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ARTICLE

Person-Indexing Registers, Idiolect, Subjectivity

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Abstract

This article explores *person-indexing registers*: registers where the non-referential indexical value of the register's metasemiotic model of semiosis is an individuated entity, prototypically a person. Differentiating such cases from persona-indexing registers (e.g., speech registers like legalese, dialects, slangs, etc.)—which invoke metapragmatic stereotypes of various sorts, prototypically figures of personhood—and so-called idiolects, I turn to an extended analysis of person- and persona-indexing enregisterment in Stanton Wortham's ethnography of a U.S. classroom. I conclude by reflecting on the non-discreteness of persona- and person-indexing registers, the way they dialectically transform into each other through citational processes, and how an understanding of this relationship affords insight into the semiotics of subjectivity.

Keywords: enregisterment; idiolect; indexicality; register; subjectivity

Introduction

This article explores *person-indexing registers*. As *registers*, person-indexing registers are (ethno)metapragmatic (i.e., cultural) models of communicative activity that entextualize stretches of discourse as coherent (i.e., poetically resonant) vis-à-vis their non-referential indexicality. As *person-indexing*, they are registers whose non-referential indexical value is an individuated "entity",[1] prototypically, but not necessarily, a person (however this is understood culture internally): corporations, brands (Nakassis 2012;

[1]The term *entity* is in scare quotes to distance my usage from an overly "thingy" view of what can be so-enregistered. By *entity, existent*, and similar terms I do not mean to connote something necessarily physicalistic, as if such processes of enregisterment require there to be physical objects as their indexical target; indeed, my point is the reverse, since what counts as an entity is (at least partially) a function of what can be enregistered as an indexicable social "token" (i.e., of a self-same type, or "identity"). This can include abstract and not strictly physical entities, such as brands, corporations, and the like. Similarly, while the language of "individual" or "individuable" might seem to presuppose a Western conception of the biographical individual, the account I elaborate here, as I argue further below, is not committed to such a conception

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Porquet, this issue), political "Message" (Silverstein and Lempert 2012), kula shells (Munn 1986), heirloom objects (Kopytoff 1986, 80; Hoskins 1998), and AI chatbots (Handman, this issue), among other individuables, may all be so enregistered.[2] This indexicality contrasts them with *persona-indexing registers*, which indexically invoke, by contrast, a social type of some sort (prototypically, but not exclusively, a persona or figure of personhood). These are the bulk of what sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have studied as speech registers.

Person-indexing registers include multiple kinds of phenomena, from the semiotics of reputation, fame/infamy, artistic style (Porquet, this issue; Chumley 2016, 122–57), celebrity and stardom (Nakassis 2025a) to intellectual property regimes (copyright, trademark) and their extensions (authorship, corporate marketing/branding; Nakassis 2013b, n.d.), as well as institutions of state surveillance. (None of these are necessarily discrete, of course.) Like persona-indexing registers, person-indexing registers are not peculiar to speech, and their repertoires comprise many modalities and media (Agha 2007). In general, person-indexing enregisterment involves processes whereby indexical relations are rendered *proper-to* (and thus, in certain circumstances, potentially *property of*) some individuable (human or non-human) such that the signs so enregistered, when appropriately entextualized-in-context, index that individuable in their individuality. Such indexical values are often construed as uniquely belonging to or being the special preserve of their indexical object.

In what follows, I explore the semiotics of person-indexing registers in the domain of speech (see Nakassis 2025a on person-indexing registers in the cinema; Nakassis, n.d. on brands). To do so, I differentiate the notion of person-indexing register from two other analytic concepts: (1) idiolect in linguistics and (2) persona-indexing registers in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. I then provide an extended ethnographic example from the work of Stanton Wortham (2006). This example illuminates the dialectical relations between person- and persona-indexing enregisterment as entangled dimensions of the sociocultural and historical life of semiosis. I conclude with brief reflections on person-indexing registers and the semiotics of subjectivity.

Before proceeding, I want to stress that, despite the use of terms like *person* or *individual*, I don't intend this discussion to presume upon any particular model of the person, certainly not the notion of the autonomous, self-possessed liberal individual, as I argue in more detail below. Registers (person- or persona-indexing) are models of conduct (Agha 2007) that implicate concepts of personhood, concepts which are, as anthropologists have well shown, highly variable across time and space and bundled with other variable cultural concepts (of morality, agency, and so on). Such models need not stipulate radically discrete or internally coherent and agentive individuals

but is instead concerned with semiotic process of individuation, and thus of "individuals" (i.e., individuable entities) of wide varieties: objects, persons, corporate collectives, etc.

[2]For individuables so enregistered, when enregistered signs that invoke them are animatable by (or seem to emanate from) the individuated entity itself, such an entity may come to be experienced as having personality/agency (i.e., it may be personified) and, in matter of social fact, may be thus constituted as a person. In the case of non-human entities that are so enregistered, we find they are often treated as person-like: marketers talk of the "personality" of the brands they peddle (Nakassis 2013b), famous kula shells or other objects have their own biographies (Munn 1986; Hoskins 1998), and so on.

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(indeed, they may conceptualize persons as intrinsically "dividual" and always already relationally imbricated with others; Marriott 1972; Strathern 1988). Yet whatever such models are, every such model will involve, in the cultural cosmology in which it situates itself, entities that are semiotically individuable, and such individuables are available to, and are the effects of, processes of enregisterment. This doesn't require that such individuated entities be coherent over time nor that they be impermeable or autonomous. (Registers themselves, after all, come together and fall apart all the time, just as they are stitched together from the repertoires of other registers.) As we see below, the register phenomena that concern this article are constituted precisely through the circulations of fractions of the individual (i.e., signs of them) through the actions of others, just as they are composed of fractions of other so-enregistered individuals and person types. Moreover, such "individuals" need not be "one" (even if they are individuated and figured *as* individuals, semiotically), as the enregisterment of collective individuals (e.g., corporations, brands) reveals; similarly, one and the same person may be the indexical object of multiple such registers. The point of interest is that such registers model, semiotically, their indexical object *as* individuable, as self-same across moments in some way, even if changing in every other way (indeed, we can only track such changes given a semiotic process of individuation/identification), and even if at other moments, and from other perspectives, they are conceptualized as multiple, dividual, partible, recombinable, and so on.

Differentiating person-indexing registers from the notion of "idiolect", and the ideological conception of the individual in disciplinary linguistics, clarifies some of these points.

Idiolect and person-indexing registers

Modern linguistic science has long located itself within, and oscillated between, a metaphysics of individual and society. The neogrammarian nominalist Hermann Paul ([1880] 1880), for example, argued against the vision of language of the comparative philology of his time, for which language was akin to an organism moving through evolutionary history. Instead, he asserted that the only reality of language was the speaking individual at a moment, a linguistic monad constantly transacting with other such monads, dynamically changing moment to moment, ever in flux, never self-same. Language, for Paul, was a kind of fiction, an average or aggregate that was, at best, an analytic convenience for the linguist who, after all, Paul noted, can't study every single event of speech in relation to every other such event across historical time.

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* ([1916] 1986) critiqued this nominalism by stipulating a realist basis for linguistic science, what he called, with a technical sense, *langue*. As a sui generis synchronic reality, *langue* for Saussure was not simply the addition or average of the speech of every individual; rather, it is that virtual, homogeneous normativity immanent to every utterance as its condition of well-formedness and meaningfulness across some community of speakers. The individual and their speech, on this conception, thus become part of that heterogeneous mass of activity known as *parole*, what needs to be set aside so as to render clear what enlivens it, what is common to it: the linguistic system.

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This epistemic enclosure opened a chasm—between the individual and society, token and type, *parole* and *langue*, event and code—which various approaches to language have since tried to bridge. Bloomfieldian structuralism reconciled this problem of in-principle unlimited variation (Bloomfield 1933, 45)—for ultimately, at issue for Paul, Saussure, Bloomfield, and others was the intrinsic variability of the instance against the stipulative homogeneity of code—through the socio-geographic scaling of linguistic systematicity. Denotational codes—aka "languages"—used by speech communities were at the encompassing apex, a common core against which (social) variation could be mapped; "within" a language were its dialects: geographical variants of a language, the systems shared by speakers within a particular "region" or by a group therein. Dialects, in turn, could be more or less encompassing of other socio-geographic units: … > region > sub-region > town > neighborhood > household …. As Bloch (1948) suggested, at the most atomic level would be the *idiolect*, the linguistic "system" of the individual speaker, the lower bound of both systemic variation and sociological composition.[3] In a stroke, the problem of variation was controlled while abstraction and systematicity were maintained, since the atomic individual that was posited manifested a "system" beyond which any variation was excluded from scientific study. So far, so Aristotelian and Durkheimian.

Sapir ([1927] 1949, [1938] 1949), for his part, highlighted the problem of the individual while integrating it within the sociocultural reality that mediated it. More alive to the contingencies of communication in the historical emergence and dynamism of cultural and linguistic norms, Sapir argued for a dialectical relationship between the individual and the social, responding to the strong realism of an "impersonal" structuralist view of language and culture by reintroducing a measure of nominalist particularism (Sapir [1938] 1949, 575). Sapir suggested that individuals emerge into clarity only and always against a social background from which they may differ,[4] even as

[3]Put otherwise, the problem of the idiolect might be seen as the excrescence of a linguistics struggling to find real generals (languages, dialects, and their rules) amidst unbridled, monstrous variation. If everything is a unique singularity, how do we know how to posit where boundaries lie, where centers are, and so on? For both Saussure and Paul, Bloomfield and Labov, the problem boils down to the question, what is a (group-level) norm? Is it real? Or is it a fiction we impose as analysts? As suggested in the main text above, the problem in both accounts—in Saussure's and in Paul's; and by extension, in Bloomfield et al.'s and in Labov et al.'s—is that the question of norm (and singularity) was attempted to be ontically grounded as of a reality independent of the constitutive reflexivity of speakers themselves, as something only to be decided for and by the analyst. But if we posit—as we must—the problem of variation (and identity) not from the perspective of an objective exteriority but from within, then the problem space is redrawn and the metasemiotics of variation enter center stage. The issue, thus, isn't that there is infinite variation per se *or* that there are norms per se (i.e., independent of speaker's own reflexivity activity) but that *variation* and *normativity* are only construable relative to the reflexivity of semiosis, wherein the former are rendered semiotically meaningful by the latter. This doesn't commit us to a social/ideological nominalism but just the opposite: to the semiotic reality of social facts. It means that, as Asif Agha (2007), among others, has argued, languages, dialects, registers, or idiolects can't *only* be defined on purely formal, distributional grounds but have to take into account local ideologies (Gal and Irvine 2019). Hence, what concerns us as regards person-indexing registers cannot simply be how individuals differ or are unique but rather how that difference is constituted by being construed *relative to the individual as an indexical target of such difference*.

[4]In other moments, Sapir sophisticatedly speaks not of individuals but of singular events of communication (Sapir 1938, 575).

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the individual was also always the very germ for the emergence of social norms themselves: "the individual has his method of handling those particular patterns of society, giving them just enough of a twist to make them 'his' and no one else's" ([1927] 1949, 534). Personality, thus, individualizes culture, even as the sociocultural is emergent from individuals.[5]

For both Bloomfield and Sapir, however, there is a tendency to a kind of positivism in that both take the language system (at whatever level they locate it) as something describable by the linguist purely from an etic point of view, where the differentia between idiolects or dialects or voices or languages is something objective and aperspectival, discoverable because difference is "in" the phenomenon in itself. For a Bloomfieldian linguistics, certainly, that speakers themselves may make such distinctions—and recognize idiolectal difference—was not a central theoretical or methodological point. And while Sapir, like Hymes and others after him (Friedrich and Redfield 1978), rightly asked after the "social meaning of such differences" (Hymes 1979, 36), the assumption remains that social meaning can be made of such differences and attributed to individuals because, by self-evident presumption, individuals *are* unique; that is, individuals and the variability they manifest (against some norm) are taken by these authors as pre-given. In short, all such views take for granted the nature of the social unit, and horizon, against which variation is to be mapped: namely, the individual and the social collectivity to which they belong.

Jakobson (1953, 15), recognizing such problematic assumptions, rejected the notion of idiolect as a "perverse fiction", for language—and the individual—never occur in isolation but always in dialogic events of communication which involve more than one speech-event participant (even when only involving one person). As Jakobson (1953, 15) writes: "There is no such thing as private property in language: everything is socialized." In a similar vein, variationist sociolinguistics, from its inception in Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog's landmark 1968 paper, eschewed the notion of individual language, rejecting the way linguistic science pits variation *against* structural homogeneity. Instead, they argued that language must be rethought not as self-same code but as a structure of differentiation and variability within some speech community. Here, the individual is displaced, with sociodemographic categories (age, class, gender, region) or situational correlates mapping onto distributions of token-instances around some structural legisign (i.e., a "variable", typically phonetico-phonological, though the principle can be extended to any structural-functional category; Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968, 167). As such, it is not individuals that vary and differ from a homogeneous standard code; rather, the code itself is a matrix of differential realization ("variables") organized by, and plottable in relation to, stable social categories (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968, 169–83). Hence, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968, 188) conclude their influential paper: "Because the variable structures contained

[5]One can also see these dynamics in Halliday's (1964) writing, where idiolect extends the speaker-focal indexicality of dialect down to the individual (p. 156); given this, the linguist can "define a set of language events as the language activity of one individual in one register" where "[t]his intersection of idiolect and register provides an institutional definition of individual style" (p. 157), which is the basis of the recognizability of individual language users against the background of shared norms.

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in language are determined by social functions, idiolects do not provide the basis for self-contained or internally consistent grammars." Idiolect begone!

Yet despite the fact that "as the awareness of the complexity of linguistic behavior grew, the domain of the idiolect shrank—eventually to the vanishing point" (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968, 160), the linguistic individual, rugged and self-possessed, has persisted. Johnstone (1996, 2000), for example, has pushed back against the tendency in sociolinguistics and other fields to deterministically reduce the linguistic behavior of individuals back to social categories. If, following Weinreich et al., variation is a resource, Johnstone has insisted that it is a resource used by *individual* speakers in strategic, and often idiosyncratic, ways; in particular, to "express" their individual selves. Here, the individual is—reappears as—the bearer of a unique signature of linguistic behavior.[6]

The linguistic individual also persists in so-called third-wave variationism. Penelope Eckert's (2000) ground-breaking work, for example, has pushed beyond Labovian sociologism by instead correlating variables to local categories of emic significance within the speech community: in her Belten High project, for example, variables are correlated to local types of personhood (jocks, burnouts), their intensive qualities (burnedoutedness, jockiness), social practices (cruising, school-activities), and—in a logic that recalls Paul and Bloomfield—to social networks of interacting individuals (2000, 171–98). At core nodes of the latter, we find specific individuals, so-called "linguistic icons" or "iconic individuals". Here, a sociolinguistic interest in style—a variety of speaking linked to particular social stereotypy (see below on register)—is scaled down to the linguistic individual. If "style is the man [*sic*]" (Friedrich and Redfield 1978, 284), the linguistic icons that Eckert describes are individuals whose usage—flagrant, stylized, and extreme—serves as a local model for meaning making, indeed, is a site for the emanation of vanguard linguistic practice (viz. variables) for wider networks of speakers and thus for historical linguistic change. Here, recalling Paul, the individual is situated at the center of (socio)linguistic process, not simply because their usage is unique but because, through a certain social cultivation of personal identity within a sociological landscape, their idiosyncratic usages performatively create (and change) social meanings for other individuals, and thus classes of persons.

As this quick sketch suggests, much scholarly work on language has assumed the pre-givenness of the individual speaker—who variously serves as the basic carrier and reality of a language system (Paul), the lowest level of systematized variation (Bloch), the agent whose self is inferred/expressed through speech (Sapir, Johnstone), or from whom emanate local values (Eckert)—in relationship to an order of social normativity that exceeds them or perhaps even constitutes them in their individuality (as in post-structuralists' vaporizations of the individual as a figment of discourse).

[6]This, of course, assumes exactly what needs to be explained. Here, one detects a confusion between the particularity of individual behavior—specific events and sinsigns with their contingent, contextualized *this*-ness—and the particularity of biographical individuals; while it may be reasonably argued that linguistic theory cannot proceed without an account of the radical singularity of semiosis (always linked to a concern with its virtual possibilities and norm-level generalities, to be sure), with Jakobson, we might note that this does not commit us to linguistic individuals/individual speakers as the unit of particularity.

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The question that interests this article, by contrast, is one that lurks in but has not received clear expression in the above accounts. It is a question not of the objective uniqueness or singularity—the individuality—of the individual in "their" speech but the way in which sign activity *indexically invokes* an individuated entity (including but not exclusively a person) as its conventionalized object. These two issues are distinct, though conflated in the literature discussed above. This conflation is itself a function of a collapse between two kinds of perspectives on the individual: between a *speaker's-eye view*—where the question is what are the linguistic signs that reveal the individual (e.g., by which we judge an individual as having some kind of personality; Sapir), by which they express their selves (Johnstone) or their identity (Eckert)—and a *sign's-eye view* (Silverstein 2004)—where the question is under what conditions do certain signs point-to (what they project as) an individual and for whom? Note that the latter view shifts the question from the linguist assuming the individual—and then looking for objective behavioral correlates that confirm/"discover" the individuality of that individual—to the question of *the individual as a local model for "hearing" variation*, that is, the individual not as an analytic (and ontic) etic construct but as part of our object of analysis, an emic construct.[7]

Rather than ask after the individual "in" language (be this as the enunciating subject or the idiolectal speaker) or wash our hands of the very question (like Saussure, Jakobson, or Weinreich et al.), we might ask how speech is constructed—through a semiotic process (maybe even through a project)—*as* the speech of an individual, where both sides of the correlation, individual and signs of them, are not treated as pregiven but, rather, given or made through semiosis. In other words, we might ask after the *enregisterment of persons and other individuables*, not as the study of idiolects (the "lect" of an individual) but as the study of *person-indexing registers*.

Persona-indexing and person-indexing registers

Sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have used the term (speech) *register* to denote "ways of speaking", capturing the ideological sense of language users that varieties of language present "different ways of saying the same thing", where "the same thing" denotes referential or propositional content and "different ways" indicates some pragmatic (social) difference. For Halliday ([1964] 1968), a register, thus, comprises a repertoire of forms (phonological, lexical, phraseological, morphosyntactic) that vary with and indicate situational or occupational aspects of their use, such as the language

[7]Sapir writes: "We are so interested in ourselves as individuals and in others who differ, however slightly, from us that we are always on the alert to mark the variations from the nuclear pattern of behavior" (Sapir 1927, 534). Johnstone's example of how the "Aaah" of her father (Johnstone 1996, 4–5) became conventionalized as an index of him for the social domain of her and her sister, such that it could be cited to index him (also, p. 130), al reveal this point. Similarly, Hymes notes how individual differences can come to be socially recognized and invested with meaning, asking: "What then do a given set of people make of differences? What differences do they notice, what ignore? What differences do they stigmatize or seek to repress, what tolerate, what encourage and cultivate?" (Hymes 1979, 40) It is these threads that I expand upon in what follows.

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of medicine, scientific practice, the law, and so on.[8] Such repertoire forms of a speech register thus carry a *non-referential indexicality* (Silverstein 1976a); they are indexical because they point to some aspect of their context of use, and non-referential because—while they may ride on the referential function of language—they do not (seemingly) alter the propositionality of the utterance (i.e., they "say the same thing").

Over the last several decades, linguistic anthropologists have critically rethought this notion of register. Asif Agha (2007), in particular, has pointed out that a repertoire view of register is insufficient insofar as it fails to account for the fact that registers are always duplex. Register phenomena always involve a meta-semiotic *model*—a linguistic ideology (Gal and Irvine 2019)—that construes speech and therein imbues it with indexical value. As Agha points out, the linguist must, of necessity, rely on such a model (often starting from speakers' own ethnometapragmatic vocabulary: "legalese", "baby talk", "Pittsburghese", "Received Pronunciation") to identify what the relevant formal contrasts (and thus repertoire forms) are that index such pragmatic values. Which is to say, the linguist—like all users of language—does not directly encounter variation or difference as such; indeed, the sea of differences that manifest across experienceable sinsigns is far vaster than—in principle, always in excess of—what we hear and ascribe social meanings to. Recall that it is this fact—the monstrous, bottomless differentia in the materiality of speech—that itself drove the Bloomfieldian approach to explain away the problem of variation through recourse to the notion of the idiolect (assumption H2: "Ultimately no two speakers, and indeed no two utterances, have the same dialect"; Bloomfield 1926, 162).

From the contemporary linguistic anthropologist's point of view, then, a register is a cultural model of enactable pragmatic (non-referential indexical) values through which variation in speech is heard and voiced. More specifically, we should say that registers are metapragmatic functions (Silverstein 1993) that have scope over the textual coherence of discourse, that is, that mediate processes of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990). The notion of *entextualization* weds Jakobson's ([1958] 1960) "poetic" or "aesthetic function" ([1935] 1987)—where the qualia of speech emergently give rise to (iconic) figurations of various kinds (i.e., image-texts; Nakassis 2019)—with Halliday and Haasan's (1976) concerns about textual cohesion and information (symbolic) structure (i.e., denotational texts) by extending both: namely, by noting that not simply in qualia or in semantic meaning (i.e., as image-texts or denotational texts), the unfolding of a message (or a "text") also involves coherence of *pragmatic* (or indexical) signs qua *interactional texts*. A register, on this view, mediates or regiments the process of entextualization by construing co-occurrence relations as (poetically) fitting or not fitting with each other vis-à-vis their non-referential indexical values (i.e., as interactional texts); more specifically, as being appropriate to or entailing of some set of metapragmatic stereotypes that are congruent with each other in their context of occurrence—that is, as being "in" register or not (Nakassis 2023).

We can preliminarily characterize such a model semiotically as involving two kinds of indexicality, each with a different value and metapragmatic calibration type

[8]This contrasts, for Halliday, to dialects, which point to regional identities. The distinction of situational/occupational varieties versus dialectal varieties is collapsed in the later work of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists as two types of registers (Agha 2007).

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(Silverstein 1993, 2021; Nakassis 2020): (1) On the hand, register tokens indexically invoke stereotypic aspects of various sorts, pointing to cultural conceptions of different aspects of the speech event, such as situational or institutional (occupational) dimensions ("torts" is a register token that stereotypically invokes legal institutions; "ain't" informal social contexts; "dahntahn" Pittsburgher identity, etc.). As cultural concepts of speech, or metapragmatic stereotypes, such indexical values are *nomically calibrated*, that is, the sign form metapragmatically characterizes its indexical object (here, the stereotype) in a way that stands in no particular time–space relationship to the event of its happening (it is a kind of cultural "essence"). (2) On the other hand, register tokens *presence* such nomically calibrated stereotypes in the event of their use; they *enact* (or enunciate) them by pointing to an indexical target in the very event of their happening (e.g., to speaker, hearer, etc.). Such an indexical relation is *reflexively calibrated*, where the sign points to some dimension of the enunciated speech event *and* characterizes it in the light of the first indexicality (the cultural stereotype). (As a shifter-like indexicality, every such indexical value can, of course, be shifted—or reportively calibrated—to some other event structure. In such citational uses, the deployment of the register is put in quotational brackets and its indexicalities shifted-out to another event that is not the event of enunciation—hence, it is non-reflexive—but is in a time–space relationship of continuity with it—hence, it is non-nomic.)

Agha (2007) notes that pre-eminent among the cultural stereotypes of speech registers are the figures of personhood that come to be enregistered to them. (Such figures, or personae, we can see as social types that organize and unify the various stereotypes and characterological qualities that the register also indexically invokes.) Given that such registers often index social personae, I call these kinds of speech registers *persona-indexing registers.* And since such personae are *social types*—indeed, cultural models of personhood—their enregisterment involves processes of *typification*. We can notice that ethnometapragmatic vocabulary to speak of registers in this aspect relies on common nouns of various types (i.e., nomically calibrated, non-shifter semantic expressions; in particular, status terms) that denote the personae in question, as often reflected in the names of registers themselves: "sportscasters talk", "women's language", "youth slang", "thieves' cant", and so on.

Such personae are often projected onto actors recruited to some role within the speech event, typically but not exclusively speaker. Hence, to use sportscasters talk is to characterize oneself as (like) a sportscaster, Japanese "women's language" as (like) a normatively sanctioned woman (Inoue 2006); by contrast, to use baby talk is to characterize one's addressee as (like) a baby (voicing the other by speaking "like" them), while to use mother-in-law language is to characterize speaker's relationship to bystander as a relation of affinity. Hence, when *I* deploy tokens of a register like sportscasters talk, it is *I* who is indexically characterized by the stereotype (denotable by the status term "sportscaster"), and when *you* do so, *you* are so characterized, and so on (similarly, with addressee- and bystander-focal registers, whose object shifts across participation frameworks). As a reflexively calibrated indexical relation, such usages involve a *shiftable* relationship, with the reflexively calibrated target "shifting" across usages.

In sum, registers coordinate two indexical grounds, shifting-out to invoke a (nomically calibrated) social type of subjectivity (denotable by a common noun) while

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shifting-in to enunciate that social type in a (reflexively calibrated) instance of discourse in a shifter-like way (Fontanille [1998] 2006).[9] Regarding the latter, here we recall Benveniste's (1971) suggestion that the subject is *enunciated* through personal pronouns and related deictic forms that allow a speaker to appropriate *langue* in an act of discourse, but generalize this away from the overly reductive question of a form class (personal pronouns and other deictics) to a general semiotic *function* (or achieved dimension of semiosis).

By contrast to persona-indexing registers—which have as one of their objects social *types* of personae—person-indexing registers, as we've defined them, comprise repertoires of signs whose enregistered (conventional) non-referential indexicality invokes an individuated existent as an individual (a social "token", we might say).[10] While for a linguistic anthropology of speech (persona-indexing) registers, the question has largely been about how entextualized voices become conventionalized—wherein any individual speaker, or speech event, is understood as drawing on multiple voices (the individual as a symphony of the voices of others)—here the question is slightly different; namely, the question is how an individuated entity (e.g., a person) can serve as the indexical object of some enregistered repertoire of forms.

Yet does this notion commit us, in matter of fact, to the sin of assuming the individual (in language)? Certainly, in many cases (such as in modern Western societies), the indexical objects of such registers are biographical individuals. Yet, as I noted above, the range of person-indexing registers exceeds the question of biographical individuals.[11] As such, the notion of a person-indexing register is not committed to the fundamental ontic reality of the individual as some kind of social atom; rather, the question is *what are the individuables in some cultural cosmology* such that they can be subject to

[9]Here, I use the phrases *shifting-in* and *shifting-out* with their senses in Greimassian semiotics (Greimas and Courtés 1982; Latour 1988) to denote how, in enunciation, a sign may shift its frame away from some stipulated origo (residually, the event of speech)—as with reported speech constructions—or back into another frame ("toward" the speech event). The English terms are derivations from the French translation of Jakobson's use of the translation of Jespersen's "*skiftere*" (1916, 122–24; "shifters" in Jespersen 1922, 123–24) as *embrayeur/embrayage,* the gear-mechanism of an automobile (Danish: *gearskifte*) which the driver "shifts" into and out of gear. The English translation of Greimas and Courtés's (1982) "dictionary" translates *embrayage* and *débrayage* as "engagement" and "disengagement" (viz. to "engage" the gear mechanism).

[10]While one might be tempted to contrast person-indexing registers as indexing *tokens* and persona-indexing registers as indexing *types* (see Nakassis 2025a), it should be apparent that the individual (however conceived) is itself a type-level phenomenon insofar as it is conceptualized as, in some way, self-same across moments. What it is not, however, is a class. A "social token", in other words, is only a token relative to the existence of social types (personae); indeed, it is itself a peculiar kind of type, since it implies a transcontextual regularity, an "identity", of that token with "itself" across time. And again, we recall that this is not an ontic claim on our part but rather the (ideological) claim of the register phenomena in which we are interested.

[11]Here, we might extend this point to underline that the class of individuables exceed not only the biographical individual, but also the human (not all so-enregistered individuals are human) *and* the person as a cultural category (since not all such individuables need be considered persons), *even if* the human individual person seems to be, in many contexts, the prototype for this class of registers. This parallels the fact that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have taken as the prototype of speech registers those that involve social types of personhood, even if the full range of such registers involves stereotypes of speech-event variables that exceed those of the social identities of speech-act participants.

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processes of person-indexing enregisterment? (One test for this, as I discuss below, is whether such entities can be given a proper name.) The *individual*, thus, is an ethnographic object whose conceptualization varies in different times and places. In other contexts, we may not find Western possessive individualism, yet enregistered individuables we certainly will. From this perspective, the individual is not the precondition of person-indexing enregisterment but its outcome. Such enregisterment, in other words, is a process of semiotic individuation.

But why, again, is this not just an *idiolect*? To reiterate: by contrast to an idiolect, a person-indexing register is a cultural model that "hears" speech variation—under conditions of entextualization—as indexing some individual. The issue is not what are the unique idiosyncratic uses of an individual speaker but rather whether, and which, differences are construed by some sociologically significant social domain *as* meaningful *vis-à-vis the individual*, that is, how and when do elements of speech come to carry within them an indexicality that points to individual speakers in their individuality as their indexical objects?[12]

Emphasizing this distinction is important for a number of reasons. Not only, as we noted above, can the individual not be taken as ideologically neutral or pre-given, long a truism and true lesson of anthropology and allied disciplines (e.g., Mauss [1938] 1985; MacPherson 1962; Foucault [1969] 1998; Marriott [1972] 1976; Strathern 1988; Stasch 2002), but even if we could assume the individual, not all variation at the level of the individual is meaningful for hearers *as* characteristic of them. Moreover, much of what *is* taken as proper to them, as indexicable of them, is not—*in fact, in principle will not be*—unique to them. One can always cite and imitate, appropriate, or steal person-indexing forms. Acts of parody, like acts of identity theft, turn on this fact. (This is, in fact, one test of semiotic individuality: when using the form, does it still residually hold an indexical tether to some individual in their individuality? Such citations, in other words, both confirm and constitute individuality.) Hence, to take a very simple example (suggested to me by Jack Sidnell), rather than ask after the unique linguistic system of Elvis Presley, our concern is with the social fact of the existence of a repertoire of forms that, for some social domain, can be used to indexically invoke Elvis as a recognizable individual: namely, the "Elvis voice" with its signature (shibboleth) phrases, "Thank you, thank you very much", to say nothing of particular hair styles, clothing styles, the snarl of the lip, the tilt of the head, the gyration of the hips, his musical repertoire, among other stereotyped signs that are assumed to be proper-to him (some of which are even his estate's intellectual property). These are all repertoire forms that, entextualized together, may be used "point to", parody, imitate, and presence Elvis Presley (who is thereby transported "… in the building", as it were). Of course, his Memphis accent, the phrase "thank you, thank you very much", a greaser pompadour, sequin jump suits, a cocked lip—none of these were, are, or will be unique to Elvis Presley. Elvis didn't invent them and Elvis impersonators—among others—deploy them all the

[12]In essence, here we are reiterating Agha's (2007) critique of the repertoire-view of registers but applied to the repertoire-view of idiolects. An idiolect is, in effect, a person-indexing register whose social domain of competence is putatively that of the individual speaker and whose social domain of recognition is the linguist who has "discovered" it (plus whoever is socialized to it through their writing).

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time! Nonetheless, when such signs are used—and in particular, when they are entextualized in co-occurrence patterns to convoke their indexicality so as to manifest an image-text of the man for some social domain socialized to the register—they point to *him*, they impersonate *him* precisely because such signs are taken to be proper to him.[13]

Where persona- and person-indexing registers differ, then, is in their non-reflexively calibrated indexical values: in contrast to a persona-indexing register, what is indexically enacted through repertoire forms of a person-indexing register is not a nomically calibrated social *type* but an individuated entity in a reportive calibration to the event of entextualization (since the person/entity is indexed vis-à-vis the presumption of existence in some historical contiguity with the event of using the register). This, of course, itself presumes upon the individuation of the indexical object *as* an individual. How are we to conceptualize this semiotic process?

Rigid designation and rigid indexicality

We might think of this process in relationship to Saul Kripke's (1980) discussion of the way an entity is fixed with an identity through the conferring of a *rigid designator*—a name or equivalently functional sign—in a ritual event of baptism. In such acts, through one and the same process, a name and a referent are constituted in tandem: via referential shifters of various sorts (pronouns, demonstratives, eye gaze, pointing gestures, rubbing substances on the referent, etc.) an existent is individuated and then, via a performative nomination (accomplished variously in different contexts), bestowed a name which thereafter refers to—"rigidly designates"—that existent across events. This account is a kind of myth of Kripke's; or we might say, it is the myth that rigid designators presuppose as the condition of their intelligibility/functionality. In any case, what is important for us is this: rigid designation is the semiotic infrastructure of person-indexing registers precisely because of the peculiar indexicality of proper names that Kripke puts his finger on.

As Kripke argues, a proper name like "Aristotle" or "Elvis", once fixed to its referent, refers to it across its various contexts of use, indeed, in any "possible world" for those party to the original performative act of baptism, be it directly or through the "speech chains" that emanate from that event. By "possible worlds" Kripke means that, once fixed by a rigid designator, in any counterfactual situation where some intension of the referent, semantic or stereotypic, is hypothetically otherwise, that from the perspective of the speech chain of naming—that is, as anchored to the name's performative event

[13]Person-indexing registers, thus, are like other speech registers in that they are ideological constructs through which difference is heard as pragmatically meaningful by some social domain (Silverstein 2003, 2022; Agha 2005, 2007; Gal 2018; Gal and Irvine 2019), and through which forms of interactional textuality cohere in processes of semiosis (i.e., entextualization). This last point is important to underline since many (most?) repertoire forms of a register cannot, of themselves and without co-textualization, presence the conventionalized stereotypes modelled by the register. That is, most elements of a register are not shibboleths, and the capacity of most communicative activity to index personae/persons instead turns on textual patterns whose *cumulative* force is to index a person(a). Registers, again, are models of textuality rather than bins of (performative) shibboleths, even if such shibboleths anchor the wider token-forms with which they co-occur to the registers with which they thus belong.

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of nomination (the designator's indexical origo)—the referential relation still holds. Even if all that was truly predicable of Elvis was discovered to be false (including his very existence or even that he was named Elvis), we could still refer to the entity so-fixed by with the name; hence, in the sentence "Elvis never existed" or "Elvis is not his name", or "Elvis was never baptized 'Elvis'", "Elvis" still refers! The name, in other words, stipulates an identity beyond all intensional properties (Žižek 1989), independently of any of the characteristics, qualities, or stereotypes of its referent, simply by having been fixed to its referent *at* some moment, and thus *across* future moments (for some social domain). It is in this sense that rigid designators are reportively calibrated both to their putative events of baptismal origin, which serve as the ever-after origo of the name in its referential indexicality, and thus to their token-target/referent.[14] It is this peculiar relation that makes such signs unshiftable—or at least, differently shiftable—across contexts of translation or citation (in comparison to personal pronouns, e.g.). To shift the referent, rather, requires resetting the origo through a new baptism and thus the creation of a new speech chain (Butler 1997): "not *that* Elvis, the other one, *this* one, *him*, the one with that band, 'The Imposters,' …"[15]

Proper names, on this analysis, however else they function (which are quite diverse), *refer* based on their achievement of rigid designation. This property makes them central to person-indexing registers and the diverse phenomena they manifest (reputation, fame, stigma/taboo, celebrity, branding, etc.). Because rigid designators refer independently of both their intensions (semantic or stereotypical) and their contexts of use, they can thus *communicate* (in the sense of transfer) those intensions—and in particular, the social indexical (n + 1st) values that they absorb through their entextualization/contextualization and circulation—*back* to the referents which they designate. Rigid designators like names are *semiotic batteries* for social pragmatic power; they absorb and release the social meanings that are generated (i.e., entextualized) in their contexts back to their referents. For this reason, the name functions as an intertextual metasemiotic that links all such events in which something is predicated of or done to or around a name (Munn 1986). The rigid designator anchors signs that co-occur *with* it *to* it, indeed, allows such signs to be incorporated into the personage of the name, that is, to become *rigid indexes* of the person. I call these *rigid indexes* and not rigid designators because they are non-referential signs; they do not contribute to the propositional content, or denotational text, of discourse but rather carry a second-order indexical value that rigidly invokes some individuated entity.

The name (like the face; Fleming 2024) is, thus, a *shibboleth* of a person-indexing register—and, indeed, is often part of the metapragmatic name for such a register; viz. "[Elvis_{PN} voice]$_{\text{CN}}$" (cf. [$\text{sportscaster}_{\text{CN}}$ talk]$_{\text{CN}}$)—which co-textualizes co-occurring

[14]The latter thus evinces, as well, a kind of nomic calibration, as Luke Fleming (2024) has argued; cf. Nakassis (2025a, n. 17).

[15]Here, Fleming's (2024) distinction of the *proper name* (as a designator that extensionalizes *one* referent, *that Elvis*) and the *proper noun* (as the symbolic legisign that classes proper names as the same form: "Elvis" as a name) is important and productive to understand the playful slippage that is possible in the gap between them. Elvis Costello, for example, is the stage name of Declan MacManus, who changed his name first to Declan Costello (a family name his father once used as an alias) and then was given, by his managers, Elvis as a stage name, in reference to *the* Elvis.

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signs and thus may incorporate them, bringing them into the semiotic body of the register. Through this, innovative social meanings that are generated through the entextualization/contextualization of enregistered and non-enregistered signs (i.e., via the person-indexing text-in-context) can always be recouped into, and reanalyzed as, *elements* of the register, given a semiotic memory in the form of a default non-referential indexicality; in the case of person-indexing registers, such signs can be turned into signs proper to the person, reanalyzed as "theirs" in some way—indeed, as we've had occasion to mention, even as *their property*, as with the intellectual property of brands (trademark) or authors (copyright) (Nakassis, n.d.), the face or publicity rights of celebrities (Wortham et al., this issue),[16] the clan rights of Tsimshian adawx narratives and ancestor names (Roth 2008), and so on.[17] In such cases, the semiotic commons, through a kind of expropriation, is turned into indexical property, that is to say, into proprietary paths through which interdiscursive travels of value can be controlled (and in the case of brands and other commodified registers, through which the flow of profit/money can be channeled). There is, in other words, *contra* Jakobson, such a thing as private property in enregistered discourse, even if all that is proper-to a person always allows for (indeed, makes possible) theft, homage, and other modes of citational appropriation.[18] Only that which can be owned, after all, can be stolen.

Recall that person-indexing registers co-ordinate two indexical values, one "shifted out" to a non-reflexively calibrated person, the other the "shifted in" to a reflexively calibrated animator; one (special) case is when the two converge: where the speaker of the forms is also the target, say, Elvis speaking with Elvis-enregistered forms, i.e., as "himself". (Of course, we should note that the two targets are never really the same, which is why one can sound unlike oneself, be different from one's own personage.[19]) Just as common, however, are cases where the two targets differ, say, where someone other than Elvis (e.g., Rondey Wooton aka Blelvis, an African-American Elvis impersonator in Washington DC when I was growing up) uses Elvis-indexing forms. In such cases, the animator cites the person or some aspect of them. And in doing so, they

[16]Wittgenstein (1953, §171) observes: "A similar fusion occurs, for example, between the faces of famous men and the sound of their names. It seems to us that this name is the only right one for this face." Thanks to Charles Zuckerman for drawing my attention to this reference.

[17]Writing of the Malo of Vanuatu, Strathern (1988, 109) notes: "It is possible to purchase another's bodily gesture or idiosyncratic speech form. The relationship between person and knowledge here is that between owner and disposable, but not alienable, item—the item retains its value as a resource from being simultaneously in another's possession."

[18]Here, we might differentiate questions of *ownership* (who controls the flow of value of the rigid indexing of repertoire forms) versus *appropriation* (who can manage to cite), and *being* (who can be something [the type] through using a sign-token) versus *citation* (who can *be like* and cite a type through a sign-token), and *none of the above* (who can neither *cite* nor *be* nor *appropriate* nor *own*).

[19]This parallels Fleming's (2024) observations about the ideological slippage from extensionalized proper names to intensionalized proper nouns, and from both to persona-designators (i.e., common nouns): viz. Karen as proper name of some person ("Karen Carpenter, what a great singer!"); Karen as proper noun of a type of name for a person ("I knew a lot of girls named Karen in my school"); *a* Karen as a common noun for a type of person ("Guy 1: yo dude did you hear Mrs Smith next door called the cops on a Black Guy cuz he was just taking out the trash?; Guy 2: Brooo wtf that's crazy! What a Karen"; from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=KAREN, entry by TherapistPierrePolnareff, modified August 1, 2020). See Kosse (2021).

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Table 1. Some contrasts between persona- and person-indexing registers

	Persona-indexing (speech) register	Person-indexing register
Indexical object and target	1. Social (stereo)type (of personhood*)	1. Individuated entity (a social "token", a person*)
	2. Speaker/sign-user† */†Other stereotypy (than person-type) and targets possible (as with honorific registers, avoidance registers, etc.)	2. Speaker/sign-user *Other entities possible (e.g., collective individuals, objects, historical events(?), etc.)
Calibration types (indexical orīginēs)	1. Nomic calibration of persona to cultural world of belief	1. Reportive(/nomic) calibration to baptismal event (of individuated entity) via "speech chain" and thus to indexical object
	2. Reflexive calibration of (1) to event of enunciation (i.e., to Speaker)	2. Reflexive calibration of (1) to event of enunciation (i.e., to Speaker)
Indexical type	1. Typifying index (i.e., to social type),	1. Rigid index (to individuated entity),
	2. Shifter (non-referential, to Sp.)	2. Shifter (non-referential, to Sp.)
Interactional schema	Enacting/voicing(Sp., figure) (i.e., inhabiting a social type of personhood)	Being/citing(Sp., individuated entity) (i.e., inhabiting a social individuality)
Repertoire	Various: phono-lexico-syntactic, gestural, sartorial, etc.	Various: phono-lexico-syntactic, gestural, face, name, sartorial, etc.
Default interactional text	Speaker signals (i.e., voices) social identity through register-conforming texts consisting of repertoire forms	Speaker signals enregistered individual's identity through register-conforming texts consisting of repertoire forms

adorn themselves with that other person's personage (Munn 1986), even as they in turn become a vector of that person's reputation, for better or worse (one can, after all, also *defame* someone by doing violence to signs proper to them, just as one may pay them homage). In so adorning themselves, such a person may even become an enregistered part of the register, where their social existence itself becomes an index of the person in relation to which they are defined (as with fans, acolytes, kin, devotees, and similar phenomena). (See Table 1 for a summary comparison of person- and persona-indexing registers.)

As the comments above suggest, however, person- and persona-indexing registers are not so easily differentiated. Rather, they are two distinct but entangled *dimensions* of enregisterment that relate to each other through reversible "indexical orders" (Silverstein 2003); as I discuss below, one may emerge out of the other (i.e., stand in an nth–n + 1st relation), just as some process of enregisterment may involve both dimensions at one and the same time (Figure 1).[20] This is precisely because, as noted above, every rigid sign (designator or index) by being entextualized/contextualized

[20]Here, we might distinguish three indexical values: reflexively calibrated animator, reportively calibrated person, nomically calibrated persona; in such cases, the persona-indexing register may have a paragon or prototypic figure (a "linguistic icon", to use Eckert's term), just as a person-indexing register may accrue stereotypy of various sorts. See below for more discussion.

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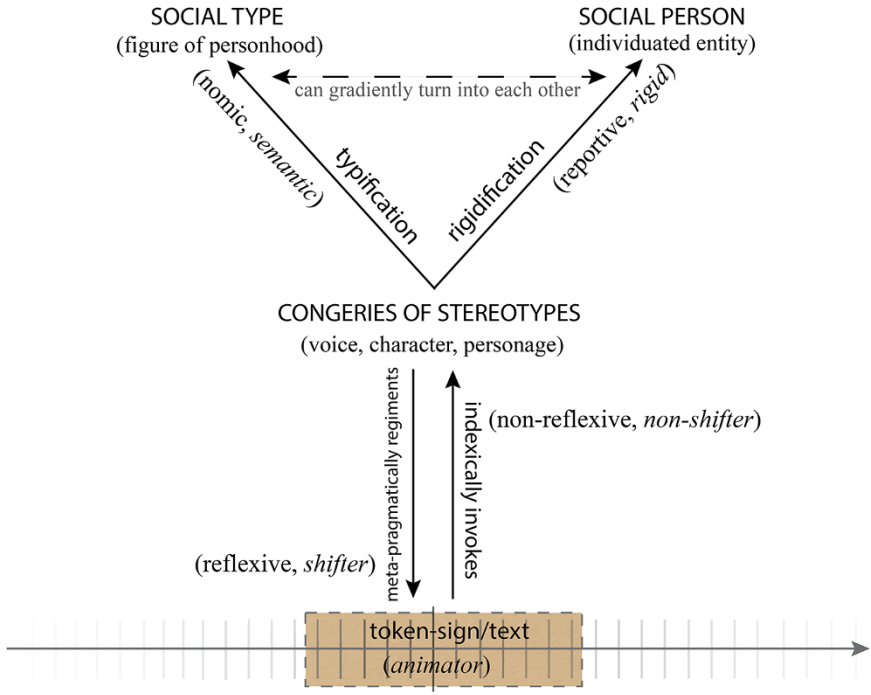


Figure 1. Shifting, rigidifying, typifying, schematized: Token-signs entextualized into a text-(type-)in-context by some animator(s); such signs indexically invoke various (non-reflexively calibrated) stereotypes, organizable as a voice or character, a *personage*; such a personage also regiments the unfolding of the text (i.e., serves as its reflexively calibrating metapragmatics); further, such text-level tropes may themselves be enregistered, either to an individuated entity (person-indexing register) or a social type (persona-indexing register), or both. Each such register may transform into the other, serving as its fodder or effect, through citational acts.

serves as a magnet of stereotypic (n + 1st order) values that "stick" to the indexical object (as a social token or type of person/hood); such stereotypes of the person themselves may shade into—that is, be reanalyzed as—a persona, historically anchored to an individual yet ultimately detachable from them through a process of *typification*. Similarly, social personae may serve as the basis, through a process of *rigidification*, for the enregisterment of person-indexing registers, where persona-enregistered signs are appropriated as rigid indexes of a person. The vector for both processes of enregisterment are, as always, events of entextualization/contextualization, events wherein such indexical objects are enunciated through processes of *shifting(-in)*. And the way, as we see below, in which these two dimensions (person- and persona-indexing enregisterment) are intercalated and transformed, one into the other, is through acts of citation (Nakassis 2013a).

Person- and persona-indexing registers in a U.S. classroom

To consider how persona- and person-indexing registers interact with each other, in what follows I consider an extended example from Stanton Wortham's singular

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ethnographic monograph, *Learning Identity* (2006). Wortham's study of a ninth-grade school classroom in the United States clarifies this relationship through his discussion of the ontogenesis of "social identity", that is, the ways in which particular individuals come to regularly experience themselves, and are experienced by others, as particular social types of persons. Wortham asks: how does an individual become a "bad student" or a "good student", a "nerd" or a "troublemaker", or whatever the descriptor happens to be? That is, how do biographical individuals come to "be" tokens of particular enregistered social types (what I've been calling persona-indexing registers)? This is, note, different from the (not unrelated) question that concerns this article: namely, how do person-indexing registers—whose repertoire forms are indexically linked to an individuated entity, a person—emerge (in particular, out of persona-indexing registers)?

Wortham begins from the premise that social identity is always an interactionally mediated phenomenon: social types exist only insofar as they manifest in real-time events of semiosis, which is to say that identity is always put into play in, and thus emergent from, interaction. At the same time, events of interaction themselves only take intelligible shape (are entextualized) to the extent that extra- or trans-contextual semiotic norms—such as widely circulating social types of personhood (viz. registers)—hover over and across interactions. As this implies, the issue isn't simply that large-scale, widely circulating models of identity are uniquely contextualized (or troped on, i.e., realized) in different events of social identification, but also that those very models emerge through and across those token-events of identification (i.e., are virtualized). Through such an "enunciative praxis" (Fontanille [1998] 2006),[21] every event dialectically instantiates and thus also reconstitutes such models of personhood, thereby giving rise to self-differences *within* these models, enabling "local" or "meso" models of identity, as Wortham puts it, to emerge, say, in classroom activities across the course of an academic year.

While Wortham's interest is how social types can be scaled "up" or "down" (to the level of individuals), here my interest is in how this dialectic of norm and trope—or social type and token-instantiation, virtualization and realization—and the forms of self-difference it continually produces relate to, produce, and are produced by the enregisterment of such indexicalities to *individuated existents*; that is, how such models of identity can be *rigidified*, fixed with a rigid indexicality to a person. What Wortham's ethnography reveals, thus, is when the rubber of enregisterment hits the road of individuation and subjectivity. And this implies the distinct process of the enregisterment of a person, of the thickening of *their* personage, of their becoming a particular social type unto themselves.

The case of Tyisha

As Wortham tells us, one widely circulated stereotype in American schools that created a default metapragmatics for the particular classroom he studied was that "girls are less

[21] On the notion of "enunciative praxis" and its relationship to entextualization and enregisterment, see D'Armenio (2025), Danos (2025), Dondero (2025), Donzelli (2025), Guellouz (2025), Nakassis (2025b), Nakassis and Padoan (2025), and Padoan (2025).

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troublesome, smarter and more promising than boys" (2006, 53). This was particularized in the classroom that Wortham studied, such that teachers articulated the belief that "girls cooperate more with the teachers, are more intelligent, and will more likely succeed professionally and economically in later life. Boys, in contrast, more often resist classroom expectations, are less intelligent and will most likely not succeed professionally and economically in later life" (2006, 53). These stereotypes were elicited by Wortham in interviews with teachers. They were, however, also implicitly figurated—embodied and instated—in interaction as the way in which students were positioned within and across classroom interactions.

This relationship of stereotype to student behavior, of course, hardly worked in straightforward ways, where students were directly recruited to, or seen as, instances of these stereotypes. Rather, such stereotypes were the grounds of intelligibility of student behavior, whether they conformed to them or not. Consider Tyisha, an African American student who started the year as a "promising girl" but ended up as a "disruptive outcast". While the first category is perhaps a relatively recognizable identity category for a student, the latter, Wortham notes, is not. Rather, the "disruptive outcast" was a locally emergent category particular to this classroom (and one mediated, as we'll see, by the class's curricular focus on Aristotle's *Politics*); and further, this persona was the result as much as the source of Tyisha's trajectory of person-indexing enregisterment over the course of the school year; which is to say that the persona emerged through what Wortham calls Tyisha's "trajectory of identification".

In September, at the beginning of the academic year, Tyisha was an outspoken student whose input was valued in the class because she was one of the few who participated regularly. As Wortham reports, when her answers were off topic or "wrong" they weren't commented upon by teachers as such, and the uptake of her participation by teachers and other students was generally positive, even for forms of behavior that later became problematical for the teachers when more students began participating in classroom discussion (2006, 153–55), such as couching her statements as personal opinions via epistemic modifiers like "I think" or "to me".

By December, what largely went uncommented upon in the autumn began to receive implicit disapproval and even explicit metacommentary by teachers as negative behaviors. Wortham shows how Tyisha was increasing dismissed by the teachers as "missing the point" (2006, 157–58) or being off-topic, as well as inappropriately framing her discussion only as her own personal opinion (rather than taking an impersonal point of view) or by using her own personal definitions (rather than abiding by the "social contract" of the class to use shared definitions), as we see below. Increasingly, as the year went on, Tyisha became cleaved off from the rest of the group, interrupted with more frequency and more quickly. She began to be treated as a different *kind* of student, and not in a good way. This wasn't a named identity, however, but a pattern, an image-text (Nakassis 2019), of interaction. Consider the poetics of pronouns and proper names in the following transcript from November 2 (Figure 2), and how students begin to take up the teachers' stance to Tyisha two months later, in January:

In the first strip of interaction, note the citation of Tyisha (lines 372–74 in red brackets), which figures her as flippant and explicitly typifies her contribution as "vague" and without "specific" examples. Further notice how in both excerpts, the poetics

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November 2

TYI: but- it shouldn't be the rights of men and women
370 because the only people that got rights in here is the men or the husband.
T/S: whoa, whoa, the only one who has rights in here are men. could you give me some concrete examples, from this. well no, all of them, you know, just sort of being
375 vague. we want be specific to show us that you've actually read it.

January 2

TYI: okay, when- um Sylvia was talking about the slave and the ma:ster, the master, okay, the slave, he uses his hands and stuff but- they won't give him a chance to use his- to teach him to read and stuff and the master know
435 how, so he using his mind. why does he [[4 unintelligible syllables]
T/B: [okay, didn't- you just missed the connection, the con- the thing is that- do not look at this as saying that slaves are manual workers,
440 slaves- women are slaves. look at these as four distinct relationships.
T/B: and in Greeks- in Greece, there certainly were slaves that used their mind. yeah?
FST: I'm talking about going back to what Tyisha said
450 about how slaves that- well- if, okay if a master didn't teach the slaves how to read, how did they learn how to read? how did we know how to read and talk ourselves?
T/B: o[kay, you just missed-
TYI: [right, thank you.
455 **T/B:** you just missed the point.
→ **JAS:** you missed the point. we're not compari[ng them.
TYI: [I know, but I'm talking about-
T/B: okay, look at this again, mental, manual workers,
460 are mental workers

Figure 2. Tyisha in the classroom, November 2 and January 2.
Source: Adapted from Wortham (2006, 156–57).
Notes: Annotations on this transcript and those that follow—such as thick underlining (red, black, gray), red curly brackets, arrows, circles around text, sans serif text—are my own; thin underlines are in the original and indicate stress; see Wortham (2006, 292) for his transcription conventions.

of discourse (e.g., the PERSON-deictics, verbal mood) provides a reflexive image (or meta-picture) of what is going on the interaction; namely, a contrast between:

you:	we/us::
Tyisha:	the teachers and the rest of the class::
those who are vague:	those who are specific::
those who didn't do the work:	those who did do the work.

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This emergent figuration of Tyisha as outside of the consensus of the class is solidified over time, as revealed by the uptake of this position of Tyisha by Jasmine in line 456, whose "we" aligns her with the teachers (and potentially other students), as being in distinction to Tyisha (and another female student [FST]).[22]

As these brief excerpts show, up to this point Tyisha's recurrent positioning in the class is figurated through turn-taking, interruptions, pronouns and other person-referring expressions, grammatical features (such as the imperative mood), as well as explicit commentaries. This positioning has an unspecified and unnamed quality: she is implicitly treated ("voiced") as a student who doesn't listen and who is outspoken. This image is solidified, or "thickened" over time (as Wortham puts it), as each interaction revisits, and conserves, something of these previous interactions, as this comparison of two events across two months hints at.

Critical to Wortham's account of this thickening is how classroom interactions were informed by the curriculum. And when a new curricular topic emerged—Aristotle's *Politics* with its thematization of the antimony between individual and society—Tyisha's protean personage became a resource for academic learning. That is, her recurrent positioning in the class *itself* became an object of reflexive pedagogical interest; and this transformed, indeed, enregistered, such recurrent positioning into an image of the person herself. By being so figured, Aristotle's *Politics* became a metapragmatics by which a social type/persona (the "disruptive outcast") and an enregistered person (traveling under the name, Tyisha) emerged in tandem. Not simply exemplified by Tyisha, this curricular text also puts a finer point on, and fleshes out, the model of personhood that she was already being recruited to, that is, enregistered to within the classroom.

Central to this process is what Wortham (1992, 2006) calls "participant examples". This pedagogical technique aims to align the denotational text of the lesson with the interactional text of the classroom by making a student or teacher an example of something in it. Consider one of Wortham's examples. The class is discussing Aristotle's *Politics* and, in particular, the question of what differentiates animals and humans. The teacher is pushing the notion that humans have goals. Tyisha interjects, "Mrs. Bailey? I-I have to disagree" (2006, 181), a statement of epistemic particularity, which is greeted by the class as a typical thing Tyisha does, as indicated by their immediate laughter. Tyisha suggests that her cat also has goals, such as to get on the counter, just like she has goals, like to win at Nintendo. The teachers push her on this, arguing that humans, but not animals, have long-term goals.

Tyisha persists and inhabits her position in the class as an impish disrupter, her persistence taken up by the teachers, and the other students, *as* a disruption. To counter the teachers' arguments, rather than contest their framing, Tyisha plays into it and reverses its terms. It isn't that her cat is like her but that *she* is just like her cat. In the summertime, all she wants to do is sleep and eat (Figure 3).

[22] Further, note how the teachers are trying to steer the conversation away from reading the topic against a history of racial slavery in the United States (a not-irrelevant context invoked by the African American students in the here-and-now of the interaction) and toward a particular text of Aristotle ("the point"). It is obvious from the data that the question of race—in relationship to the curricular topic—is central here.

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T/S: what goal did you have in mind this morning,
even when you went to sleep.
TYI: [laughing] I didn't h(h)ave o(h)ne.
T/S: sure you did. didn't you- didn't you have the
730 goal you had to wake up at a certain time, get
dressed in a- by a certain time, get to a place
TYI: yeah that's true.
T/S: so you had goals even before you s[tarted
TYI: [but not in
735 the summertime. I just got up, see, just like
T/S: ah, and in summertime when you got up
because you didn't have to come to school what was your
goal or was it to sleep until three in the afternoon?
or to get up and play with your friends?
740 **TYI:** the same goal my cat had, to go to sleep,
and get up and eat.
T/B: ahhh, isn't that interes[ting? [increase in pitch,
'mocking' effect]
T/S: [ahhhh

Figure 3. Tyisha in the classroom, January 24.
Source: From Wortham (2006, 184).

745 **T/B:** same goals as her (1.0)[cat=
FST: [cat had
T/B: =had. wow.
→ **FST:** so you are like an animal.
→ **T/B:** so you are like an animal.
750 **TYI:** I'm not saying, I just don't have
somewheres to be at.
T/B: okay, but that's not- don't confuse the issue.
one point at a time, Tyisha. you throw out seventeen
things and then- nobody can even begin to address
755 any of these things.
MST: tss [hissing laughter]

Figure 4. Tyisha in the classroom, January 24, continued.
Source: Adapted from Wortham (2006, 186).

In lines 736–39, the teacher's formulations offer up a set of alternatives for Tyisha, the first of which would seem to be dispreferred; it is precisely this, however, which Tyisha takes up and elaborates as "the same goal my cat had". In line 742, the teacher typifies Tyisha's equation as "interesting" with an increase in pitch that, as Wortham puts it, metapragmatically typifies this "goal" by mocking it. Next, the teachers and the students pick up this stance together so as to argue that, indeed, Tyisha is beastlike (2006, 186). Note how, in the transcript below (Figure 4), the teachers and the other students collaboratively (re)entextualize an image of Tyisha as separate from the class:

In line 745, the teacher cites Tyisha's equation of herself and the cat with a third-person construction ("her" = Tyisha), and in lines 748–49 the teachers and students both position Tyisha as "like an animal", generalizing from her particular cat to the larger taxonomic category ("her cat" → "an animal"), using a nomic copula with the

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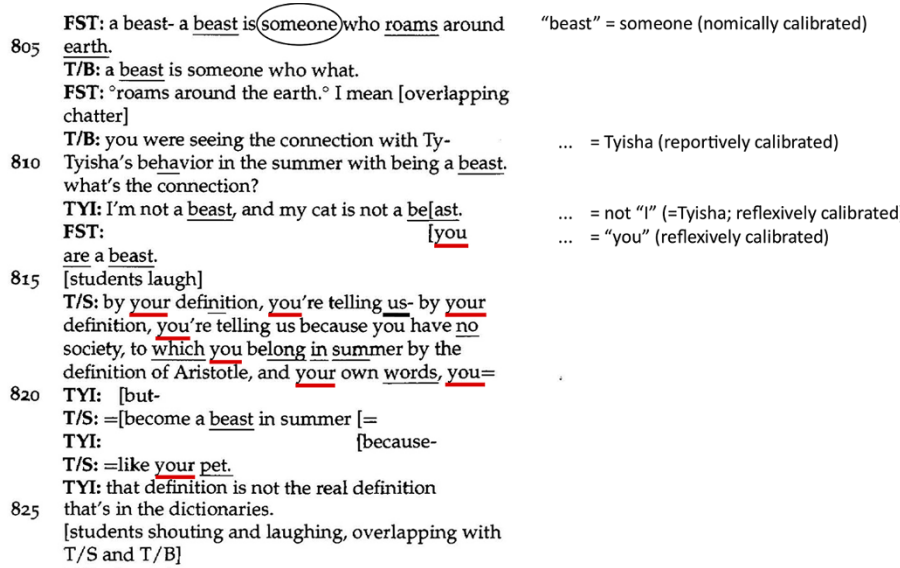


Figure 5. Tyisha in the classroom, January 24, continued.
Source: Adapted from Wortham (2006, 187–88).

second-person subject ("you are"; cf. Tyisha's reportively calibrated past tense reference, "same goal my cat had"), with Mr. Bailey's stress on "are" indicating this being against normal expectations. At this moment (line 750), Tyisha begins to back off of her argument, and the teacher, Ms. Bailey switches footing to discipline her. Ms. Bailey shifts-in through a switch in address: from pronominal "you"—quasi-rigidly designating her hypothetical cat-like self—to proper-name address, "Tyisha", the student in the here-and-now of the class. In line 756, the rest of class ratifies the teacher's disciplining, solidifying Tyisha's individuation and separation from the rest of the class (as disruptive, beastlike).[23]

This comparison between Tyisha and her cat is shaped, of course, by Aristotle's text, whose point is that beasts, like Gods, are asocial creatures; they exist *outside* of society. Consider how the interaction continues to unfold (Figure 5).

In this stretch of classroom interaction, the concept from the text—the definition of a "beast"—is metasemantically elaborated and humanized: note the existentially quantified human noun "someone" (cf. "something") plus "who" (cf. "which") in line 804, followed by the verb phrase "roams around the earth". In the teacher's utterance in line 810 (addressing another student), Tyisha again becomes a third-person topic, a usage that excludes her from the discussion while "connecting" her to the nomically

[23]Note here that the second-person pronoun functions as a rigid designator (nomically calibrated to a hypothetical "possible world") while the proper name shifts-in to the reflexively calibrated *hic et nunc*, speaking to the point elaborated in the conclusions that at issue is not form classes with stable meanings but contingently achieved contextual functions.

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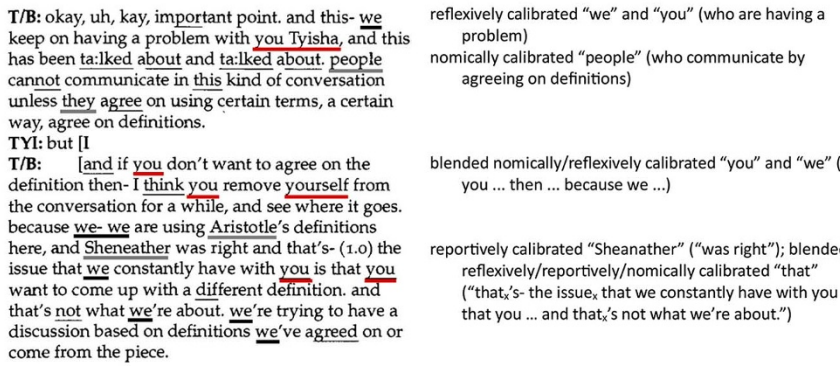


Figure 6. Tyisha in the classroom, January 24, continued.
Source: Adapted from Wortham (2006, 188).

calibrated curricular topic ("the beast"). When Tyisha protests in line 812, both the students and the teacher turn her argument against her. "Definitions" become the way in which Tyisha is shown to be a beast, like her cat. In line 816, the teacher says, "by your definition …" so as to fix her as a beast, not in a "possible world" but in the here-and-now of the classroom itself (Figure 6).[24]

In line 828, an explicit connection between an (exclusive) "we" having a problem with "you Tyisha" is drawn; the teacher switches to an impersonal third person ("people") who must agree on terms. The hypothetical syllogism, already implied to be the case (as sketched in the interactional poetics thus far), is that if *you* don't agree on a definition then you can't participate with *people [=us]* (i.e., you are not one of the people, you are not a person, you are an animal). As the teacher says in line 835, "and if you don't want to agree on the definition, I think you (should) remove yourself from the conversation".

At the beginning of the interaction, there had been two possible entextualizations available: that Tyisha is joking around (as seen from the students' laughter) or that Tyisha has made an argument that is valid and should be considered (as seen from the teacher's uptake of Tyisha's intervention). As Wortham suggests, both come to be reformulated as the interaction proceeds, and by the end of the interaction, by pursuing the latter, Tyisha has become the butt of the joke (line 815), her own inhabitation of the participant example turned against her. By the end of the sequence, Tyisha is not simply figurated as a hypothetical example of an outcast. She has been distinguished and separated out discursively from the rest of the group, which itself is figurated, via the abiding metapragmatics of the textual analogy, as "society".

Here, the performative semiotic structure of such participant examples works as an engine of enregisterment: not only do the participant examples align the denotational

[24]Note here how Tyisha attempts to inhabit a (socially typified) impersonal voice of authority ("the dictionaries"), but the weight of her individuation (as a particular type of student in the class) forecloses this possibility in this interaction; as this example, and others in this section show, the way Tyisha is individuated blocks her ability to self-represent *as* a particular kind of individual.

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text under question (here, Aristotle's *Politics*) to the interactional text of the classroom and its discursive image-texts; they also make each the metapragmatics of the other, such that the interpretation of the pedagogical text becomes a function of its framing through the emergent interactional relations constituted by the participant example, just as the participant example is metapragmatically framed by the denotational content of the text which is being taught at the moment. This pedagogical modality socially locates Tyisha by positioning her vis-à-vis Aristotle's text, creating analogies whereby qualities/intensions discussed in Aristotle's text (in this case, of being disruptive and being an outcast, being beastly) can come to be lodged in the individuated entity that straddles the participant example (Tyisha). And vice versa. Such hypotheticals ("possible worlds") double the text and the interaction, linking each world with the other (the world of the narrative, Aristotle's *Politics*, and the world of the classroom interaction) through the signs of an individuated entity recruited to participate as their bridge: namely, the *body, name,* and *conduct* of the person, Tyisha. The participant example becomes a conduit or pivot, then, through which person-indexing enregisterment happens, through which a history of interaction (itself an emergent image-text culled over numerous interactional texts over the school year) and a pedagogical (and mythic) denotational text come to be entangled with each other vis-à-vis the individuated person; and to Wortham's point, it is precisely via this dialectic of person- and persona-indexing enregisterment that academic learning and outcomes are mediated, for better or worse.[25]

What is interesting for this article is how this cumulative trajectory, this continuous positioning, is itself part of the emergence not simply of gendered or racial stereotypes in the classroom (of which Tyisha was a notable exception), nor of the curricular categories (e.g., of the "disruptive outcast"), but of Tyisha herself as the indexical object of this process of enregisterment. Here, again, the issue isn't about Tyisha as a singular self with unique, idiosyncratic communicative behavior but rather about the emergence over the history of the classroom of signs whose indexicality, for that class (viz. social domain), is modeled as linked to her *as* an individuated entity. Indeed, it isn't that epistemic hedges, disruptive behavior, and the like were singular to Tyisha (we imagine that many students engage in such behavior), but rather that through being

[25] A reviewer of this article suggested that "it seems like the person-indexing register is functioning, among other things, as a strategy to bypass potential accusations of anti-Blackness and/or misogynoir", whereby rather than "histories and structures of anti-Blackness" the classroom dynamic becomes "just Tyisha being Tyisha". On this analysis, by making Tyisha's behavior about her as such, the enregisterment process deflects from questions not only of social types, but also of larger structural dynamics (racialization, intersectional exclusion). Certainly, racializing and gendered stereotypes are central to the classroom context that Wortham (2006) discusses (as he points out; also see Wortham 1992). In addition, the classroom dynamics at certain moments do clearly involve the teachers directing students away from questions of race (see note 22 above and discussion therein) just as Tyisha's person-indexing enregisterment constrains her discursive latitude in classroom discussion (including to voice certain positions/critiques; see note 24 above). Moreover, within personalist U.S. ideologies (Hill 1998), where sign-behaviors are often construed as indexes of the discriminatory mental states of particular persons rather than systemic forms of discrimination (of which personalist ideologies are a key part), we might expect this kind of deflection to take place. While I find this analysis intriguing (and can imagine such enregisterment processes functioning in such ways), from what is presented in Wortham's ethnography I hesitate to conclude that there is a purposive strategy to so-enregistering Tyisha (i.e., so as to deflect accusations of anti-Blackness or misogynoir).

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BRE: they just put them out an- as a test. if it lives
then it's strong. and if it dies then it dies.
→ **T/B:** I'm going to play Tyisha.{that's not right}
STS: hahahahaha
250 **T/B:**{these people are stupid. that's not right}
we're[missing=
STS: [hnh haha
T/B: =her today.
STS: [7 seconds comments and laughter]
255 **T/B:** she- you know that's what she'd say?{what
is your response to that?}
STS: [unintelligible response] hahahahaha
T/B: you'd never say that when she's in the room.

Figure 7. Impersonating Tyisha in the classroom, February 7.
Source: Adapted from Wortham (2006, 192).

repeatedly co-textualized to shibboleths such as her name such signs came to have a residual indexicality anchored in her person. By being co-textualized *with* her, they became *proper-to* her, even—perhaps especially—in her absence (Figure 7).

Here, later in the year, Tyisha is now named as a character/social type to be "played" through the deployment of signs that have been rendered proper-to her, as indexes of her; in this case, parodied through disruptive and challenging speech acts ("these people are stupid, that's not right", "what is your response to that?") co-textualized and regimented by her name.

What the case of Tyisha demonstrates is that the criterial feature of such a register is *not* the uniqueness of the repertoire forms vis-à-vis their indexical object. Rather, it is their *citationality* (Nakassis 2013a), the fact that Tyisha as a person circulates through citable signs of her—signs whose contextualized values, however, return to *her*, as "hers", in this case, in an ambivalent, indeed, somewhat negative light.

We might further suggest that it is this citationality that *constitutes* the register even as it partially undoes its rigidity, shifting it through typifying it (here, through an act of parody). For the outcome of every such enregisterment—every such individuation—is precisely its converse, its decontextualization and abstraction, a tendency of every individuated social token to become a social type, of the individual to give herself over to a self-different stereotype of "herself", of the person, through their personage, becoming a persona. Tyisha, then, wasn't simply a token-individual of a generalized social-type (promising girl, disruptive outcast, etc.), or even a token that altered the type; *her identity itself became a type*, not simply relative to itself, which is to say, as a self-same identity across time and space (i.e., as a biographical individual), but also a recognizable type across a social domain (the classroom over the year) that construed such signs as proper to her.

Conclusions

The case of Tyisha reveals the play between person- and persona-indexing registers. Each emerges from the other, the "disruptive outcast" persona informed by and informing the image of Tyisha herself as the object of an assemblage of signs organized by her

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person. Further, this emergence and appropriation of one kind of register out of/by another—where a person is made up out of the shards of personae, and social personae elaborated out of individuated persons—is a function of the dialectics of entextualization and contextualization, wherein some $n + 1$st indexicality that is generated under conditions of entextualization is enregistered to an individuated entity, a person (versus some contextual variable-type or conventionalized social type), or vice versa, where an nth order index of an individuated person gives rise to an $n + 1$st stereotype of itself (itself perhaps the germ of a new social type of personhood).

Person- and persona-indexing enregisterment, as I've suggested, should not be thought of, then, as two distinct *kinds* of registers but as intertwined *dimensions* of enregisterment. They should be thought of as insistent, ever-present tendencies of enregisterment toward individuation, or *rigidification* (reportive-calibrating metapragmatic regimentation), and generalization, or *typification* (nomic-calibrating metapragmatic regimentation), whose mediating interface is the event itself, that is to say, reflexive-calibrating metapragmatic processes of *shifting*. The interface and grease between these dimensions, further, as we suggested, are *citational acts*: moments when these indexicalities are de- and re-centered, re-articulated, where individuated particulars are cited into stereotypy (the differential produced through citation enregistered as a type), and stereotypes cited into individuated persons (the differential produced through citation enregistered to the individual).

Historical semiotic change, we might further suggest, is propelled through this dialectic of citationality: of repetition and difference; individuation and abstraction; of shifting/appropriating, rigidifying/propertizing, and typifying/communalizing. We might return to Penelope Eckert's notion of a "linguistic icon"—a person in a local community of practice whose idiosyncratically intense and stylized use of some set of sociolinguistic variables serves as a model for others to align with, *to cite*. Eckert's notion, read in this light, reveals how the historical change of persona-indexing registers—and thus languages per se—are driven, in part, by the enregisterment of person-indexing registers, even as the latter are themselves, following Wortham, made up out of the former.

Here, we might even return to Hermann Paul's idiographic nominalism, if with new, semiotic realist eyes. Recall that for Paul it was at the level of individuals, with their idiolects, interacting that diachronic change, the flux of sociolinguistic reality, is modulated; we might affirm this view, but only if by idiolect we mean person-indexing registers and by sociolinguistic reality we mean the envelope of enregisterment in a speech community.

* * *

In conclusion, I'd like to return to the centrality of the three co-ordinate (meta)indexical processes mentioned above: *shifting, rigidification, typification*. These correspond to Peirce's three ontological categories—Firstness (possibility), Secondness (actuality), and Thirdness (generality); his three semiotic grounds—iconicity, indexicality, symbolism; Silverstein's three calibration types—reflexive, reportive, nomic; and the three dimensions of textuality/entextualization we've discerned—image-text, interactional text, denotational text.

We might understand these processes as organized in the following way: the aesthetic textuality (i.e., poetics) of discourse paints pictures (icons; specifically, diagrams

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or image-texts), with each sign (a stroke, as it were) emerging in events of semiosis (Nakassis 2023). Such image-texts figurate, among other things, *voices* (Agha 2005), immanent possibilities of subjectivity and identity that, if so entextualized in the instance, may become swept up—that is, iterated, cited, recontextualized—and enregistered. In/across such moments, such texts and their partials may be anchored/enregistered as rigid indexes of an individuated entity (a person, a spirit, a place, an object, a moment [Proust's madeleine?, a psychic trauma, a mediatized debacle[26]]) just as they may be typified, that is, indexically linked to some social norm or type (a persona, a type of relation, an institutional context, etc.). Further, as models of textuality that serve as virtual metapragmatics that regiment processes of entextualization/contextualization, every such register moves through those turning, winding paths that lead it to other destinations: types tokenized (rigidified) and tokens typified (conventionalized), with both these conversions unfolding via processes of enunciation (shifting-in and -out) that are the necessary possibility of the emergence, regularity, and change of such semiotic norms.

It is interesting that all known languages feature three types of nouns that correspond to these three processes—deictics (including, especially, person-indexing shifters), proper names (including, especially, person-referring rigid designators), and common nouns (including, especially, status terms for types of persons)—and even more that linguists and philosophers have homed in on, and reanalyzed (Silverstein 1979), these noun classes as THE "wheres" and "whens" of subjectivity and identity.[27] For Benveniste, for example, the subject enunciates itself through the "I" (and "you"); for Kripke and Butler, it is the proper name that creates identity; for Žižek and Butler, status terms like "woman" or "girl" or abstract nouns like "democracy" in performative formulae ("It's a girl!") instate subjectivity.[28]

Such a focus on these decontextualized structural categories or their use in decontextualized words or sentences, of course, misses the point. For while these processes find a kind of sedimented crust in language in and as these distinct form classes (that is, in *langue*), reflection reveals that rather than their status as stable grammatical categories, in *discourse* what is important is the functional *achievement* of what are taken as their default properties; after all, what are structurally by default shifters may be used in particular contexts as rigid designators, proper names as shifters, and common nouns as either. What is more important are the ways in which sign relations can be *shifted*, made *rigid*, turned *common*. These are contingent achievements of tenuous processes (even political projects and legal regimes; Nakassis 2013b, n.d.). Further, these semiotic processes have nothing in particular to do with nouns nor can they be

[26]See Kosse (2021) for a brilliant discussion of the verb phrase "pull a [proper name]", and in particular, "pull a Britney", a phrase that rigidly indexes a specific media event—singer Britney Spear's public 2007 meltdown that resulted in her shaving her head—via the rigid designator, "Britney" so as to metapragmatically characterize the subject of the noun phrase, at the moment denoted, as akin in some way to Britney Spears in the moment of her meltdown.

[27]We might also note their relative place in Silverstein's (1976b) noun-phrase animacy hierarchy, a hierarchy of relative (meta)indexical anchoredness in the speech event.

[28]Here, we can also gesture to arguments about "impersonal" enunciation in continental semiotics, wherein subjectivity is not a function of *I* and *you* but of the *it/he/she/they*, the "illeity" of enunciation (Paolucci 2022; cf. Urban 1989; also see Nakassis 2025b).

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explained only by attending to their properties out of context. They involve numerous types of signs—some nominal, most not; some linguistic, most not—and represent neither stable functions nor isolable forms but immanent and always pressing tendencies and potentials of indexical semiosis: to be shifted, to be fixed, to be generalized. Sign processes are ever realizing these tendencies. And at their nexus, we find subjectivity (perspectives), persons, and personae, propelled by and propelling the movements of semiosis.

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