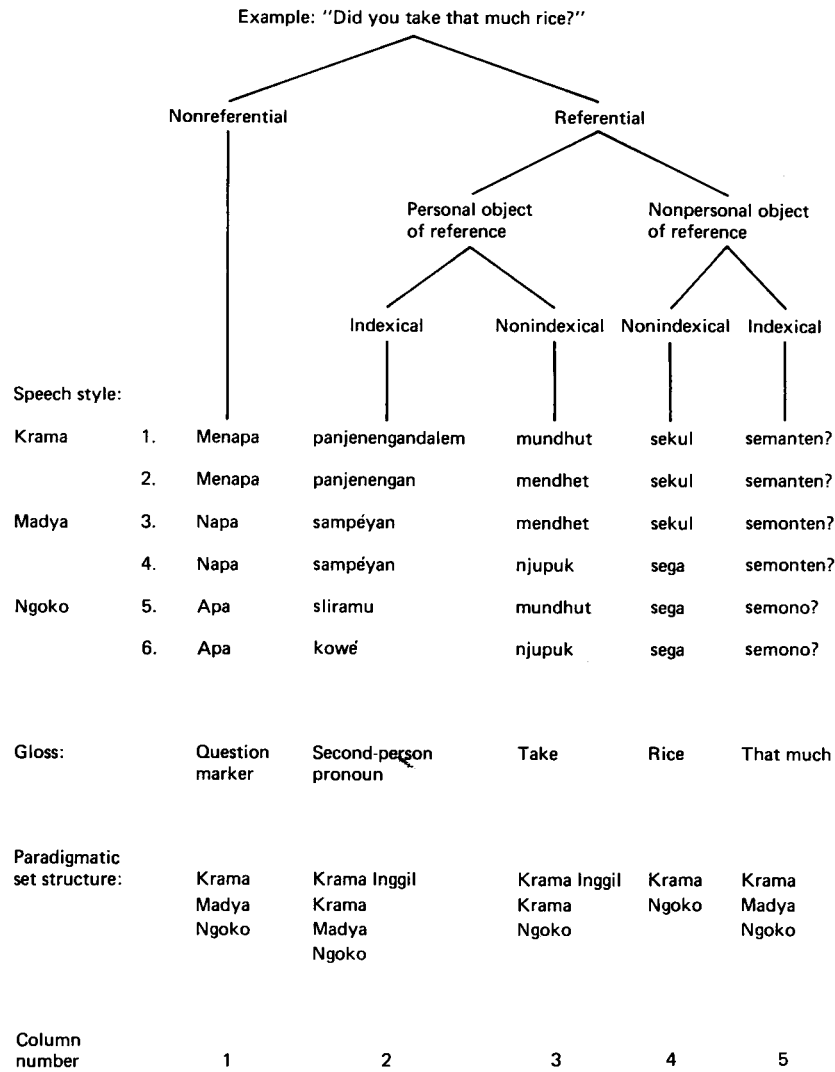


Figure 1. Semiotic-linguistic structure of the speech levels.

### Semiotic Features of the Speech Levels

The paradigmatic sets exemplified in Figure 1 contrast in structure, in the numbers of elements they contain, and in the restrictions that govern their co-occurrence in sentences. Sets can likewise be contrasted through the types of

contributions to referential–propositional meanings of sentences made by their members, and these shared semantico-grammatical characteristics can be drawn out as encoded context-independent features. Morphemes which make up and alternate in such sets thus share referential meanings and grammatical functions, but contrast with each other in contextually realized social significance.

We first set off those paradigmatic sets of morphemes which are not lexically referential, that is, which contribute to referential meaning of sentences as configurative or grammatico-syntactic elements: relative clause markers, nominalizers, aspect markers, affixes, et cetera. In Column 1, for instance, are three phonologically distinct forms which fulfill the same nonreferential function, that of marking each sentence as a question. Sets of this type number only between 20 and 30. A far larger class of paradigmatic sets contains lexemes endowed with referential meaning, which can be subclassified in terms of their objects of reference—personal or nonpersonal—and their modes of reference—indexical or nonindexical. By the first criterion personal pronouns (Column 2, ‘you’) and words predicable of persons as actors, patients, and possessors (Column 3, ‘take’) are distinguished from all others. By the second criterion are set off indexically referential personal and demonstrative pronouns—Columns 2 (‘you’) and 5 (‘that much’) respectively—from nonindexically referential lexemes, as in Columns 3 (‘take’) and 4 (‘cooked rice’). Thus, sets typified by Column 4 are nonindexical in mode of reference, and do not have a common referential focus of persons.

The criteria used in this classification, schematized by the branching diagram, are so general as to be potentially applicable to any linguistic code but nonetheless suffice to pick out crucial classes of sets for the case at hand, because all natural languages contain grammatico-syntactic, lexically referential, and indexical constituents.



### Paradigmatics and Syntagmatics of the Levels

One chooses styles from a repertoire of speech levels like that exemplified in Figure 1 to mark an evaluation of social relations involving speaker, addressee, and perhaps a third person. The following description is organized to show how the system’s structure correlates with a crucial pragmatic distinction between social relations created through acts of address, and relations marked in making acts of reference. The former are constituted through acts of speaking to someone who is existentially and socially linked to speaker as speech partner. The latter come about through acts of speaking of someone, a social entity involved as referent—speaker, addressee, or third person who is present or absent from context of use.<sup>2</sup>

## NGOKO/MADYA/KRAMA

Styles of speaking to persons are called *ngoko*, *madya*, and *krama*, as are morphemes used in those styles. The most common paradigmatic sets are also the simplest, each made up of a pair of alternants; these two-way alternations are the backbone of the most basic address styles. The elements of such sets are called *ngoko* and *krama*, as exemplified in Figure 1 by Column 4, which contains words meaning 'cooked rice' (*sega* and *sekul*, respectively). *Ngoko* refers to combinations of such morphemes which make up the "basic", spontaneous, natural, somewhat crude manner of speaking to intimates and inferiors. *Krama* is the common standard polite address style, properly spoken to non-intimate peers or superiors. Two-way *ngoko*-*krama* oppositions number in the hundreds and every type of leveled set to be discussed below contains at least a *krama* alternant to a "basic" *ngoko* element.

Stringent co-occurrence restrictions on *ngoko* and *krama* forms dictate that use of the *krama* word meaning 'take' (*mendhet*), for instance, will entail choice of the *krama* word for 'cooked rice' (*sekul*) and that choice of the *ngoko* word for 'take' (*njupuk*) entails choice of the *ngoko* word for 'cooked rice' (*sega*). (But a choice of *sekul* does not entail choice of *mendhet*, nor choice of *sega* entail choice of *njupuk*, for reasons to be discussed later.) Such basic co-occurrence restrictions—general rules governing styles of linguistic interaction—guarantee formal unity of the styles of address, and so pragmatic interpretability of level choice vis-à-vis context of use. For present purposes, we may say that a sentence made up entirely of *krama* lexemes and morphemes (Sentence 2) may be called a sentence in the *krama* style, and one made up entirely of *ngoko* elements (Sentence 6) a sentence in the *ngoko* style.

The pragmatic significance of choice between *ngoko* and *krama* speech styles can be concisely explained in terms of the basic patterns of exchange which they make possible. Symmetric exchange—reciprocal *ngoko* or *krama*—marks relative intimacy or nonfamiliarity between speech partners, respectively. Asymmetric use marks the *ngoko* speaker as being of appreciably higher status than the speech partner who returns *krama*. These exchange patterns can thus be preliminarily classified in terms of the power and solidarity model first developed by Brown and Gilman (1960) to analyze second person pronominal usage in Western European languages, later extended by Brown and Ford (1964) to use of titles and names in American English, and by Brown (1965) to pronominal usage in nonwestern languages. In Javanese, the *ngoko* address style functions like a *T* ("familiar") pronoun (like *tu* in French, *du* in German, etc.) and *krama* like a *V* ("formal") pronominal form (*vous* in French, *Sie* in German).

A third address style, together with the relatively small number of paradigmatic alternants which distinguish it, is often called *madya*. In Sentences 3 and



4, *madya* elements supplement two-way *ngoko*–*krama* oppositions in paradigmatic sets in Columns 1 and 5. The *madya* vocabulary is small but itself bipartite, made up on one hand of grammatico–syntactic elements like *napa* (Column 1, ‘question marker’), and on the other hand of indexicals: demonstrative pronouns like *semonten* (Column 5, ‘that much’) and the second person pronoun *sampéyan*, (Column 2). There is a formal contrast between *ngoko*–*madya*–*krama* sets made up on one hand of grammatico–syntactic elements, and on the other of deictics, which relate utterances indexically to spatiotemporal context of use. Several *ngoko* series encode tripartite deictic distinctions which correspond roughly to locus of speaker (e.g., *seméné* ‘as much as this’), addressee (e.g., *semono* ‘as much as that’) and loci far from both, (e.g., *semana* ‘as much as that over there’). These distinctions are preserved in *madya* (so, by *semènten*, *semonten*, and *semanten*, respectively) but collapse into a single conjugate in *krama* (*semanten*) which correlates formally to the “distant” alternant. No analogous collapse occurs in sets of grammatico–syntactic alternants.

“*Madya*” can be glossed as ‘middle’, aptly describing the interstitial structural position of *madya* sentential styles; because the specifically *madya* vocabulary is so very small, *madya* speech necessarily contains either *krama* or *ngoko* referential vocabulary (Sentences 3 and 4, respectively)<sup>3</sup>. These different two-member and three-member paradigmatic sets comprise the basic styles of address, but because the pragmatic significances of *madya* have changed markedly over the last 80 years, they will be dealt with later in a sketch of sociolinguistic variation and change.

#### DEFERENCE AND REFERENCE: KRAMA INGGIL

The two remaining types of paradigmatic sets, exemplified in Columns 2 and 3, contain lexemes referring to persons. Members of these sets key to one of two different kinds of contextual factors. Choice of a *ngoko* or *krama* word from such a set will conform with choice of address style as a whole, so, with the speaker–addressee relation. But choice of a word from the vocabulary called *krama inggil* (lit. ‘high *krama*’)—as in Column 3 of Figure 1 (*mundhut*, ‘take’)—marks the person spoken of as object of speaker’s deference, be he/she addressee or third person. In examples in Figure 1 addressee and referent are the same, and use of the *krama inggil* word *mundhut* (‘take’) therefore marks deference for addressee. The oppositions between *krama inggil*/non–*krama inggil* on one hand, and *krama*/*ngoko* on the other, are skewed pragmatically: the former keys to connections created by referring to someone, the latter to existential links presupposed in addressing someone.

A formal correlate of this functional difference is the broad range of permissible combinations of *krama inggil* lexemes and different address styles. Speakers may choose to use *krama inggil* when speaking either *ngoko* or *krama*

(Sentences 5 and 1, respectively). Because krama inggil marks deference and status differences, its social significance in use for addressee may complement or augment that of choice of address style. Asymmetric exchange of ngoko and krama keys to status differences between speech participants; krama inggil is then virtually obligatorily used by the krama speaker to refer to deferred-to addressee. To use krama inggil to speak of addressee in ngoko marks respect for nonetheless familiar addressee, and so complements the intimacy of ngoko address to intimates of nonetheless appreciable status.<sup>4</sup>

Most krama inggil words function necessarily on the axis of reference, and only potentially on the axis of address; crucial exceptions to this rule are first and second person pronouns. A first or second person pronoun will “pick out” addresser or addressee as referent by virtue of his/her role in the speech situation, that is, as one who is presupposed to be a participant in the act of linguistic exchange of which the pronouns are themselves a part. The first and second person pronoun paradigms are the largest, most elaborate sets of alternants in the level system, so elaborate, in fact, that the native metalinguistic vocabulary is insufficiently developed to distinguish them. Because each address style can be associated with a separate second person pronoun, one might call *panjenengandalem* (and Sentence 1) krama inggil, *panjenengan* (and Sentence 2) krama, and so on. But since *sliramu* is used only in ngoko speech with non-indexical krama inggil for addressee (Sentence 5), a style with no name of its own, the pronoun and sentential level both elude classification with the received terminology.

### THE SPEECH LEVELS IN USE

Structural features of the sentential levels thus correlate with their components' semantico-referential meanings and contextual (or pragmatic) significances. But code components also contrast in their availability to native speakers' awareness as mediators of social relations created through speech. This is not a trivial observation; in fact, investigators have long been at least implicitly aware of this differential availability of linguistic constituents for observation and characterization by speakers, and the consequently variable reliability of statements they make about speech. Research has been designed around the facts of differential awareness—exploiting or avoiding data of self-reported and/or observed usage—and Labov has made the issue of native speakers' awareness central to his critique of linguistic and sociolinguistic methodology (1972:183–202). This problem of what Silverstein (1977) has called “the limits of awareness” of native speakers is theoretically and methodologically significant for sociolinguistic description.

The notion of *pragmatic salience* will be used here to deal with native speak-

ers' awareness of the social significance of different leveled linguistic alternants, which is manifested both in statements about language and in spontaneous, natural use. It relates encoded linguistic-functional features of morphemes—objects and modes of reference, as presented previously—to their use in communication. *Use* here covers both “regular” and “strategic” (or goal-oriented) use of code-given alternations; *mention* refers to speakers' spontaneous or elicited characterizations of actual or hypothetical use.

Pragmatic saliences of morphemes contrast by virtue of their differing objects of reference (if they have any) and their modes of reference (if they refer). More pragmatically salient (classes of) morphemes are tacitly recognized by native speakers to be more crucial as linguistic mediators of social relations, and this awareness is evinced both in their metalinguistic statements, and in linguistic change and variation. The classification set out in Figure 1 gives clues about the encoded features of language to which people pay more or less attention as markers in speech of evaluations of social relations. First and second person pronouns are doubly integrated into the context of speech exchange, make up the most complex, delicately differentiated paradigmatic sets, and are (as will be shown) most subject to strategic manipulation and metalinguistic use. Sets used to refer to persons nonindexically are relatively less salient, but more so than those that are not referential of persons. Relative simplicity of paradigmatic structure thus appears to correlate with relative peripherality of lexical alternations to the mediation of social relations in language. Table 1 shows how members of these different types of paradigmatic sets, distinguished by object and modes of reference, integrate into speech situations on the axes of reference (speaking of) and address (speaking to).

It is worth noting that these classificatory criteria and the notion of prag-

TABLE 1  
Functions of Leveled Elements

Word class	Object of reference <sup>a</sup>	Mode of reference <sup>b</sup>	Level function vis-à-vis speech context
Personal pronouns	+	+	Address and reference
Words referring to persons	+	–	Address or reference
Demonstrative pronouns	–	+	Address
Alienable nouns and verbs	–	–	Address

<sup>a</sup>Coding: plus (+) = personal; minus (–) = nonpersonal.

<sup>b</sup>Coding: plus (+) = indexical; minus (–) = nonindexical.

matic salience are so general as to invite inference about cross-cultural constants of linguistic etiquette. It seems no coincidence that the most elaborate paradigmatic sets in Javanese are functionally identical with those in the wide variety of languages which have been analyzed in the Brown and Gilman framework in an extensive literature (see also Head 1978). But the notion is best explicated, its descriptive usefulness most convincingly demonstrated, by applying it to the case at hand.

### Data of Mention

Native speakers' statements about language use can be valuable or misleading for sociolinguistic analysis. Discrepancies between what people say and think they say are themselves significant facts from which can be inferred the nature of conceptions of "proper" language use, stereotypes, and stigmatized forms (Labov 1972:79-99). Rationalizations which are recognized to stem from such conceptions and prejudices and to covary with informants' social background can be valuable clues for understanding sociolinguistic variation. But priyayi's metalinguistic statements also reflect a tendency to focus on a few paradigmatic sets which are naturally treated as crucial linguistic markers of social evaluations. Accurate or not, spontaneous or elicited, they are indicative not only of sociolinguistic prejudices and norms for "proper" use, but also of the relative salience of different code components both as linguistic mediators of social relations, and as the means for talking about patterns of linguistic exchange.

This last point is crucial, because priyayi consistently use elements of more pragmatically salient categories as favored means of describing use of the entire system. To the most general, neutral inquiries about their own speech level use—questions of the form "How do you speak to X?", where X is a relative or acquaintance—speakers most commonly respond by specifying unilateral or reciprocal patterns of personal pronoun exchange. The metalinguistic terminology commonly used in the literature is relegated to a supplementary descriptive role by native speakers (when they use it at all) and there is moreover great variation among speakers as to the meanings of those specialized terms (see Errington 1985:76-101). Cases gleaned from personal experience and "spontaneous" use in literature likewise show the favored use of personal pronouns in spontaneous or unelicited Javanese talk about talk, with or without mention by name of an associated speech style.

In this way native speakers exploit two properties of personal pronouns. Because the elaborate second person pronoun paradigm is encoded in almost isomorphic correspondence with syntagmatically defined address styles, to specify the former usage is to specify the latter. In actual use, personal pronouns refer by virtue of referents' role as participants, that is, by virtue of his/her existential relation to the social act. First and second person pronouns thus pick out re-

ferents as participants in the same social relation that governs choice of entire address style. Because speech level structure correlates with these modes of contextual integration, personal pronouns are doubly integrated as metonyms of the code-governed speech styles, and as means for referring to speech participants qua speech participants. Elements of no other type of paradigmatic set could ever be used in comparably general metalinguistic fashion and no other type of set is comparably elaborated; no other type of lexeme is as pragmatically salient.

### Data of Use

It is intuitively plausible that Javanese should “naturally” talk about talk by focusing on relatively crucial linguistic means for the accomplishment of individual, social ends which are anterior to language use and choice of communicative style. As contextualized goal-oriented communication, speech is made up of variably important markers of social relations. When speakers pay less attention to language per se than to the particular ends they wish to achieve by means (in part) of language, they use linguistic resources strategically.

Speakers do not merely “obey” a set of rigid, monolithic, externally imposed rules of use; linguistic and nonlinguistic norms for social action are rather assimilated into communicative projects which may be constrained but are not wholly determined by them. Speakers deviate from and manipulate them to flatter, avoid giving offence, insult, scold, et cetera. The notion of “strategic” use thus implies creative or goal-oriented manipulation of implicit shared and recognized norms, which are themselves therefore susceptible to change. If more pragmatically salient elements are relatively subject to manipulation, so should their normative use be relatively more mutable over time, gradual change being the cumulative result of numerous, recurrent, individual occasions of strategic use.

But how to identify strategic manipulation? To use Fishman’s terminology (1972:451), how can analysis of the *data* of talk, from which norms are extrapolated, be related to the *process* of talk, and thus to particular, concrete contexts of which those norms are only one part? Variation which is statistically negligible or meaningless may nonetheless be individually and strategically meaningful vis-à-vis a particular speech event. The problem is to find objective correlates of this “native speaker awareness” which can be shown to reflect dynamic relations between language user in context of use on the one hand, and pre-given code and norms for use, on the other.

Sociolinguistic variation results from the same dynamics that are manifested in linguistic change; both show the existence and nature of interaction between code structure and use, and provide evidence for the empirical validity of the notion of pragmatic salience. The cumulative effects of numerous individual

strategic uses of language are gradual but definite changes in paradigmatic set structure, co-occurrence restrictions, and “proper” level usage. It is impossible to distinguish all kinds of strategic manipulation or explain their full impact on norms for use, but changes in the speech levels clearly stem from the particular types of sociolinguistic pressure which are brought to bear on communication. Kiparsky (1968:174) has suggested how linguistic change provides a window on the form of a (Chomskyan) linguistic competence; I argue that data of formal-functional shifts in the speech level system provide a window on the nature of the code as a strategically, subjectively used vehicle of communication. This likewise provides a way of understanding general semiotic conditions on the integration of code with contexts of use.

### Analyzing Sociolinguistic Change

It must suffice here to consider one example of each of the two types of change affecting the levels, but these two kinds of structural and sociolinguistic evolution are best described in terms of very different sociolinguistic models: one pioneered by Labov, the other by Brown and Gilman. Contrasts between the models are quite conspicuous because each is usefully applied here to elements of a single language, and within a single linguistic-structural (i.e., the lexical) level. I argue that the differential appropriateness of the two models for the Javanese case stems from the contrasting pragmatic saliences of their appropriate objects of description.

#### PRONOMINAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF SAMPEYAN

Reliable descriptions of priyayi pronominal usage, which date from about 1890, can be used to juxtapose three stages of change in the second person pronoun paradigm presented in Table 2. Details of use and change even within this single paradigmatic set must be glossed over here to focus on a single element, *sampéyan*, for reasons which will become clear. The repertoire labeled “conservative” in Table 2—identical with that in Figure 1—is that of the oldest priyayi still living in modern Surakarta (ca. 1980); the “traditional” repertoire was extant up to about 1920; the “modern” repertoire is that of younger priyayi, children and grandchildren of the conservative speakers who have grown up in the postrevolutionary, egalitarian-ethic milieu of a modernizing urban center.

Two general conclusions about pronominal change are obvious from Table 2. First, there has been a progressive revaluation through devaluation of several alternants, this trend manifested formally in changing co-occurrence restrictions, and pragmatically in the social characteristics of addressee to whom these alternants are appropriately (normatively) used. Secondly, there has been sim-

TABLE 2  
Changing Priyayi Pronominal Repertoires

Co-occurrence	Traditional	Conservative	Modern
Krama + Krama Inggil	<i>panjenengandalem</i>	<i>panjenengandalem</i>	—
Krama ± Krama Inggil	<i>sampéyan</i>	<i>panjenengan</i>	<i>panjenengan</i>
Madya	( <i>ndika</i> )	<i>sampéyan</i>	<i>sampéyan</i>
			<i>panjenengan</i>
Ngoko + Krama Inggil	<i>sliramu</i>	<i>panjenengan</i>	<i>panjenengan</i>
		<i>sliramu</i>	
Ngoko – Krama Inggil	<i>kowé</i>	<i>kowé</i>	<i>kowé</i>

plification of the personal pronoun repertoire among modern speakers, and a concomitant collapse of status distinctions marked in speech. Both processes result from social interaction within the Surakartan speech community as a whole.

In traditional society non-priyayi were by definition of low status, and since they usually controlled narrower ranges of speech styles than did priyayi, they commonly used a madya style of address to nonintimates and superiors. Status evaluations typically keyed for commoners to relative age and kin relations, rather than (as for priyayi) a finely differentiated scale of nobility and official status. Traditional priyayi saw madya as substandard non-ngoko language, common parlance in their outgroup which they themselves rarely used. Madya was in their eyes primarily a substandard social dialect which marked its user as an uneducated commoner<sup>5</sup>.

Traditional priyayi used *sampéyan* as the “regular” polite second person pronoun, either with krama inggil to those of somewhat higher status, or without to nonintimates of comparable and perhaps slightly lower status. Thus, krama inggil/non-krama inggil alternations in krama speech keyed to relative status, and the *sampéyan/panjenengandalem* alternation shaded the import of krama used with krama inggil for reference to addressee. *Sampéyan* could be used symmetrically, but *panjenengandalem* was used only asymmetrically by an inferior to a superior who would return some “lower” speech level.

Around the turn of the century, the second person pronoun in general use by commoners in madya speech had been *ndika* (in parentheses in Table 2), which by 1920 had fallen largely out of use, at least among urban speakers, who increasingly used *sampéyan* in madya address. *Sampéyan* gradually became common usage among non-priyayi in polite speech. Recollections by old conservative priyayi in Surakarta of how their parents used *sampéyan* in polite speech to peers, and would comment on its improper use by non-priyayi, indicate that priyayi had recognized and reacted to this cumulative refunctionalization and appropriation of *sampéyan* into a social dialect they did not use.

A new second person pronoun, *panjenengan*, was coined in priyayi circles to occupy the niche formerly held by *sampéyan*, and *panjenengan* is now standard conservative usage to nonintimate peers<sup>6</sup>. This was apparently a two-step process: as *sampéyan* was appropriated into a “substandard” dialect, it consequently became an index of users’ status for priyayi, who responded by coining and rapidly standardizing this new term. In modern Surakarta a favorite topic of metalinguistic comment among conservative priyayi is how *panjenengan* is used and in fact (by their standards) misused; their complaints indicate that this process of “appropriation” of second person pronouns by non-priyayi is an ongoing process.

By 1930 egalitarian sentiment had become sufficiently strong among the Surakartan elite to oblige virtually all priyayi to refrain from asymmetrical speech level use with nonintimate commoners (see Errington 1985:31–62). They had previously spoken ngoko to members of their outgroup—by definition their inferiors—and received the best sort of non-ngoko language, usually *madya*, their speech partners could muster; this asymmetric pattern thus keyed to status differences. For reasons which cannot be detailed here, priyayi shifted to a pattern of reciprocal exchange of non-ngoko speech which was, given commoners’ narrow repertoire, usually some form of *madya*. *Panjenengan* was for priyayi not just a nonfamiliar polite pronoun, but in-group usage, opposed as such to the out-group term *sampéyan*. They were used by priyayi to addressees of priyayi and non-priyayi status, respectively. So even though conservative priyayi now speak *madya* with *sampéyan* to non-priyayi speech partners who do not control *krama*, they associate that usage with non-priyayi as an out-group speech style which they themselves only speak “out” of their social group (and as most conceive of it “down” the social hierarchy). They are therefore careful to avoid use of *panjenengan* in *madya*.

Their children by and large differ in this respect; as modern priyayi speakers become increasingly assimilated into a larger, more homogeneous speech community, they use the speech levels as do non-priyayi, many of whom now count as their peers. Like non-priyayi, they choose speech styles more as a function of relative intimacy or formality than of status differences which, when relevant, generally correlate with relative age and/or official position within the various new Indonesian bureaucracies. Modern speakers likewise draw no absolute social-dialectal distinction between *panjenengan* and *sampéyan*, but use the former as a more formal alternant to the latter in *madya*<sup>7</sup>. Modern speakers in this respect resemble non-priyayi speakers, who have appropriated *panjenengan* into *madya* much as *sampéyan* was appropriated two generations ago. For modern priyayi and non-priyayi alike, *madya* is essentially functionally homogeneous with *krama*, marking evaluations of social relations as too informal for appropriate use of *krama*, but not intimate enough to warrant reciprocal ngoko. To use Brown and Gilman’s terms (1960), the pronouns and



sentential levels alike have been refunctionalized from the semantic of “power” to “solidarity.”

These pronominal shifts, obvious because they have occurred so rapidly, are manifested first by changes in co-occurrence constraints governing their use with other level elements, and second by their changing indexical meanings vis-à-vis relation of speaker and addressee. Through initially strategic use of *sampéyan*, non-priyayi consequently transformed it into a dialect marker for priyayi; more recent changes in the second person pronouns reflect the refunctionalization of the entire system by modern priyayi, who use it primarily to indicate relative intimacy–formality (solidarity–nonsolidarity) rather than differences in relative status (power). They see *panjenengandalem* as a pronoun they recognize but never use themselves, the way their traditional forebears saw *ndika*. All these facts indicate the crucial role of highly pragmatically salient personal pronouns for mediating social relations; they are doubly integrated as crucial metonyms both of speech style and situation, and have been most highly subject to strategic use. Their mutability contrasts strikingly with the relative stability of the less salient elements which make up styles of address. One can almost read from facts of pronominal shift the history in a nutshell of social and linguistic interaction within the Surakartaan speech community, because their high saliency links them intimately to social change.

The crucial contribution of indexicality to pragmatic salience appears clearly in the history of *sampéyan*, which was originally a nonindexical deferential element of *krama inggil* meaning ‘foot’ or ‘leg’ (of a deferred-to person). Its function, but not its sound shape, changed when it came into use also as an indexical referential of addressee. As a nonindexical it has been extremely stable over the last century; as a pronoun it has been susceptible to sociolinguistic manipulation and change of the sort described earlier. The least salient elements of the referential vocabulary, *ngoko* and *krama* alternants in the simplest lexical sets, have changed less strikingly, and as the result of very different sociolinguistic dynamics.

#### THE CASE OF VILLAGE KRAMA

Many *ngoko*/*krama* pairs can be classified according to one of several patterns of phonological analogy. So, for instance, *krama* forms *tedah* ‘to point’, *tangga* ‘to watch, keep an eye on’, and *cekap* ‘enough’ thus correspond by analogy to their *ngoko* conjugates *tuduh*, *tunggu*, and *cukup*, respectively. Appreciable numbers of *krama* vocabulary items fall into one or another of these classes, which have in fact expanded over the last century (if not longer) as the result of extension of such correspondences. This process of hypercorrection, dubbed “*kramafication*” by Uhlenbeck (1978:288), results from two types of sociolinguistic processes. These can be briefly but accurately described with

Labov's (1972:178) notions of "hypercorrection from above the level of social awareness" among speakers who do not control the standard, that is, non-priyayi, and "hypercorrection from below the level of social awareness" among speakers of the standard.

Javanese themselves recognize the results of hypercorrection from above, as is evidenced by the native term for words so coined: *krama désa*, literally 'village krama'. This alludes to the standard speakers' conception of the locus and so the status of the people they believe to be coiners of new, substandard terms; when uneducated, typically rural speakers try to speak "proper" krama, they sometimes extend analogical sound correspondences past the target dialect defined by priyayi. For example, if the *u-u/e-a* correspondence mentioned earlier was extended to the word *wuluh* 'a kind of bamboo', a krama désa form *welah* would result from "sporadic and irregular correction of changed forms towards the model of the highest status group, the prestige model" (Labov 1972:179). The form could then come to function for substandard speakers as a regular part of a polite substandard speech style.

Priyayi perceive krama désa forms to be markers of their users' status as speakers of substandard non-ngoko Javanese, but are unaware that not all krama désa forms have remained restricted to stigmatized out-group usage. Some have to be sure become what Labov calls stereotypes—topics of social comment which fall out of use entirely (1972:180)—but others have been incorporated into the krama speech of priyayi through a type of "change from below." Walbeehm documented this process a century ago by showing that krama désa forms could in time become transformed into standard stylistic variables, first as "optional," then as "obligatory" krama. He pointed out that priyayi speakers would actually avoid use of "substandard" krama in formal situations in which (as Labov suggests) speakers pay maximal attention to their speech and bring it into conformance with the standard, but outside of those situations they would freely incorporate formerly substandard krama forms into their speech (Walbeehm 1897:12). Two examples he mentions, *bènten* (ngoko = *béda*) and *cobi* (ngoko = *coba*), are at present krama words regarded by modern and all but the oldest of conservative speakers as standard and obligatory.

In fact, priyayi have themselves hypercorrected in the same manner they attribute to their out-group, extending regular alternations by "hypercorrection from below." The best evidence are non-ngoko lexemes called by Poedjosoedarmo "hyper-krama" (1968:66), and Uhlenbeck "super-krama" (1978:289), which result from extension of the sound analogies discussed previously to preexistent standard krama forms. So, the standard krama word for 'name', *nama*, has been hyper-kramanized to *nami*, on analogy with the ngoko/krama alternations found, for example, between *utama* (ngoko)/*utami* (krama), 'foremost, primary' and *coba* (ngoko)/*cobi* (krama) 'try' (this last form cited by Walbeehm 1897:106). Hyper-krama obviously originates among speakers who do

know standard krama forms, which often differ totally in sound shape from their ngoko conjugates. Such hypercorrection does not then result from conscious attempts to conform with an exterior, misunderstood norm, but from a regular, mechanistic extension of a pre-given encoded sound pattern. "Hypercorrection from below" within one generation of the priyayi community would create age-grade indicators that would eventually become part of the target dialect imitated by non-priyayi.

### COMPARING SOCIOLINGUISTIC MODELS

Level components of contrasting pragmatic salience have been affected by contrasting types of change, and the considerable differences between the two analytic styles brought to bear on them is itself a theoretically interesting issue. The Brown and Gilman framework was applied to patterns of exchange of individual, highly salient alternants, whereas less salient elements which make up styles of address have undergone paradigmatic shifts describable with Labov's "mechanism of linguistic change." The question then remains: how are these models of variation and change, relevant for different parts of a single linguistic system and at a single linguistic-structural level, to be related? Because code elements were contrasted in general but precise semiotic and linguistic terms, the differentially appropriate sociolinguistic models can likewise be related semiotically. The theoretical complementarities of the two approaches can be seen to result in part from the contrasting semiotic statuses of the parts of the system of etiquette they were used to describe.

Labov treats stylistic variation as parasitic on and derivative of social variation, arguing that social markers may evolve into stylistic markers, but that the reverse rarely occurs (1972:284). Such stylistic variation, he says, is largely outside the conscious control of speakers, a function of the amount of attention they devote to speech, and their success in bringing it into conformance with norms for proper usage. Labovian norms are thus relatively homogeneous standards for "proper" use within linguistically heterogeneous communities (1972:249). Brown and Gilman (1960) on the other hand studied variation indexical of speakers' evaluations of relations with an addressee by adducing "rules" or "norms" for appropriate choice between alternants. Their model for evaluating pronominal exchange distinguishes the dimensions of power (status) and solidarity (intimacy); the patterns of use they studied only secondarily indicate anything about speaker's social background per se, and then insofar as different social "semantics" or norms may typically be implemented by members of different social classes.

Labov is a well known critic of linguistic studies based on data of native speaker intuitions and/or reports of usage; he relies primarily on observed data

recorded in “natural” settings, and gathered in amounts sufficient for inductive statistical analysis. He explicitly rejects the explanatory value of hypothesized rules or norms of use which cannot be quantifiably derived or justified (1972: 284). Brown and Gilman have relied almost exclusively on just this sort of “artificial” data, gathered from the self-reporting questionnaires and literature which Labov finds unreliable as sources of data. Brown and Gilman are thus able to treat relatively small corpuses of such data in analytic-deductive fashion with an intuitively plausible model.

These very basic differences in methods, models, and analytic strategies fall naturally together with different appropriate objects of study, that is, alternations between differentially pragmatically salient elements. Labov has focused primarily on the nonlexical alternations—phonemic, morphophonemic, grammatico-syntactic—most congenial to his approach and these are, as Silverstein (1976, 1977) suggests, relatively less available to speakers’ awareness for description. By criteria for pragmatic salience adduced here they are even less salient than *ngoko/krama* alternants, which have responded to pressures brought to bear relatively independently of speakers’ attention. To put the matter in Labovian terms: alternations of nonsalient elements generally answer the observer’s question “Who are you?”, whereas more salient alternations such as those between personal pronouns answer the question “How are you feeling about me?” (1972:284). Even when relatively nonsalient alternations are exploited to create register distinctions (as in Javanese) they are subject to the same sorts of unconscious and conscious pressures Labov has discovered elsewhere, and are described most satisfactorily in largely mechanistic terms.

Labov has written (1972:247) that the value of his approach depends on its eventual applicability at other linguistic-structural levels, one of which is lexical. But his own explorations in this area (1973, 1978) have proven, if not unsuccessful, at least less compelling than the phonological and morphophonemic studies in which the method was initially developed<sup>8</sup>. The Javanese evidence suggests that this limited applicability is a function not just of the operational problems (e.g., gathering spontaneous data for inductive analysis) but also of the relatively higher salience of referential morphemes and their concomitant susceptibility to characterization and strategic use by speakers. Conversely, the Brown and Gilman approach has been widened to other elements of similarly high pragmatic salience, such as kin terms, titles, names—all referential of persons—and greetings, unitary indexes of initiation of speech exchange. Their approach capitalizes on native speakers’ awareness of that significance and on their ability to characterize the same salient linguistic markers on which they can focus strategically.

The speech levels are systematically encoded in alternations, and embody basic structural-functional linguistic properties which precondition their use to mediate social relations. Dialectal variation, indexical of social status of

speaker per se, typically accrues to alternants of low salience which speakers neither focus on or exploit strategically. *Politesse*, on the other hand, is typically marked by patterned alternations among more salient elements. Javanese does not exhibit radically novel species of sociolinguistic variation, but achieves its unusual complexity through register alternations which are elaborated and extended through classes of salient and nonsalient elements alike.

### SEMIOTICS, PRAGMATIC SALIENCE, AND THE LINGUISTIC SIGN

The semiotically dual notion of pragmatic salience reflects the nature of the system of linguistic etiquette it was used to describe, and so a sign-theoretic explication of the former reflects on the latter. Relations between the semantic (or linguistic) and social (or behavioral) significances of the speech levels which were adduced previously can be recast to speak to a more general semiological doctrine, the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

Javanese is in any of its styles an instrument for speaking of things, like all languages a vehicle of referential and predicative meaning. Like all linguistic codes, Javanese contains *shifters*—indexicals that refer by virtue of existential relations with contexts of use—and Jakobson (1971:130–147) showed how these referential indexicals anchor the semantico-referential code to contexts of use. Silverstein (1976) has expanded this Peircian perspective to show how nonreferential social-indexical types of significance may likewise accrue to the use of the referential–predicative apparatus of language. The social meaning of choice of a speech level in Javanese is one example of this latter type of indexical “meaning.”

As etiquette, the levels are part of a much broader code of *politesse* governing virtually all types of social behavior—sitting, walking, pointing, et cetera—and the “meaning” of each is linked on one hand to context, and on the other to the entire behavioral style of which it is part. This meaning is thus a function of relative appropriateness of action to a particular context, gauged through norms for social behavior. These contextual significances of level choice subsist on but are not exhausted by semantico-referential meaning, and the elaborateness of the dually significant Javanese system results from the two interpenetrating symbolic significances, social indexical and semantico-referential, implicitly distinguished in the very phrase “linguistic etiquette.”

Referential elements’ pragmatic saliences correlate with their objects of reference because their social-indexical meaning subsist on their linguistic-semantic meanings. The contrasting structures of paradigmatic sets of synonymous–isofunctional lexemes in the speech levels formally index the relative importance of persons (versus nonpersons) as objects of reference which

are also contextual features governing etiquette use. Oppositions between lexemes of a given paradigmatic set are encoded in a semantico-referential code which is superimposed, as it were, on actual communicative situations; persons spoken of and spoken to are relatively crucial pregivens of that situation, more crucial objects of reference and determinants of behavior. For these referents, more delicately differentiated distinctions are available in the level repertoire.

The relatively higher salience of indexicals (as opposed to nonindexicals) can be treated as a consequence of and evidence for a functional homology between the semantico-referential system of language and the broader social-indexically significant code of etiquette. Because these lexemes are endowed with both types of indexical significance, they instantiate a link between both symbolic domains, and are therefore more pragmatically salient. Benveniste postulated homological relations of just this sort between distinct semiotic systems (1974:61) and this abstract but nonetheless semiotically real relation is manifested in all the data considered here: formal, metalinguistic, and diachronic.

Benveniste's speculations on whether symbolic rites and forms of politesse form autonomous systems (1974:50) stem from his concern with the basic sign-theoretic issue he dealt with under the rubric of code and discourse (1971:108–111), and “semiotics” and “semantics” (1974). He clearly recognized that a crucial issue both for a Saussurean semiology and Peircean semiotic was whether or not nonlinguistic behavior could be treated as “systematic” in the true sense of the word, and this is likewise a relevant question for the case at hand. To suggest the existence of homologies between indexical elements with different significances (like those in language and etiquette) is to presuppose an underlying, more general semiotic basis of visual and auditory symbolism, and suggest that both may in fact be systematic in just the sense Benveniste suggested. Although auditory symbolism is structured in uniquely hierarchical and linear fashion (Jakobson 1971:338–345), it may nonetheless share such a general semiotic feature with visual signs (like bodily postures, etc.) and be treated as part of a larger, more abstract semiotic complex.

Benveniste is hardly the first sign theorist to have considered etiquette as sign-theoretically important; Saussure illustrated the semiological principle of the arbitrariness with “[p]olite formulas [which] though often imbued with a certain natural expressiveness . . . are nonetheless fixed by rule; it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gestures that obliges one to use them” (1966:68). Much debate on the issue of arbitrariness must be ignored here in favor of a single observation, namely that Saussure at least tacitly followed Whitney (1979:48) in linking arbitrariness to conventionality and linguistic change (Saussure 1966:69). Since signifier and signified may change independently of each other, the link between them is demonstrably conventional.

Benveniste's critique of the categorical form of this doctrine (1971:43–48)—

echoed by Jakobson (1971:348)—stems from his explorations of the fundamental, far-reaching differences between linguistic signs as parts of codes and as elements of communicative discourse. The sign appears arbitrary, he writes, only from an objective perspective on a language as code; from the point of view of the user encoding messages in discourse, the link between the two is on the contrary necessary. Both perspectives are valid, but the nature of their complementarity is often misperceived. The former is that of traditional Saussurean linguistics, which treats messages as clues to code structure. The latter is that of a speaker assimilating or appropriating language as vehicles of communication to particular expressive ends. Benveniste clearly showed how the perspective on linguistic semiosis implicit in the former contrasts with the latter.

But if objective facts of code change can only be explained with reference to user's strategic use in particular contexts, and so, with a notion of pragmatic salience, then the "impassive regard of Sirius" (Benveniste 1971:44) appears to be theoretically limiting for linguistic description, and the doctrine of arbitrariness overdetermined. And if changes in the code of Javanese are in part a function of pragmatic saliences of its elements, then sociolinguistic facts reveal one way the linguistic sign is, to use Friedrich's term (1979), relatively nonarbitrary. The code of Javanese has responded to social pressures in ways that are a function of its components' pragmatic saliences—their intrinsic values, to use Saussure's phrase, as linguistic signs. Their conventional characteristics precondition their potential uses as encoded mediators of social relations. If linguistic-pragmatic responses are not wholly asystematic, then these facts of language change give objective proof of the subjective reality of the principle of nonarbitrariness. Relative to its function as mediator of social relations, a linguistic sign's arbitrariness depends on its pragmatic salience, an encoded property of which speaker's awareness can be read from facts of mention, use, and change.

A small amount of data leads finally to conclusions that may seem overly broad to the sociolinguist concerned with the particulars of variation and change, and relatively concrete or specific to the sign theoretician. I have proceeded from structural linguistic to sociolinguistic analysis, and thence to basic complementarities between models and the types of change described with them. Further data could be introduced within this descriptive framework, and given those data, further observations could be made on the notion of nonarbitrariness developed previously. But if nothing else, this exposition may be iconically significant, illustrating the possibility of theoretically and empirically interesting rapprochements between semiotics and sociolinguistics. In such ways can a general theory of signs be empirically, theoretically, and not just programmatically integrated with the disciplines it subsumes.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In the name of expository clarity and economy, oversimplifications will be committed and details omitted which are too numerous to be listed, let alone discussed. I can only suggest that the suggestable reader consult Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo (1982), Errington (1985), and other sources mentioned below.

<sup>2</sup>Like other authors (e.g., Walbeehm 1897; Uhlenbeck 1978; Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo 1982) I make use here of native Javanese terminology for talking about the speech levels, although Javanese themselves use this vocabulary in ways that differ from those reported in the literature. Scholarly usage nonetheless provides a well-established, consistent terminological base. Native speakers and scholars alike use much of this vocabulary to pick out elements of paradigmatic sets, and combinations of such elements.

<sup>3</sup>At one time alternatives between members of these same sets apparently served to distinguish "regular" ngoko from a more polite ngoko style which is now defunct; see Padmasoesastra (1900).

<sup>4</sup>Paradigmatic sets containing krama inggil lexemes can actually be further classified into three subsets on structural and referential criteria.

<sup>5</sup>Uhlenbeck's examples (1978:317) of madya use by priyayi from old novels are problematic for several reasons. Most notable is the question of whether such uses of madya, like those in other old sources (e.g., Padmasoesastra 1900), are parts of patterns of asymmetric exchange, and key to status differences as muted surrogates for krama. Discussion of this and related issues is in Errington (1985:31-62) and Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo (1982:17-27).

<sup>6</sup>In nineteenth-century texts, one finds *sampéyan* used exclusively in polite priyayi usage, and never *panjenengan*. Today that usage would be at best peculiar, at worse a serious social gaffe. Both *sampéyan* and *panjenengan* have evolved from nonindexical titles (see below, and Brown and Levinson 1976:281-285).

<sup>7</sup>This linguistic reflex of modernization is also marked by variation among modern and conservative priyayi in co-occurrence restrictions governing use of madya and krama conjugates of grammatico-syntactic alternants, this what Labov calls a type of "change from below" (see below, and Errington 1985:105-160).

<sup>8</sup>Serious methodological doubts have in any case been raised concerning the use of variable rules above the phonological level; see Lavandera (1978) and Romaine (1981).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research reported here was supported by the National Science Foundation and the Social Science Research Council. Special thanks for institutional support to LIPI, the Indonesian Academy of Sciences. I am grateful to Michael Silverstein and Paul Friedrich for stimulating me to rethink the treatments of material outlined here. However, all opinions expressed are mine, and I therefore am solely responsible for any errors or misstatements included.

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