■   *Luke Fleming*
Department of Anthropology
Université de Montréal
luke.fleming@umontreal.ca

Taxonomy and Taboo: The (Meta)Pragmatic Sources of Semantic Abstraction in Avoidance Registers

The mother-in-law speech registers of Aboriginal Australia are notable for both pragmatic and semantic peculiarities of their organization. In their sociopragmatics, mother-in-law registers represent a rare recipient-focal type of social indexicality. In the mere copresence of certain categories of affinal relations everyday lexical forms are tabooed, with speakers instead using an alternative avoidance vocabulary. In their lexical semantics, these registers are notable for the taxonomic relationships that adhere between avoidance vocabularies and associated everyday speech forms. Avoidance repertoire items are more generic than the everyday forms for which they substitute, with one avoidance form standing in for many everyday words—the so-called "one-to-many correspondence" between avoidance and everyday lexemes first noted in Dixon (1971). Far from unique to mother-in-law registers, a range of other speech registers—from male-initiate registers to specialized speech styles used in the highlands of Papua New Guinea while harvesting pandanus nuts—are shown to exhibit these linked properties of lexical tabooing and one-to-many lexical correspondences between registers. Drawing on these data the article shows how the pragmatic particularities of context-bound lexical tabooing give rise to lexicon asymmetries, and how these lexicon asymmetries, in turn, become the basis for dialectical structure-ideology relationships that further reshape register repertoires. [taboo, semantics, pragmatics, performativity, ideology]

Introduction

The mother-in-law languages of Aboriginal Australia are perhaps most renowned in the linguistics literature for a particularity of their semantic organization. First documented by Dixon for Dyirbal, the mother-in-law register (*jalnguy*) was shown to exhibit an intriguing asymmetry relative to the everyday lexicon (*guwal*). Dixon (1971:437) noted a "one-to-many correspondence" of denotational functions between the vocabularies of the two registers. This one-to-many relationship was structured in such a way as to reveal interesting taxonomic semantic relationships that could not have been easily adduced by study of the everyday speech variety in isolation. I illustrate this by reproducing in Table 1 data elicited on Guugu Yimidhirr verbs of motion by Haviland (1979a, 1979b).

In Table 1, a set of six everyday verbs of motion are all translated into the Guugu Yimidhirr affinal avoidance register by one form, *balil*. The word *balil* is a hypernym of the corresponding set of everyday words. But while this (singular) hypernym to (multiple) hyponyms relationship is revealing in and of itself, what most interested Dixon was what happened when informants were asked to translate the Dyirbal mother-in-law register equivalent of a term like *balil* back into everyday speech. When informants are given the word *balil* and asked to translate or gloss it in everyday speech they invariably offer *dhadaa* "go," rather than *dhaarmbil*, *yaalgal*, or *gaynydyarr*, as its translation. Thus *dhadaa* "go" is itself a hypernym of sorts. Arguing from data of this kind, Dixon hypothesized that the lexicon of languages like Dyirbal and Guugu Yimidhirr (and by implication the lexicons of all natural languages) are divided into two kinds of forms: lexical primitives, "nuclear" verbs like *dhadaa* "go," and "nonnuclear" verbs, like *yaalgal* "limp" and *daabal* "wade," which are related by definitional equivalences to those nuclear forms. Mother-in-law speech, he argued, basically consists of a purely nuclear vocabulary. The existence of the avoidance register and its one-to-many lexical correspondences to everyday speech is thus an invaluable tool for revealing the underlying taxonomic ordering of the Dyirbal lexicon—a happy accident indeed for the field linguist-cum-semanticist.

But why should such an anomaly exist at all? The received interpretation of this phenomenon is that it reflects and reproduces patterns of deference indexicality. Mother-in-law registers, which often consist of repertoires of many hundreds of distinct vocabulary items, are typically used either in addressing, or merely within earshot of, certain categories of affinal kin. While avoidance practices may be lax or muted among same generation affines and alternate (or "disharmonic") generation consanguineal kin, they are generally most pronounced in cross-generation and cross-gender in-law relations. Son-in-law and mother-in-law typically avoid ever directly addressing one another, close physical proximity, the direct transfer of objects and eye contact (Merlan 1997). Violations of these taboos, whether accidental or purposeful, are reported by informants to cause extreme shame and embarrassment (Haviland 1979a:377).

In-law avoidance speech typically combines with linguistic and nonlinguistic deference indexicals (e.g., "polite" pronominal reference, bodily nonalignment, avoidance of eye contact, etc.) to create a composite and multimodal figuration of interactional restraint and nonengagement (see Fleming 2014a for a global survey of in-law avoidance registers). In the canonical account, the relative lexical abstractness of the avoidance register repertoire is viewed as the reflection of a trope of "indirectness" which maps denotational imprecision onto interactional politeness. Lexical abstractness is part and parcel of a strategy of "negative face," to use the language of Brown and Levinson (1978). As I hope to show, the relationship

Table 1
Many-to-one correspondence between everyday and
brother-in-law register verbs of motion in Guugu
Yimidhirr, after Haviland 1979b:218

Everyday Speech	Mother-in-Law Speech
dhadaa "go"	
dhaarmbil "float, sail, drift"	
yaalgal "limp"	*balil* ("go")
gaynydyarr "crawl"	
biilil "paddle"	
daabal "wade"	

between one-to-many lexical asymmetries and linguistic ideologies of interactional restraint and deference is more complex than such a perspective would lead us to believe.

To frame my intervention here, it is necessary to remember the genealogy of the language ideology concept, which has become so central to contemporary linguistic anthropology. A touchstone for this line of research is Silverstein's (1979) essay "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." That essay envisaged language change as an inherently dialectical and reflexive interplay between language structure, linguistic ideology, and discursive usage. While subsequent scholarship has often dropped the dialectical and diachronic dimensions from the study of language ideologies, where the question of language change *is* considered, it is the relationship between structure and ideology that has most often been emphasized (Irvine 1978; Silverstein 1979; Rumsey 1990). Even where usage-based considerations are brought to bear, they invariably center on acts of reference that telescope language ideological commitments and language structural realities (e.g., Silverstein [1985] 1995 on the referential, structural, and ideological aspects of pronominal gender in English). In my diachronic reconstruction of the emergence of semantic abstraction in avoidance register lexicons I seek to give usage a broader role than the one given it in the structure-ideology dialectic as canonically framed (see also Fleming 2014b).

In terms of Silverstein's triad of structure, usage, and ideology, I argue that it is the relationship between usage and structure, rather than the one between ideology and structure, which has causal priority in accounting for the lexical eccentricities of avoidance register repertoires. I argue that the primary cause of lexical hypernymy is to be found in the discursive practice of linguistic avoidance and not in ideologies of politeness. This is not to say that cultural models of language use are not crucial to our story—they are. Taboos, linguistic or otherwise, necessarily depend upon semiotic ideologies (Douglas 1966; Valeri 2000). That is to say, the pragmatic-functional particularities manifest in the use, mention, and avoidance of verbal taboos themselves presuppose ideological understandings that necessarily underpin normative evaluations of (in)appropriate usage. Furthermore, as we will see, both the general, usage-based pragmatics of verbal taboos as well as the specific content of metapragmatic ideologies contour the diachronic development and elaboration of avoidance register repertoires, though in different ways and at different levels of abstraction. Nevertheless, the idea is that in the first instance we must attend to a functional configuration manifest in usage, rather than a specific set of ideological commitments, to begin to account for the general phenomenon at hand.

This conclusion rests firstly upon an empirical finding: One-to-many relationships are found across a wide range of avoidance registers of different types, some relating to affinal avoidance, others to the liminality of male initiation, some to the harvesting of pandanus nuts, others to safe passage through untamed lands. This broader distribution of the phenomenon suggests that the hypernymy of avoidance speech has its basis not in the specificities of Aboriginal Australian affinal relationships but in more general form-functional trade-offs that emerge at the intersection of lexical semantics and social pragmatics. As I hope to show, we can best understand the lexicon asymmetries of taboo-avoidance registers by attending not to the pragmatics of denotation per se, as an account based upon "euphemism" or "indirectness" might approach the problem (Allan and Burridge 1991; Brown and Levinson 1978), but rather by focusing on the specific token-level pragmatic properties of lexical taboos and their avoidance.

Avoidance Registers: Performative Indefeasibility

Avoidance registers are specialized speech registers consisting of a repertoire of lexical forms that fulfill the denotational functions of the forms avoided while

eliding their performative, or indexical, entailments. While the best-known set of avoidance registers are the so-called mother-in-law speech registers of Aboriginal Australia, many other register formations share these form-functional properties in common with them. Some examples discussed in this article include highland New Guinea pandanus languages, Abkhaz hunting language, and Gbaya male-initiate languages.

Within avoidance speech what is not said (i.e., everyday words) is just as important as what is said. This is a function of the special performative properties of verbal taboos, which are performatives whose effects are indefeasible, even if only within some specific social context (e.g., affinal copresence). This distinguishes them from more run-of-the-mill performatives, like promises and baptisms, tokens of which may easily be canceled out or "defeased," as for instance they are when they occur within reported speech constructions. By recounting a judge's "Guilty!" verdict one does not risk condemning one's interlocuter to a prison sentence. Not so with taboo speech, where revoicing the sign may also reproduce its perlocutionary effects. Verbal taboos are unmentionable; to merely cite an everyday form within an avoidance context is to achieve its performative effect (Fleming and Lempert 2011). In the Australian context, to voice the everyday "wording" of another speaker within earshot of one's in-laws still causes shame and embarrassment, even though one is not the author of the utterance (Rumsey 1990). The performative indefeasibility of verbal taboos is thus a functional characterization of a token-level, or usage-centered, discursive phenomenon.

But if, as I argue at length below, a functional configuration of "usage" is the source of asymmetries in the denotational specificity of lexical entries across everyday and avoidance register vocabularies, this does not mean that such lexical patterns do not themselves perform ideological work. In the last section of the article I show how many-to-one lexical asymmetries furnish a patterned semiotic substance that then becomes subject to ideological rationalization and, through that reflexive interpretation of linguistic form, structural reconfigurations of its own kind. I contrast Aboriginal Australian mother-in-law languages with avoidance registers centered around male initiation. As this comparison illustrates, though the lexical asymmetries of avoidance register repertoires may share a common pragmatic motivation, they have rather different diachronic destinies depending upon the content and character of the sociocultural conceptualizations of language and language use through which avoidance speech is interpreted.

Mother-in-Law Registers in Aboriginal Australia

While there has been some work done on the question of the historical provenance or sources for avoidance vocabulary (Dixon 1990), the question of how one-to-many relationships themselves emerge over time has never been explicitly addressed. There does seem to be a null hypothesis implicit in much of the work on mother-in-law speech which seeks to transparently relate the semantic underspecification of the avoidance register lexicon to the pragmatics of its use. This line of thinking is made most explicit in two papers, Rumsey (1982) and McGregor (1989) on Bunaba and Gooniyandi mother-in-law registers, respectively, and appears as an implicit assumption in Dixon (1971:438), Haviland (1979b:210), and Errington (1988:170).

In Bunaba there is a register distinction between everyday speech (*jada jada* or "straight" Bunaba) and a mother-in-law avoidance style called *gun-gunma*, probably a cognate to Gooniyandi *goongoon-* "to speak circumspectly to, to avoid speaking to" (McGregor 1989:633, n.1). Rumsey describes a number of characteristics of the Gun-gunma speech register that include the systematic skewing of pronominal paradigms, processes of detransitivization, and one-to-many relationships between avoidance and everyday lexicons, among other features, all of which allow for "a wide range of degrees of 'explicitness' or semantic specificity" in the use of the

avoidance register (Rumsey 1982:165). Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1978) universal theory of politeness he argues that the lack of semantic precision of avoidance speech is in essence a strategy of "negative politeness" (Rumsey 1982:174 ff., cf. McGregor 1989:644). By not giving a semantically rich description, speakers give addressees maximal flexibility or leeway to interpret their utterances. Rumsey argues that Gun-gunma's "formal features are not connected in an entirely arbitrary way with the avoidance relationship which they index, but instead are inherently consonant with that relationship" (Rumsey 1982:160). It is important to see that by "inherently consonant" Rumsey does not seem to mean "inherently consonant" through the mediation of language ideologies which imbue linguistic forms and formulae with social values, but rather "inherently consonant" because the pragmatics of use themselves determine the linguistic content or repertoire of the register. McGregor (1989:647) offers a related explanation of the mother-in-law register in the neighboring language, Gooniyandi, stating that "the . . . semantic style [of avoidance speech] . . . is clearly an iconic reflection of the relationship of avoidance it encodes." If "negative politeness" is the synchronic pragmatic effect of the more abstract semantics of mother-in-law speech one might be excused for being led to believe that such delicacy in denotation could also have been the historical cause of the lexicon asymmetry.

The problem with the "negative politeness" account of one-to-many lexical correspondences is that it fails to take into account how local metapragmatic models of relational, affinal avoidance and nonengagement are *iconized* in (Irvine and Gal 2000), rather than being naturally iconic with, the denotational structure of avoidance registers (Silverstein 2010). While denotational "suppression" may indeed be understood within local models of language to count as respectful behavior it is far from clear that this structure is a direct reflection and historical product of these or any other pragmatic values of its use.

Silverstein (2010:348) offers just such an approach to related phenomena in Worora, seeing local language ideologies as playing a crucial mediating role in determining the pragmatic value of the lack of denotational specificity of Worora mother-in-law (or *rambarr*) speech. In Worora, as in Bunaba and Gooniyandi, one-to-many relationships between avoidance and everyday vocabularies are in evidence alongside pronominal skewing in (non)address of taboo in-laws. Worora mothers-in-law are not explicitly addressed, but rather the fiction of a "shill" addressee is used along with a first-person dual inclusive form which precisely excludes the taboo relation who is, in actuality, the targeted overhearer of the utterance (Silverstein 2010:348, cf. Crowley 1983:313). Importantly, by using an inclusive dual, rather than a first-person exclusive pronoun, not even the copresence (let alone the addressee status) of the taboo in-law is acknowledged on the plane of referential indexicality. This despite the fact, of course, that on the plane of nonreferential indexicality the copresence of a taboo in-law is presupposed by the use of the avoidance register itself. Silverstein argues that *rambarr* speech in Worora, both in terms of the one-to-many relationship between the avoidance register and everyday speech and in these practices of pronominal address, "is locally interpreted as negation of discursive interaction" (Silverstein 2010: 348).

Pronominal usage is the element of the register which explicitly makes nonreference to the speech participants whose social relationship is indexically figurated through its use, and thus the element of the avoidance register most transparent to metapragmatic awareness. In Silverstein's analysis, reference thus plays a privileged role in mediating the relationship between usage, structure, and ideology (see also Silverstein 1979 and 1981). These pronominal usages, and the way they referentially negate the in-law relationship, thus model the way in which other aspects of the structure of the register—including the relative lack of denotational specificity of its lexicon—are conceptualized. Rather than being transparent or naturally iconic one with the other, on this account, the relationship between register form and pragmatic value is seen as crucially mediated by language ideologies.

The analysis of lexicon asymmetry as a natural icon of its sociopragmatic value points up problems of interpretation which derive from the fact that Australian mother-in-law registers are formally and functionally composite. On the one hand there are aspects of mother-in-law speech registers which pattern much like canonical honorific registers (Agha 1998) and include skewing of person deixis, the use of honorific affixes, and patterns of voice, aspect and mood marking (Alpher 1991:103 ff.; Goddard 1985:155–158). But while pronominal skewing in affinal address may look quite similar to the pronouns of "power" and "solidarity" of European honorific registers (Brown and Gilman 1960), there are also a range of linguistic and non-linguistic taboos which, from a comparative perspective, often have little to do with politeness or deference entitlements.

Thus in Australian mother-in-law speech, both context-based lexical tabooing and face-to-face deference-indexicality are simultaneously at work. Mother-in-law speech is neither strictly a lexical taboo-based avoidance register (like Kalam pandanus register [Pawley 1992]) nor an exclusively honorific speech-level system (like Javanese [Errington 1988]). But because folk ideologies tend to project the values of the more transparently referential system onto the less transparently referential one (Silverstein 1979), both native Australians and linguists who study their languages have tended to interpret the hypernymy of in-law registers in terms of the person-deixis mediated systems of honorification.

The metapragmatic or language ideological account suggests that the relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic value is a complex and mediated one. On such an analysis there is no clear reason to see the structure of the register as the direct historical reflection of discursive strategies.

One-to-Many beyond Australia

The strongest evidence against an interpretation of lexicon asymmetry as a natural icon of deference is the existence of a number of avoidance registers outside the Australian continent, and involving wholly different circumstances of lexical tabooing than mother-in-law speech, that exhibit comparable lexicon asymmetries across avoidance and everyday speech styles.

The most unambiguously parallel set of cases outside of Australia are the pandanus "languages" of the New Guinea Highlands.[1] These are avoidance registers organized around the gathering of pandanus nuts in uninhabited mountainous regions. Activity type avoidance registers of this kind are relatively prevalent cross-culturally (Flom 1925; Knight 2008; Skeat and Blagden 1906).

As with other activity types where we see the development of avoidance speech, pandanus nut gathering takes place over an extended period of time (Pawley 1992:315). The stated ideologies behind the use of pandanus registers differ from region to region and even within certain speech communities. Kalam speakers report that if everyday speech is used the nuts will become spoiled for human consumption; the supernatural and performative connection between everyday speech and pandanus nuts is represented as a direct one. Contrastingly, Kewa and Melpa understandings of avoidance speech focus on how its use mediates the gatherers' relationship to mythical spirits and the wild dogs they control, who occupy the Mt. Giluwe region where pandanus nuts are harvested. It counts as a form of "hidden language" (*sa pi agaa*) used to trick the spirits (Franklin 1972:69; Franklin and Stefaniw 1992:4).

As we can see, the explicit language ideologies related to Kalam, Kewa, and Melpa uses of pandanus registers are distinct, not only from one another, but also from those which mediate understandings of Australian mother-in-law registers. In Kalam pandanus nut gathering, everyday speech does not risk ruining a social relationship with a very real and copresent speech participant—it risks remotely rotting the prized pandanus nut fruit. Here a supernatural connection adheres between everyday speech and the object of desire. The goal of avoidance speech is to break this

connection. Nevertheless, Kalam pandanus language is a prodigiously elaborated avoidance register which exhibits structurally homologous one-to-many relationships to everyday speech in its lexical semantics (Pawley 1992; see wordlist in Franklin 1972:70 ff. and analysis in Foley 1986:43–45 for equivalent patterns in Kewa).

As we can see for the Kalam verbal lexicon in Table 2, there are pronounced lexical asymmetries between everyday and avoidance vocabulary. Note that some of the same semantic domains which were affected in Guugu Yimidhirr—like verbs of motion—are also affected in Kalam avoidance speech. Note also that in a number of these cases an everyday word (e.g., *tgaw-* "draw back a bowstring" or *tag-* "travel about, return from") has become extended in its semantic sense in the avoidance register.

Thus we see that while these aspects of register structure are relatively consistent across different cases, local ideological frameworks concerning them vary quite markedly. Either different ideological regimes lead to similar outcomes or the cause for the unity in this structural aspect of register form should be looked for elsewhere.

Table 2
One-to-many relations between everyday and pandanus registers in Kalam taken from Pawley 1992:323–324

am- "go"	
ap- "come"	
saŋd- "depart"	
sk- "enter"	
tag- "travel about, return from"	*tag-* ("move")
taw- "move something back and forth"	
talk- "break through a fence"	
tlak- "step or jump over"	
kom- "encircle, roll up, bury"	
yok- "displace, get rid of" "	
ad- "heat stones for earth oven"	
ag- "(make a) sound"	
agi- "ignite, heat"	
ask- "avoid, be in an avoidance relationship"	
mangi- "warm oneself by fire"	*tgom-* ("communicate sound or heat")
pbok- "cook food on separate fires, reheat food"	
sbk- "scorch, burn surface of something"	
taw- "make fire by friction"	
yn- "burn, cook"	
ang- "copulate"	
ñag- "shoot, propel or move something suddenly, spring, flick"	
pungi- "impinge, press, pierce, force or impose something"	*tgaw-* ("impinge on, come into forceful contact with")
su- "bite, sting (insect), nip"	
tgaw- "draw back a bowstring"	
pk- "hit, contact"	

Lexical Cohesion and Negative Repertoires

In order to understand this formal convergence in the organization of register repertoires we must return to the notion that the performative indefeasibility of everyday words and expressions in avoidance contexts fundamentally structures the avoidance registers which arise to contain and displace these social indexical potentialities. Here, our analysis of register repertoire (Agha 2007:147) must go beyond the enumeration of the repertoire of forms used in avoidance speech to include a *negative repertoire* of forms which are tabooed.

Where avoidance speech registers occur it is never the case that each and every linguistic form used in everyday speech is avoided.[2] Bound morphology and grammatical particles are almost never affected in taboo-avoidance registers, which are made up of exclusively lexical repertoires.[3] Avoidance register repertoires thus make a neat distinction between what Whorf (2000:95) called "modulus" and "primary selective" categories. In most taboo-avoidance registers, however, not all unbound morphology is avoided. Haviland, for instance, gives the example of *badhuurr* "zamia-nut fruit" as a lexeme used in both everyday and avoidance speech in Guugu Yimidhirr (Haviland 1979b:220). The word *badhuurr* is not enregistered as exclusively in either the positive or the negative repertoire of Guugu Yimidhirr in-law avoidance speech. It is functionally unmarked in terms of its differential enregisterment. Scope of enregisterment must be viewed, thus, not only in terms of the size of the register repertoire but also in terms of the size of the negative repertoire of everyday forms tabooed in contexts of verbal proscription. Specifically, I argue that the degree of elaboration in the lexical hypernymy of avoidance vocabulary with respect to the substrate lexicon is proportional to the range of everyday lexemes which are enregistered as part of the negative repertoire of the avoidance register. This is illustrated dramatically in the mother-in-law languages of the Cape York Peninsula area, where it is quite typical for all or nearly all everyday lexemes to be part of the negative repertoire of the avoidance register. For instance, while the actual repertoire of the Dyirbal mother-in-law language, *jalnguy*, contains approximately a thousand distinct lexical items, Dixon (1990:1) attested three times that many forms avoided in the copresence of taboo affines. It is avoidance registers of this type, organized around the avoidance of the entire lexicon of the everyday language, which exhibit the most hypertrophied degrees of abstraction in their lexical semantics.

Complementing a heightened awareness about what may *not* be said is a notable suppression, in focal avoidance contexts, of practices of register-mixing in all its forms (whether as intertextual footing, stance taking, decentering of indexical origo, reported speech, etc.). This amounts to a principle of *lexical cohesion*, with respect to register repertoires, of avoidance speech in avoidance contexts (Agha 1998:161–162). Register mixing is not categorically avoided in a number of the more honorific-type avoidance registers discussed above (like Gooniyandi, Bunaba, and Yir-Yirront), where frequency of occurrence of avoidance forms may be an iconic index of respect. Neither is it uncommon outside of the most ritualized contexts of avoidance even in the cases on the Cape York Peninsula (as, for instance, referent-focal uses of mother-in-law speech in Kunjen [Sommer 2006] and Wik [Sutton 1978] attest). But again, in those registers that exhibit the most pronounced one-to-many relationships, there appears typically to be categorical avoidance of register-mixing in the most highly ritualized and ideologically valued contexts of avoidance. As Crowley (1983:313) writes, reviewing the use of mother-in-law registers for an array of language groups of the Cape York Peninsula: "The choice of style to be used in conversation had to be absolute. One could not mix the two."

The high degree of lexical cohesion of enregistered variants exhibited in avoidance discourse contrasts in revealing ways with lexically based speech-level systems like Javanese, Madurese, and Sundanese. There, too, lexical cohesion with respect to register repertoires may be a valued ideal of honorific speech (Agha 1998). But though

register "purism" has the status of normative ideal, it is not always realized in actual practice.

Table 3 compares attested degrees of lexical cohesion with respect to register repertoires of Javanese speech levels, on the one hand, and Kalam everyday and pandanus registers, on the other. As Table 3 makes clear, in speech-level systems the use of that which, from an utterance-level perspective, may be judged a token of a given speech-level is not, from a lexical-repertoire based perspective, an all-or-nothing proposition. The differing standards of appropriateness of differing degrees of lexical cohesion between speech-level and context-dependent avoidance registers have to be understood in relation to their larger sociocultural contexts.

In Javanese, variability of lexical cohesion in speech-level systems is conditioned by differential access to socialization to register variants, and thus by sociologically relevant partitions in the social domain of speakers competent to produce (and recognize) register variants (see Errington 1988:167, discussed in Agha 2007:333). Differential access to elite contexts, and thus to effective socialization to register variants, reproduces second-order status asymmetries between speakers fully proficient in the use of higher speech levels, and thus themselves iconized as refined (Irvine and Gal 2000), and those who are not. But these partitions in the social domain of those competent to produce honorific speech simultaneously articulate with the kinds of social relations indexed through the use of register variants. In Javanese, the indexical function of the speech-level system is sociocentric: it is related to social hierarchy as a model which englobes all members of the speech community in a framework which is by-degrees congruent across speakers and which converges on the individual who is positioned at the top-and-center point of the hierarchical system, the king. This contrasts sharply with kinship-based avoidance relationships, which are egocentrically reckoned and thus shift from one interactional dyad to another. The normative recipients of avoidance speech, classificatory mothers-in-law, differ from speaker to speaker. The lack of a congruent sociocentric partitioning of the individuals occupying the social roles whose relationships are indexed through the use of the registers in question means that everyone uses the same forms to index different individuals. In the Australian cases, access to particular individuals does not constrain socialization to register variants as it does in court-centered Javanese.

Table 3
Comparison of lexical cohesion between Javanese speech levels and Kalam avoidance/everyday registers, after Poedjosoedarmo 1968:62 and Pawley 1992:314

	HERE	CHILD	MINE	PN	WHOM	I	TOLD	-CAUS	RECENTLY	GLOSS
	JAVANESE SPEECH LEVELS									
✓	menikô	**anaq**	kulô	Tini	éngkang	kulô	tjriyôs	-aken	wau	*Krama*
✓	*niki*	**anaq**	kulô	Tini	**séng**	kulô	tjriyôs	**-aké**	wau	*Md A*
✓	*niki*	**anaq**	kulô	Tini	**séng**	taq	kandaq	**-aké**	wau	*Md Ng*
✓	**iki**	**anaq**	**ku**	Tini	**séng**	taq	kandaq	**-aké**	**mau**	*Ngoko*
	HERE	CHILD	MINE	PN	WHOM	I	TOLD -CAUS		RECENTLY	GLOSS
	KALAM AVOIDANCE/EVERYDAY REGISTERS									
✓	**mnm**	**tmey**	ma-	**g-**	n-	mn	*Kalam everyday register*			
*	laj	**tmey**	ma-	**g-**	n-	mn	*– unattested –*			
*	laj	mayab	ma-	**g-**	n-	mn	*– unattested –*			
✓	laj	mayab	ma-	tgom-	n-	mn	*Pandanus register*			
	LANGUAGE	BAD	NOT-	SAY-	OPT-	2ND PERSON	GLOSS			

Note: Attested degrees of lexical cohesion are marked with a check mark, unattested types are marked with an asterisk; italics, bold, and underlining are used to indicate distinct register repertoires; the abbreviations "Md A" and "Md Ng" stand for Poedjosoedarmo's speech-level distinctions of *madyantôrô* ("pure" *madya*) and *madyô-ngoko*, respectively.

The social organization of social indexicality in these two sets of cases articulates with differences in the relative performative defeasibility of register variants. In the cases where speakers are ubiquitously copresent with the nodal focus of avoidance or honorification, register variants have performative indefeasibility. In speech-level systems most speakers are typically not speaking in the copresence of the king; there the pragmatic construals of register tokens are more defeasible, allowing for the kind of register "mixing" seen in Table 3 above. The exception which proves the rule are cases of speech in royal courts where all are copresent with the nodal focus of honorification (i.e., the king). Notably, in these contexts, recipient-focal effects are attested and lexical hypernymy is most pronounced.[4]

Related to the kind of mixing of register repertoires seen in the Javanese sentences in Table 3 we also see a relative underspecification of lexical variants for register distinctions when compared with taboo and avoidance register systems. This is illustrated impressionistically in Table 4.

As Tables 3 and 4 illustrate, with respect to "expert" judgments, Javanese is both more differentiated in terms of metapragmatic typifications of register distinctions and less differentiated in terms of the enregisterment of individual lexical variants. This implies two perspectives on register, one an utterance-based perspective and the other a repertoire-based one (Agha 2007). From the perspective of the classification of utterances (and speakers) Javanese has a much more differentiated metapragmatic vocabulary than does Dyirbal or Guugu Yimidhirr. Thus utterances may be judged as *ngoko, madya*, or *krama* in the most conservative tripartite register classification. More differentiated "expert" classifications can include up to nine subdivisions (e.g., Poedjosoedarmo 1968, cited in Agha 2007:338). These differences in metapragmatic judgments, inasmuch as they are determined by differences of linguistic form, involve projections from various degrees of cotextual lexical cohesion. Referring back to Table 3 we can see that the utterance in the second row from the top, the one labeled as *madyantôrô* (or "pure *madya*"), is not made up of forms exclusively typified as of the *madya* repertoire (indeed, only *niki* "here" is typified as exclusively *madya*) but rather of forms from all three major speech levels.

The takeaway here is that though there is a relative overdifferentiation of register distinctions manifest at the level of judgments about utterances, from the perspective of register repertoires there is a relative underdifferentiation of lexemes in terms of pragmatic function. We can thus note that Javanese pragmatic paradigms often involve the opposition of a specifically honorific lexeme with lexemes which are not just underspecified, but pragmatically unmarked. For instance, *éngkang* "whom" is typified as a specifically *krama* variant of the term *séng*, which is pragmatically unmarked, being used both in utterances metapragmatically judged as *madya* and as *ngoko*. Table 4 exemplifies these varying conditions of pragmatic markedness across

Table 4
Asymmetries of pragmatic and semantic underspecification across Javanese and Dyirbal registers, after Poedjosoedarmo 1968:62 and Dixon 1971:437

	JAVANESE REGISTERS			DYIRBAL REGISTERS		
	Ngoko	Madya	Krama	Jalnguy	Guwal	
"here"	*iki*	*niki*	*menikô*	*bubaman*	*baygun*	"vigorously shake"
"tell"	*kandaq*		*tjriyôs*		*dʸindan*	"gently wave"
"whom"	*taq*		*kulô*		*banʸin*	"split a log"
"recently"	*mau*		*wau*	*dʸalnggan*	*gunban*	"cut a piece out"
					nudin	"sever"

lexical paradigms. These data contrast with the Dyirbal data at the right of the display. In Dyirbal all lexemes are exclusively enregistered as either *jalnguy* or *guwal*, "everyday" or "avoidance" forms. That is to say, in Dyirbal all lexical variants are specifically and differentially enregistered, while in Javanese a given lexical form may be appropriate to a range of speech levels. In terms of markedness theory, the Dyirbal avoidance and everyday registers stand in a pragmatically equipollent opposition to another (cf. Trubetzkoy 1969:75).

Avoidance registers are therefore characterized by *the structural inversion of pragmatics with respect to semantics*. As we have seen, there is a many-to-one relationship between the semantics of everyday and avoidance forms revealed in the relative underspecification of the structural sense semantics of the avoidance register (see column 4 of Table 4). This contrasts with speech-level systems like Javanese where semantic hypernymy and polysemy are more muted (but see Errington 1988:170–174), leading to largely isosemantic register repertoires. These semantic relationships are reversed, however, in the domain of pragmatics, with Javanese lexemes relatively underspecified for pragmatic function. Meanwhile, in avoidance/everyday register pairings like the one found in Dyirbal, lexical variants are isopragmatic. That is to say, all register variants are differentially and specifically enregistered to the same degree.

We are now at a point where we can formulate the conditions that give rise to one-to-many lexicon asymmetries as fundamentally concerning a tension and a trade-off between lexical semantics and sociocultural pragmatics. At the beginning of this article I argued that avoidance registers consist of repertoires of lexical items that replace everyday words in terms of their semantic functions in contexts in which they are tabooed. Taboos on everyday forms are logically (and historically) prior to their replacement in avoidance speech. Lexical taboos pose the problem which avoidance forms solve. As a wide set of everyday lexical items, approaching the entire lexicon, are enregistered in the negative repertoire of an avoidance register speakers are faced with the problem of devising avoidance forms on the fly and in contexts where the everyday forms they are to gloss are unmentionable. In such situations the pragmatically "safest" option is to use some form already present in the positive repertoire of the avoidance register to substitute for the everyday form. Here, concerns over the pragmatic fidelity of lexical forms outweigh concerns over precision in the translation of denotational semantics. Forms with near-enough lexical semantics to taboo targets will be employed if they are already "safely" enregistered as part of the positive avoidance repertoire. This is reflected in Table 4, where Dyirbal and Javanese are shown to differ not only in the precision with which lexical forms are pragmatically categorized but also in the differing degrees of isosemanticity of lexical variants across registers in the two cases. Techniques for achieving "non-nuclear" semantics in avoidance speech illustrate how the ranking of pragmatic considerations above semantic ones progressively creates taxonomic relationships between avoidance and everyday speech registers.

Making Do with a Minimal Lexicon

A common means of getting around tabooed lexemes is periphrasis. Rather than say *à-bax* "rock," Abkhaz hunters would say *à-cag* "a blunt thing." Rather than *a-xapèc* "tooth" they said *a-tʃà-ga* "that with which one eats" (Khiba 1980). But what happens when all the words of the everyday language are tabooed, where—unlike Abkhaz hunting register—everyday verbs and adjectives cannot be used to derive new substitute forms?

The evidence suggests that the same techniques of periphrasis are employed, only now by using pragmatically "safe" forms already enregistered as avoidance repertoire substitutes. In avoidance registers like Dyirbal *jalnguy* (Dixon 1990), Lardil *damin* (Hale 1982), and Gbaya *lá'bì* (Moñino 1977) virtually no free morphology is

shared between the repertoires of the everyday and the avoidance registers. The entire everyday lexicon is part of the negative repertoire of the avoidance register. In such cases, periphrastic expressions themselves exclusively employ enregistered avoidance vocabulary.

This tendency to recursively employ avoidance vocabulary to generate more precise denotations can be illustrated with examples from Dyirbal. While elicitation from everyday forms into mother-in-law register typically yields taxonomically superordinate terms, when field researchers press informants to give a more specific term they invariably do so by creating periphrastic descriptive phrases. Dixon gives the examples of *mabiiRi-y* "to cross a river (or road, railway line) by any means" and the semantically more specific, *baaŋa-l* "to cross a river by walking across a log" as an example of two everyday Dyirbal forms that could be glossed by one avoidance repertoire item, *guyabi-l* (Dixon 1990:12–13). But though both are glossed by *guyabi-l*, the more specific meaning can be conveyed in avoidance speech through paraphrase—*daambiR-a-Ru guyabi-l* TREE-LOCATIVE-ALONG CROSS—which employs lexical material exclusively sourced from the avoidance-repertoire (i.e., *guyabi-l* "to cross' and *daambiR* "tree") in conjunction with post-positional case-marking morphology shared between everyday and avoidance styles (the locative marker, *-a*, and the medium morpheme, *-Ru*, "along"). A set of parallel examples of the use of paraphrase to achieve non-nuclear semantics within the avoidance register are given in Table 5.

As we can see in Table 5 there is a one-to-many relationship between the avoidance repertoire and the everyday repertoire for the semantic field of requests when considered purely in terms of lexical correspondences. The avoidance term *baÑarrmba-l* can be used to gloss all of the everyday words in the middle column of Table 5. This does not mean, however, that non-nuclear meanings cannot be produced within avoidance speech. On the contrary, non-nuclear meanings like "to invite someone" or "to keep on asking" are generated by employing grammatical resources shared across the two registers in conjunction with lexical items from the avoidance repertoire to create descriptive paraphrases of the actions denoted (these are shown on the right side of the display). The point is that while the lexical repertoire of the avoidance register is predominantly made up of word-borrowings from neighboring languages (Dixon 1990), non-nuclear forms are created much in the same way that the Abkhaz hunting register accomplishes the task—through descriptive periphrasis. Here periphrasis allows speakers to successfully avoid tabooed everyday words that don't

Table 5
Paraphrase as used for "non-nuclear" meanings in Dyirbal avoidance speech, after Dixon 1990:12

Avoidance Lexeme	Everyday Lexemes	Compositional Paraphrase in Avoidance Register
baŋ-arrmba-l	ŋanba-l "to ask"	baŋarrmba-l "to ask"
	yumba-l "to invite someone"	baŋarrmban yalibili "to ask to come"
	bunma-l "to invite someone to accompany one"	ŋaja baŋarrmban ŋaliji bawalbili "I asked [him] so that we can both go"
	gunji-y "to keep on asking"	baŋarrm-baŋarrmban "ask over and over again" (reduplication is productive in Dyirbal giving an iterative reading)

have already enregistered one-to-one substitutes in the avoidance repertoire. Lexicon asymmetries between avoidance and everyday repertoires are the cumulative effect of these strategies of avoidance.

The periphrastic function has more than passing resemblance to the poetic function. To mangle Jakobson's adage, the periphrastic function displaces the principle of—here, semantic—equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. The effect on avoidance vocabularies is to keep would-be lexical paradigms hollowed out, to express semantic distinctions typically encoded by taxonomically lower order lexical contrasts, *if at all*, by syntagmatically complex descriptions. If avoidance speech abhors synonyms, it embraces syntagmas.

These conclusions are not only supported by the consistent finding that avoidance lexicons are much smaller than everyday vocabulary. They are also reflected in the widespread finding that avoidance vocabulary items are on average longer than everyday vocabulary items (Crowley 1983; McGregor 1989; Dixon 1990). For Gooniyandi, more than 90% of nonverbal and 98% of verbal roots are minimally bisyllabic in the mother-in-law language, whereas only 70% of everyday lexical roots have more than one syllable (McGregor 1989:639). In Uradhi, 57% of everyday roots have two or fewer syllables, while only 13% of the mother-in-law language words are that short.

Crowley observes that a "possibility is that many of the avoidance terms may in fact be diachronically (or even synchronically) polymorphemic" (Crowley 1983:385). He observes that quite a number of nouns have final syllables in -*βi* and -*ŋu* "suggesting that they are derived from comitative . . . and nominalising suffixes . . . respectively" (ibid. 386). Dixon makes similar observations for *jalnguy* avoidance lexemes that cannot be shown to be borrowed. In everyday Dyirbal and Yidiny 75% to 80% of lexical roots have two syllables, the rest have more. But in the avoidance repertoires, 50% of original (i.e., nonborrowed) vocabulary has more than two syllables (Dixon 1990:51). These facts all reflect the dependence upon derivational morphology, word compounding, and periphrasis in the derivation of new vocabulary under conditions of limited lexical resources.

Structure-Ideology Dialectics[5]

The manner in which limited lexical resources are extended to cover taxonomically subordinate levels is illustrated particularly well by the organization of folkbiological taxonomies in a number of avoidance registers. In Table 6 the domain of ethnobiological nomenclature is used to compare avoidance and everyday linguistic varieties across four language groups: Gbaya (Central African Republic), Lardil (Queensland, Australia), Uradhi and Guugu Yimidhirr (both Cape York Peninsula, Australia). Lardil and Gbaya avoidance registers are organized around male initiation while the Uradhi and Guugu Yimidhirr registers are centered around affinal avoidance.

In none of the registers are generic-rank taxa encoded by monomial expressions, which is what would be expected on cross-linguistic grounds (Berlin 1992). Rather, it is only taxonomically higher order folk-biological taxa, like life-form taxa, that are encoded by monomial expressions in the avoidance repertoires. Notwithstanding the similarities, there are also important differences in lexicon structure between the initiate registers, on the one hand, and the in-law avoidance registers, on the other. In the Gbaya *lá'bì* and Lardil *damin* registers, generic-rank taxa are encoded by standardized polynomial expressions, but in Uradhi and Guugu Yimidhirr mother-in-law languages, there are no enregistered expressions for grass or macropod folk-generics, respectively. While I have emphasized the role of linguistic usage in the emergence of lexicon asymmetries writ large, these different linguistic treatments of taxonomically subordinate level concepts seem to be more directly mediated by differences of linguistic ideology.

Table 6
Comparison of ethnobiological nomenclature across everyday and avoidance registers of Uradhi, Guugu Yimidhirr, Lardil, and Gbaya (data from Crowley 1983:383, Haviland 1979a:371, McKnight 1999:146, and Vidal 1976:326)

AVOIDANCE REGISTER		GLOSS	EVERYDAY REGISTER	
Mother-in-law language ("cross" speech)			Uradhi ("straight" speech)	
utpumu ("grass")	—	"blady grass"	*iṯan*	*iðamu* "grass"
	—	"spiky grass"	*ukaṯa*	
	—	"spear grass"	*aṉṯara*	
	—	"bandicoot grass"	*iku:namu*	
	—	"tall grass sp."	*ilβi*	
Brother-in-law language			Guugu Yimidhirr	
daarraalngan (macropod)	—	"small wallaby"	*gadaar*	—
	—	"rock wallaby"	*bawuur*	
	—	"small scrub kangaroo"	*bibal*	
	—	"kangaroo rat"	*dyadyu*	
	—	"black kangaroo"	*gangurru*	
	—	"red kangaroo"	*nharrgali*	
Damin (*warama* initiate language)			Lardil	
wuu ("edible shellfish")	*wuu*	"shellfish"	*mala*	—
	jjuu wuu	"small shellfish"	*daangku*	
	kujburrmen wuu	"mangrove shellfish"	*jirkarr*	
	rn!uumen wuu	"freshwater shellfish"	*malmulkarnan*	
	kurrijjuu wuu	"large oyster"	*baakarnan*	
Lá'bì (Gbaya initiate register)			Gbaya-Kara	
bél ("bird")	*bél màn*	"reed cormorant"	*nɔ́é yi*	*nɔ́ɛ́* ("bird")
	bél kàpài dátìɔ̀	"cattle egret"	*yòl*	
	bél ndángá	"hammerhead stork"	*dìsà*	
	bél gbòk dátìɔ̀	"marabou stork"	*zìgàwàl*	
	bél gòlìkè	"spur-winged goose"	*nàsósó*	
	bél kpèsèlìkè	"spotted dikkop"	*kɛ̃ kɛ̃*	
LIFE-FORM TAXA	GENERIC TAXA		GENERIC TAXA	LIFE-FORM TAXA

As we saw above, native speakers tend to view the relative lack of denotational precision of mother-in-law discourse as an emblem of deference. Here, then, speakers rationalize the discursive instantiation of cross-register hypernymy as congruent with other linguistic and nonlinguistic signs which serve as iconic indexicals of the affinal relation—icons of interactional restraint and negation, and indexes of affinal copresence. These include: (a) *nonaddress of the other*—the use of "shill" addressees (e.g., rocks, trees, dogs, etc.) when covertly addressing taboo in-laws, use of

undirected or musing speech; (b) *absorptive reference to the other*—the use of plural pronouns, spatial demonstratives, trirelational kin terms; (c) *interactional non-ratification of the other*—the avoidance of eye contact and of body positioning which would suggest mutual coordination toward the ends of consummated discursive interaction, occasional use of head coverings (e.g., bark carpets) to avoid being a perceptible presence for the other, speaking softly, whispering or even keeping quiet altogether, sometimes complemented by use of manual-visual signs (see Fleming in press).

The use of the semantically abstract avoidance vocabulary, for both higher- and lower-level concepts, comes to be seen as continuous with these other tropes of interactional negation. A lack of periphrastic precision becomes a denotational icon of the interactional nonconsummation characteristic of mother-in-law talk. A diagrammaticity between the core speech act functions of address and reference is constructed; avoidance language refers to its object in an analogous fashion to the manner in which avoidance relations send and receive messages to and from one another. Just as the actual target of interaction is far from being the explicit addressee, so too is the actual discourse referent at a remove from the semantic meaning which is denoted. The spatial metaphors are apt here; it is the framework of—non-congruent, nonproximal and, in the best of all possible worlds, non-copresent—bodies in space which has an orienting priority when informants characterize mother-in-law speech as "sideways" or "crosswise" (Guugu Yimidhirr; Haviland 1979a:369), "curved" or to the "side" (Wik; Thomson 1935:485), or as "turn tongue" (Wurrung; Dawson 1881:369).

This ideological interpretation of many-to-one lexical correspondences itself feeds back into the structuring of the avoidance lexicon. Though both are similarly organized around speech proscriptions and substitutions, the male initiate registers, Gbaya-Kara *lá'bi* and Lardil *damin*, differ markedly from the affinal avoidance registers both in how lexical asymmetries are interpreted and in how they are elaborated. Here I will focus on three speech registers employed in masculine initiation—*damin*, *lá'bì*, and the Warlpiri male-initiation language, *tjiliwiri*. Unlike the mother-in-law languages, these are not part of a culture-historically related complex. Lardil and Warlpiri are Australian languages while Gbaya-Kara is spoken in Central African Republic. Nevertheless, as we will see, there are important parallels in how male initiation, initiate speech, and lexical asymmetries are conceptualized and treated across these cases.

Among the Lardil there were two levels of male initiation (McKnight 1999). The first involved the circumcision of all young men by classificatory fathers-in-law and initiated them into the social category *luruku*. The second type of initiation (into the *warama* category) was undergone only at the volition of the initiate himself and involved subincision by classificatory brothers-in-law. Both rites entailed the use of avoidance codes; after both rites, initiates were expected to not use spoken Lardil in a wide range of interactions for up to years at a time. In fact, *luruku* were not to use oral communication of any kind—instead, they employed a sign language, *marlda kangka*. The *warama* initiates, while subject to speech restrictions as well, distinguished themselves from *luruku* in being able to employ the spoken register, *damin*. In the *damin* register all unbound morphemes of everyday Lardil are replaced by no more than 150 morphemes (Hale 1982).

The *lá'bì* registers employed by Gbaya language groups were employed during the years-long period of seclusion of male initiates at a bush encampment built at a distance from local villages. During this time the use of the everyday language was tabooed for them; it was thought using everyday speech would cause death. This symbolic sanction makes sense within the ritual complex: the opening rite of male initiation, making a scar on the belly of the initiand, stands for his death—in a staged murder, a ritual specialist "stabs" with a spear the initiates who are then "buried" under leaves (Vidal 1976:121–127). This symbolic death proper to the time-space of initiation—the bush camp where the initiates will live for the next year—may become

a real death should the signs of the everyday world, chief among them the Gbaya language, penetrate the world of initiation.

Both Lardil *damin* and Gbaya *lá'bì* are avoidance registers, while the third male initiate register, Warlpiri *tjiliwiri*, is of quite different dimensions. The name of the register, *tjiliwiri*, is translated in everyday Warlpiri as "funny," "clown," or "clowning" (Hale 1971:473). In reality, *tjiliwiri* is anything but a kind of clowning around (Agha, personal communication, 2002). Rather, it is the medium through which the serious business of Warlpiri male initiation is revealed. Here the register name serves as a shibboleth qua emblem of the register both in its broader sociological significance and in terms of the semantic principle of its parsing. The trick of *tijiliwiri* is semantic antonymy. Almost all register repertoire items of *tjiliwiri* employ the same lexical forms as those found in the lexicon of everyday Warlpiri. The relevant difference is that their denotations are those of their Warlbiri antonyms. Thus, just as the name of the register reveals its seriousness under the cover of the silly, male initiation promises to reveal deeper meanings which stand hidden behind the surfaces of everyday Warlpiri signifiers. The figuration of male initiation as an, often layered and iterative, revelation of the world is a common one in native Australia and Melanesia (see Slotta 2012:134–135). Within such a revelatory frame, decoding elements of the *tjiliwiri* register repertoire serves as a replica-in-miniature of the acquisition of male initiation–centered esoteric knowledge.

Tjiliwiri differs markedly from both *lá'bì* and *damin*, both in its lexical organization and the functional organization of its social pragmatics. Warlpiri *tjiliwiri* is a secret language, in the sense that its use is proscribed in the presence of women and uninitiated males. But it is not an avoidance register; it is acquired in contexts where the use of everyday Warlpiri, rather than being tabooed, is a necessary component in the acquisition of the specialized register (Hale 1971:473). Formally, this functional difference is reflected in the fact that the register repertoire is itself furnished from already existent resource of the Warlpiri lexicon.

Though Warlpiri *tjiliwiri* is not based in lexical taboo and avoidance, it does share interesting parallels with Lardil *damin* and Gbaya-Kara *lá'bì*. In all three initiation registers, the acquisition of the speech register is itself figured as a revelatory event which implies the ontological transformation of its speakers. In all three cases, the language acquisition process serves to emblematize the incorporation of a masculine essence that is embodied at levels of both phonic articulation and conceptual organization. In Damin, this is manifest quite literally in the training of the mouth to a phonological system marked in its articulatory alterity to everyday Lardil (Hale and Nash 1997). In Warlpiri, it is manifest in the acquisition not so much of a distinct vocabulary as of a semantic principle which once acquired, allows for the generative production of *tjiliwiri* utterances (Hale 1971:477–478). The ritual acquisition of *tjiliwiri* heightens the phenomenological experience of the cognitive operation:

> Novices are not taught the semantic principle directly; rather, they must learn it by observation. According to my consultants, the novices are exposed to rapid dialogues between guardians. In these dialogues, one guardian speaks *tjiliwiri* while the other answers, or rather interprets the message, in Walbiri. . . . Novices are said to learn to speak and understand *tjiliwiri* in two to four weeks. Walbiri men stated that when they first heard *tjiliwiri*, its principle eluded them for some time; eventually, they explained, it came as a sudden flash of insight. (Hale 1971:474, 475)

In Gbaya, too, proper articulation seems to be held in high importance; initiates are initially drilled in species names, lists of which they must recite without error lest they receive lashes to the back. But if the substance of sound is the beginning, the conceptual structure of language is the self-evidence of the initiates' ontological transformation. It is for this reason that acquisition of a specialized language so perfectly emblematizes the *rite de passage*—here, the medium is transparently equated

with the message, the ends of knowledge transfer with its means. To crack the code is to simultaneously receive the word (see Beidelman 1997; Bellman 1984; Boyer 1980).

It is in terms of these cultural frameworks that the elaboration of conventional-ized polynomial expressions for folk-generics within male initiate registers needs to be understood (see Table 6). Though *lá'bì* and *damin*, but not *ṭjiliwiri*, involve taboo avoidance, in all of these male initiate registers the specialized speech register is ritually figurated as a source of masculine prestige whose revelation is at once phenomenal and noumenal. The elaboration of descriptive paraphrases for taxonomically lower order semantic concepts, like folk-generic taxa, serves to emblematize the initiate languages as a store of knowledge. But at the same time, these descriptive paraphrases, precisely in the nontransparency of the relationship between the descriptive phrase and its denotation, function as brain teasers—they are linguistic models which produce in miniature the qualitative cognitive and phenomenological experience which male initiation, at a more global scale, is understood to effectuate (cf. Whitehouse 1996). They entreat and entrain initiates to search out the connections hidden behind linguistic appearances (see Boyer 1980:46).

It is notable that it is these morphologically complex, polynomial expressions that must be employed to denote taxonomically subordinate level concepts which have pride of place in the ritual socialization to the register among both the Lardil and the Gbaya. In *damin* it is a list of animal terms (see McKnight 1999:26), in *lá'bì* the ethnobotanical terminology (see Vidal 1976), that are the first lexical series that the initiates are taught. In the processual terms of the acquisition of the register this presentation makes periphrastic terminology a double hermeneutic challenge—the initiate must realize the relationship between the term and its ref-erence or denotation (i.e., its extension) but in doing this must also decompose it into its minimal and highly abstract sense-bearing units (i.e., its intension). If, in mother-in-law languages, many-to-one lexical correspondence is fostered as a sign of interactional negation and restraint, in the male initiate languages these semantic asymmetries are exploited toward the ends of creating a compositional complexity at the level of the code that makes language the privileged diagram of masculine esoteric knowledge and its mastery. These distinctions are schematized in Table 7.

Table 7
Dialectical relationship between lexical semantics of avoidance register repertoires and their ideological rationalization across register types

	IN-LAW AVOIDANCE REGISTERS	MASCULINE INITIATION REGISTERS
Lexicon structure t^0:	Abstract lexical semantics (many-to-one correspondences)	
Ideological rationalization of discursive instantiation:	interactional restraint/negation	esoteric knowledge/ mastery
Lexicon structure t^1:	lack of enregistered variants for subordinate taxonomic levels; ad hoc polynomial expressions, if any	enregistered polynomial expressions for subordinate taxonomic levels

Conclusion

In the course of an extended discussion of the concept of "register," Irvine writes:

> The concept of register is inherently heteroglossic (i.e., suggesting a plurality of "voices" in the Bakhtinian sense): By definition, there is always a *set* of registers, not just one. . . . One of the many methods people have for differentiating situations and marking their moods is to draw on (or carefully avoid) the "voices" of others, or what they assume those "voices" to be. (Irvine 1990:128, 130)

In their negative intertextuality, in the way they "carefully avoid" the registers which they stand in opposition to, avoidance registers are the exception which proves this rule. While they are often "voiced" in, for instance, myth narration or other represented speech (as in the elicitation contexts owing to which most of our knowledge of mother-in-law registers is due), in the contexts which demand avoidance register use there is a marked reduction in the capacity to appropriately "voice" other registers. As Merlan (1997) astutely notes, this gives mother-in-law language a "univocal" quality (a theme elaborated in Stasch 2003); while avoidance registers are structurally opposed to everyday speech registers, in avoidance contexts they maximally efface the signs of these other registers. At the interactional plane, the univocal quality of mother-in-law languages emblematizes the social relationships which they index as having overriding importance.

This reduction of the dialogic and heteroglossic character of discourse in contexts of affinal avoidance contours the specificity of mother-in-law languages across a range of functional orders. Where mother-in-law languages index copresent bystanders, register differences cease to function effectively to interpellate a range of differently socially situated types of addressees; rather, the indexing of affinal copresence overrides all other functions in the domain of speech participant indexing. Recipient-focus thus constitutes a functional suspension of register-mixing and -switching as a resource for achieving addressivity. Similarly, the unmentionability of everyday vocabulary in avoidance contexts means that Bakhtinian voicing of represented speakers is highly curtailed; rather than being able to manipulate a dynamic interplay of voices in representing the speech of others, a son-in-law must keep his speech strictly monoglossic lest he disquiet copresent in-laws. Monoglossic speech thus constitutes a functional suspension of register as a resource for representing speech, and through such representations of enacting a range of social identities and relationships.

In this article I have argued that the functional suspensions characteristic of such univocal avoidance speech have implications for the formal organization of register repertoires as well. In Javanese, mixing of differently enregistered lexical variants helps to create finely differentiated composite images of speaker refinement while simultaneously contouring speaker-referent and speaker-addressee relationships. Such gradient displays in discursive practice appear to motivate the ultimately continuous, rather than discrete, divisions between "speech levels" found in native speakers' (and exasperated linguists') classifications of register types. In taboo-avoidance registers, where each enregistered shibboleth (up to and including all unbound morphemes of the everyday language) is assigned an absolute specification in terms of sociopragmatic function, such hybrid tropes of voicing by register-mixing are notably lacking. In actual discourse, tokens exhibit a maximal degree of lexical cohesion with respect to speech register type. At the level of metapragmatic classification, the result is a discrete and binary division between avoidance speech and everyday language. We needn't wholeheartedly agree with Douglas, Turner, and Leach that "the unclear is the unclean" to see that verbal taboo here effects classificatory distinctions, converting registered differences into different registers.

Denotationally based lexical correspondences thus stand in an equipollent (rather than a marked/unmarked) relationship to one another in terms of their differential enregisterment. In avoidance speech, it is at least as important to effectively avoid

the full repertoire of everyday words which are tabooed—what I have called the negative repertoire of the avoidance register—as it is to produce the avoidance register itself. This equipollent enregisterment of repertoire variants conditions the emergence of the taxonomic abstractness of the lexical semantics of avoidance vocabulary. If everyday variants were functionally unmarked for register-membership they could be used to fill in lexico-semantic gaps in avoidance discourse. (As we saw, this is what happens, to a certain degree, in *krama* discourse in Javanese.) In Gbaya-Kara, Lardil, Guugu Yimidhirr, Kalam, and Dyirbal language communities the negative repertoire of the avoidance register employed is equivalent to the entire vocabulary of the everyday language. In these cases, filling in semantic gaps with everyday vocabulary isn't a possibility, and so the avoidance vocabulary has to be semantically stretched to cover a wider denotational territory.

The taxonomic relationships manifest in the comparison of avoidance and everyday lexicons are the effect of strategies of lexical economy—of making do with a minimal lexicon of already enregistered avoidance repertoire items to express the full range of everyday semantic distinctions. Specifically, taxonomic elaboration occurs through a bootstrapping process which transforms the semantics of avoidance terms from being centered around reference to prototypical and archetypal actions or entities to being lexical items which have genera, (super)classes, and other "nuclear" concepts as their denotations. As the same avoidance nouns and verbs are used in different descriptive paraphrases designed to refer to a range of nonarchetypal and non-nuclear referents, those terms come to be inferred as having generic or "nuclear" meanings. The fact that this bootstrapping process recurs again and again across the typology of avoidance registers is conditioned by isomorphisms at the level of pragmatic function, not by the specific content of metapragmatic ideologies.

But as the comparison of male initiation centered and affinal avoidance-based registers illustrates, once constituted, these one-to-many semantic relationships themselves become objects for a native metapragmatic awareness which invests them with social significances. These reflexive valuations of lexicon asymmetries in turn inform the alternative elaboration or hollowing out of register repertoires. In this sense a language ideological perspective is absolutely necessary for an understanding of the diachrony of one-to-many lexical correspondences in avoidance registers. The point which I have tried to make is that this effect of language ideology on language structure is a secondary development. For instance, semantic abstractness is clearly interpreted within local models of mother-in-law language as part-and-parcel of culturally valued practices of interactional restraint. But as we have seen, to argue that Dyirbal or Guugu Yimidhirr or Ompela language ideologies of turned, side-ways or otherwise "indirect" speech are prime movers in the re-organization of language (qua lexical) structure, in the mode of Silverstein 1979, masks as much as it reveals (cf. Philips 2010:322). Rather, another stratum of pragmatic function seems to have overriding causal consequentiality on semantic structure in these cases.

The reader will note that I have defined avoidance registers as a class of sociolinguistic phenomena in terms of semiotic-functional criteria—lexical taboo (i.e., performative indefeasibility) and substitution. Evidence of common synchronic properties and diachronic trajectories in the emergence of one-to-many relationships has, I hope, illustrated the usefulness of such a semiotic-functional definition of register *for these cases*. This functional definition of register allows for a comparative study of register phenomena which can help us distinguish between semiotic-functional and language ideological determinations of register form and function. As I hope this account of lexicon asymmetries reveals, this can be a helpful methodological intervention as we seek to better understand the relationship between linguistic usage, structure and ideology. The takeaway here is that different elements of the triad of language structure, usage, and

ideology have different degrees of causal priority within different sociopragmatic configurations. But such relationships are only revealed by complementing the ethnographic, language-ideological approach with a comparative and typological one.

Notes

1. For Kalam, see Pawley (1992), Bulmer (1967); for Kewa, Mendi, and Melpa see Franklin (1972), Franklin and Stefaniw (1992); see also Lomas (1989:292) on Huli *tajanda bi* or "bush language" and Hoenigman (2012) on Awiakay "mountain talk."

2. But see Kendon 1988 on sign language-based avoidance registers.

3. See discussion of this distinction for Buru, Grimes and Maryott 1994:280; Dyirbal, Dixon 1990:1; Kalam, Pawley 1992:314; Uradhi, Crowley 1983:383; *inter alios*.

4. See, in particular, Keating 1998 for a discussion of Pohnpeian, where the hypernymy of "exaltive" and "humiliative" honorific repertoires is notably linked to its recipient-focal indexical functioning. Referent-focal honorific registers often interact with context in important ways. See Diller 2006 on the use of Thai *raachaasàp* in the royal presence, or Philips 2010 on the density of occurrence of Tongan honorifics in church and (juridical) courtly contexts. Javanese speech level usage at the royal courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta offers a revealing comparative case (Errington 1982:90–91). This "palace language" (*basa kedhaton* at Yogyakarta, *basa bagongan* at Surakarta) was characterized by a notable suppression of speaker-referent honorifics (i.e., *krama inggil*) in acts of reference to anyone other than the king.

5. This section discusses the Warlpiri male initiation register *tjiliwiri*. As specified in Hale 1971:472, I hereby ask all readers to comply with the request of Warlpiri community members "that none of the knowledge [involving *tjiliwiri*] be discussed with uninititated Walbiri men or with Walbiri women and children."

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