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Coda

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These interesting situations in which generics play a key role in interactional pragmatics sparked my memory of solid geometry and spherical trigonometry class at Stuyvesant High School in the early 1960s. Each morning our instructor, the somewhat irascible Mr. Burns, would start off by asking a question on the day's material, calling for a response by '[student surname]'. Stuyvesant, in those days an all-male institution, functioned, like prep schools, on a surname basis for both reference and address; the teachers' names were prefaced by Mr. or Mrs. or Miss, while student names had no prefixed title.

Posing the question and seeking a response, Mr. Burns called out, "Cohen!" Upwards of eight voices inquired simultaneously, "Which Cohen?" Over the decades, Stuyvesant has worked its way through New York City's working- and lower-middle-class ethnic minorities for its students, chosen on the basis of an entrance exam score; at that time, I would estimate that fifty percent or more of the student body were of Jewish ethnicity—in my solid geometry class of thirty-five perhaps half, including the said eight-ish Cohens. "Any Cohen!" replied Mr. Burns; "I don't give a good goddam!" All this even though Mr. Burns had in front of him a Delaney book opened to a seating diagram of where every student was sitting, Cohen surnamed or otherwise. Raised in an Irish ethnic enclave in Brooklyn's Greenpoint neighborhood, Mr. Burns had a clear concept of a generic 'Cohen', and one gathered it was loaded with somewhat negative value as revealed in such exchanges as this one. The concept was coded in and cued by the ethnic surname, for some, the very prototype of a Jewish ethnic surname.

In the pragmatics of discourse, this example, like those offered in the articles, seems to have in common the creation and interactional use of a genericizing expression with a moral or ethical indexical loading. These can become conventional and routinized, as in McIntosh's examples from the US military, or Zuckerman's ascriptions of genred purposivity for men's wagering on pétanque, but they need not be.

Generic expressions—whether nominal or verbal—do not refer or predicate in the usual sense of these terms. Much as in Keith Donnellan's old distinction between 'referential' vs. 'attributive' uses of what at first look like definite descriptions—*The killer was led away in handcuffs* vs. *The killer of Smith, if any, will certainly be determined*—generic expressions communicate a descriptive backing, a criterion of membership that would, if extensionalizable, be usable in actual referring or predicating. They rather communicate the existence of a class or category by an intensional criterion but give no directions as such for extension. In this, the interlocutory other is on her or his own. (Note the class criterion

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presumed upon by Mr. Burns: the class or category of young men with surnames like the prototype surname of this category, Cohen.) And because of this stipulative character, generic expressions are useful in a number of ways.

For example, they justify or dispute actual predications by classifying some aspect of what has been previously claimed in some described categorial position by virtue of a non-contingent state-of-affairs. (In the Vietnamese coffee shop example, people from [geographical term] are [nomic] such-and-so. Note that no particular person must empirically have demonstrated such-and-so characteristics, by the way. For years during fieldwork I was lectured to about Jews by all and sundry local people, none of whom had ever met one, to their knowledge—yours truly included.)

What we term explicit metapragmatic discourse interpreting experienced as well as imagined indexicalities is rife with generics, frequently of a rhematizing sort: an understood indexical is rationalized as additionally an icon of some kind: slow-talking [index] bespeaking slow-thinking [with which the index is understood to communicate 'likeness' along the dimension of speed]. And from such rhematizations behavioral orientations follow, as in military views and behavior toward enemies—or like Mr. Burns's behavior toward his students, the interchangeable 'Cohen' boys and those onomastically (and hence ethnically) like them.

Generic nominals present intensions categorizing entities; generic verbs allow us to do so in respect of events or states-of-affairs. Together, they make nomic generalizations possible in discourse, statements true independent of, but suggesting, confirmatory exemplification. Note how many languages—including, famously, Indo-European—distinguish two kinds of nouns of agency, one for 'the one who has V-ed' for some verb form V, and the other for 'the one who V-s' as an inherent capability, capacity, and propensity of the denotatum whether or not that propensity has been, is, or will be exercised to anyone's empirical senses. Such inherence is essential, in the discursive circumstances in which the form is used, a property seemingly shared by all of the examples in these articles.

My teacher Jakobson, who—as Carl Voegelin said—spoke Russian fluently in six languages, always used to refer to Viggo Brøndal as "the very Danish brilliant linguist", seeming to use a non-native order of adjectives, indexing foreignness. But perhaps he was just coding the relative inherence of these property-spaces, 'brilliance' more so than the expected 'Danishness', though he apparently manifested this latter to advantage.

Whatever the case here, inherence and/or essentialness at the moment of discursive manifestation seems to be key to speaker's choice to formulate an utterance-turn of 'generic' functionality. It should be noted that not all the material is, strictly speaking, generic, though it may present collectivities via typifications ('towelheads') or typified genres of activities ('gambling for money'). Without the indexed presumption of inherence or essentialness as discursively manifest we might identify shades of non-canonical generalizations that masquerade in the

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image of generics. This—like many of the issues raised in these articles—requires further investigation.

NOTE

†1945–2020; this is Silverstein's reading text of his remarks as Discussant on the AAA panel, which he furnished to the panel organizer via email on 23 December 2019.

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