

most commonly used word for 'friend' is *Arkadas*. Without presuming etymological expertise in Turkish, one is nevertheless tempted to remark that *arka* means among other things the backside of the body and *das* is a suffix implying fellowship or participation. A friend is thus literally a back participant or a "backfellow." It is, in short, someone who is trustworthy and who can therefore be allowed to stand behind one. One must be careful who one allows to enter one's back zone. A nonfriend might take advantage of such a position to initiate an aggressive attack. Only a true friend or "back" can be trusted not to do so. To trust to the protection of someone is:

Birine arka vermek

One to back give to

(to give one's back to someone)

This and many other traditional metaphors involving the *arka* root suggest that friendship is semantically related to a safe backside.² If these philological materials are relevant, as they would seem to be, they would tend to support the idea that an active penis attacking a passive anus has been a critical psychological configuration in Turkish culture for some time. In any event, whether the ritual phallic penetration of an opponent's anus is a long-standing tradition or not, it seems safe to conclude that as the verbal dueling technique exists in twentieth-century Turkey, in city and in village, it is hardly an isolated, unimportant bit of esoterica. Rather it is a dynamic functioning element of Turkish culture, an element which provides a semipublic arena for the playing out of common private problems. The duel affords the young Turkish boy an opportunity to give appropriate vent to the emotional concomitants of the painful process of becoming a man.

In the spirit of this essay, we should like to close by asking the reader: "Do you know the chapter you just read?" (Reader: Yes.)

Sana girsin

you to enter let it

² Among the traditional words and phrases found in A. D. Alderson and Fahir İz, eds., *The Concise Oxford Turkish Dictionary* (Oxford, 1959) and Mehmet Ali Ağakay, ed., *Türkçe Sözlük* (Ankara, 1966) which we might cite in support of our hypothesis are: (1) *arkasipek*—literally, he has a lot of back; figuratively, one who has protectors or one who trusts somebody or one who trusts in a strong place. (2) *arkalamak*—literally, to back, to support, or to back up someone; figuratively, to help by giving trust to someone. (3) *arkadas değil*, *arka rası*—literally, he's not a friend, he's a back stone (a stone in the back); figuratively, he's hardly a friend. This might be said about friends who do one harm. (4) *ardına kadar açik*—literally, open up to the backside; figuratively wide open. (5) *birinin arkasını sıvırmak*—literally, to plaster (as in construction) someone's back; figuratively, to flatter someone insincerely, to butter up.

5

Signifying and Marking: Two Afro-American Speech Acts

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The last few years have seen a growing concern with Afro-American dialects on the parts of linguists concerned with descriptive and historical problems (Stewart 1967; Labov 1969b; Wolfram 1969) and educators interested in improved language and reading instruction (Barat and Shuy, 1969). These studies have made important contributions to our understanding of black speech. It has been shown, e.g., that the language of urban blacks is not, as some have implied, simply a random collection of features deviating from the standard but rather an independent dialect of English. Like other dialects of English, it has its own rules of grammar and pronunciation, rules which are explainable in terms of the history of its speakers in much the same way as rules of other English language dialects. The educator's notions of "linguistic deprivation" have also been discredited. These notions, which are based almost entirely on

responses to formal questionnaires and psychological tests which assume a knowledge of middle-class white culture, have led some educators to characterize ghetto children as linguistically underdeveloped and lacking in verbal abilities. Ethnographic studies which deal with black speech behavior in terms of the culture's own conceptual system show quite different results. As Mitchell-Kernan suggests, the exceptionally rich terminological system including such folk concepts as "sounding," "rapping," "running it down," "signifying," and "marking," all referring to verbal skills, testifies to the importance which black culture assigns to verbal skills.

The American urban situation is thus best regarded as a system of multilingualism and multiculturalism characterized by the coexistence of a variety of distinct ethnic groups, each with its own body of traditions, values, and rules of speaking. To understand this complex system, it is, of course, first of all necessary to identify and describe its constituent components. But mere description of subsystems is not enough if we are to learn how the plurality of cultures operates in everyday interactions and how it affects everyday speech behavior. Members of ethnic minority groups spend much of the day in settings where dominant norms prevail. Even those individuals whose behavior on the surface may seem quite deviant tend to have at least a passive knowledge of the dominant culture. What sets them off from others is not simply the fact that they are distinct but that their own private language and life styles are juxtaposed with those of the public at large as well. Mitchell-Kernan deals with juxtaposition of values and its effect on everyday speech behavior through her analysis of signifying and marking.

Her study builds on the work of folklorists such as Abrahams and Kochman (1969), and her discussion also shows some similarity to Dundes's discussion of verbal dueling (Chapter 4). Note the similarity of the skills involved in choosing topics appropriate to the context, building on weaknesses in opponents argument, and relying on shared cultural knowledge.

While folklorists, however, deal with their material in its own terms, emphasizing description and structural analysis, Mitchell-Kernan is primarily concerned with the way folk themes are used in natural conversations to convey special culture-specific meanings. All her ex-

amples are taken from tape recordings in everyday settings. She also devotes considerable discussion to the value of signifying and marking as communicative strategies, discussing the condition under which a speaker might find it advantageous to rely on such indirect means of getting across his point rather than making his point directly.

Mitchell-Kernan also illustrates many of the features of communication discussed elsewhere in this volume, such as the discrepancy between surface meaning and communicative function referred to by Ervin-Tripp (Chapter 7) and Sacks (Chapter 11), the notion of culture as background knowledge (Garfinkel, Chapter 10; Sacks, Chapter 11; etc.). Of particular importance is the way in which she relates choice of linguistic code to content and function. Basing her ideas on Hymes's (Chapter 1) notion of the speech event as a structured whole, she shows how these components of speech events combine to convey meaning. Her view of black dialects is thus quite different from that of the other traditional dialectologists, who deal with black dialects purely on the level of syntax and reference. For Mitchell-Kernan, these formal features of the linguistic code are merely signals of culturally based communicative strategies, strategies which reflect the Afro-American concern with speaking as a skill and an art.

Like many of the chapters in this volume, Mitchell-Kernan's work constitutes a departure from previous academic tradition and must be read not for its solid research results but for the suggestions it implies for further work. Nevertheless, it would seem that her point of view has several important implications for educational policy. Some of these implications are discussed by Gunperz (1970b). See also the works of Frederick Williams (1969) and Henrie (1969). For a historical discussion of Afro-American speech patterns, see Dalby 1970, as well as his article in Kochman (1972).

In a linguistic community which is bilingual or bidialectal, the code in which messages are conveyed is likely to be highly salient both to members of the community and to the ethnographer. The languages spoken tend to be named, and individual speakers, who speak one or the

other dialect in particular settings, identified as belonging to one or more groups. The fact that more than one language is spoken, that various social categories of people use specific languages in certain settings when discussing particular topics with members of other social categories, is a significant point of departure.

Aside from language or grammar *per se*, there are, however, other aspects of the communicative competence of such a group which require analysis. The appropriate beginning point for an investigation may be the analysis of the components which are emphasized by elaboration in a variety of speech forms. Well-elaborated components comprise a basis for selection among alternates. The pattern of such selection reveals crucial social information.

Hymes (1967) notes that precedence of components may differ from case to case, and such differences may be a basis for the classification of sociolinguistic systems. Such hierarchies of precedence may depend not simply on apparent causal direction in the interrelationships between components but also on the cultural focus (salience-emphasis) upon one or more of the components.

The artistic component is significant in black English. The salience of consideration of the artistic characteristics of speech acts in black English is evidenced by both the proliferation of terms which deal with aspects of verbal style and the common occurrence of speech routines which may be labeled by these terms. The artistic characteristics of a speech act are the characteristics that have to do with the *style* of the speech act, i.e., with the way in which something is said rather than with such components as the topic or the interlocutors. Moreover, the very term art carries connotations of value or judgment of appreciation (or nonappreciation).

The speech acts which will be described here are among the many which are given labels in black English. The terms themselves are sometimes descriptive of the style of the speech act. A partial list of such terms is: *signifying, rapping, sounding, playing the dozens, woofing, marking, loud-talking, shucking, and jiving*. Some of these terms are variants used in particular geographic areas. Undoubtedly, other variants exist.

I shall deal in detail two of these speech acts, treat their stylistic aspects, and attempt to relate the artistic characteristics to the other components which together comprise the speech act. I will describe how these speech acts are used and demonstrate that concern with style and value of artistic merit on the part of speakers of black English influences the other components. Specifically, I will show that this concern has a direct effect upon the choice of the linguistic code in certain conversational settings and frequently explains the use of black dialect forms.

Value regarding verbal art in black English is evident not only from the high frequency of occurrences of nameable artistic variants but also from the comments on such variants in ongoing conversations, including stated

values regarding speech use and judgments of the ability of particular speakers that are based upon considerations of artistic merit and style. Concern with verbal art is a dominant theme in black culture, and while these speech acts do not have style as their sole component, style is nevertheless the criterion which determines their effective use.

Signifying

A number of individuals interested in black verbal behavior have devoted attention to the "way of talking" which is known in many black communities as *signifying* (see Abrahams 1964; Kochman, 1969). *Signifying* can be a tactic employed in game activity—verbal dueling—which is engaged in as an end in itself, and it is *signifying* in this context which has been the subject of most previous analyses. *Signifying*, however, also refers to a way of encoding messages or meanings in natural conversations which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection. This kind of *signifying* might be best viewed as an alternative message form, selected for its artistic merit, and may occur embedded in a variety of discourse. Such *signifying* is not focal to the linguistic interaction in the sense that it does not define the entire speech event. While the primacy of either of these uses of the term *signifying* is difficult to establish, the latter deserves attention due to its neglect in the literature.

The standard English concept of *signifying* seems etymologically related to the use of this term within the black community. An audience, e.g., may be advised to signify "yes" by standing or to signify its disapproval of permissive education by saying "aye." It is also possible to say that an individual signifies his poverty by wearing rags. In the first instance we explicitly state the relationship between the meaning and the act, informing the audience that in this context the action or word will be an adequate and acceptable means of expressing approval. In the second instance, the relationship between rags and poverty is *implicit* and stems from conventional associations. It is in this latter sense that standard English and black usage have the most in common.

In the context of news analyses and interpretation we hear the rhetorical question, "What does all of this signify?" Individuals posing this question proceed to tell us what some words or events mean by placing major emphasis on the implications of the thing which is the subject of interpretation and, more often than not, posing inferences which are felt to logically follow. Such interpretations rely on the establishment of context, which may include antecedent conditions and background knowledge as well as the context in which the event occurred.

The black concept of *signifying* incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting

meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. Complimentary remarks may be delivered in a left-handed fashion. A particular utterance may be an insult in one context and not in another. What pretends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. Superficially self-abasing remarks are frequently self-praise. The hearer is thus constrained to attend to all potential meaning-carrying symbolic systems in speech events—the total universe of discourse. The context embeddedness of meaning is attested to by both our reliance on the given context and, most importantly, our inclination to construct additional context from our background knowledge of the world. Facial expression and tone of voice serve to orient us to one kind of interpretation rather than another. Situational context helps us to narrow meaning. Personal background knowledge about the speaker points us in different directions. Expectations based on role or status criteria enter into the sorting process. In fact, we seem to process all manner of information against a background of assumptions and expectations. Thus, no matter how sincere the tone of voice affected by the used car salesman, he is always suspect.

Labeling a particular utterance as signifying thus involves the recognition and attribution of some implicit content or function, which is potentially obscured by the surface content or function. The obscurity may lie in the relative difficulty it poses for interpreting (1) the meaning or message the speaker is adjudged as intending to convey; (2) the addressee—the person or persons to whom the message is directed; (3) the goal orientation or intent of the speaker. A precondition for the application of the term *signifying* to some speech act is the assumption that the meaning decoded was consciously and purposely formulated at the encoding stage. In reference to function the same condition must hold.

The following examples of signifying are taken from natural conversations recorded in Oakland, California. Each example will be followed by interpretations, intended to clarify the messages and meanings being conveyed in each case.

1. The interlocutors here are Barbara, an informant; Mary, one of her friends; and the researcher. The conversation takes place in Barbara's home and the episode begins as I am about to leave.

BARBARA: What are you going to do Saturday? Will you be over here?

R: I don't know.

BARBARA: Well, if you're not going to be doing anything, come by. I'm going to cook some chit'lins. [Rather jokingly] Or are you one of those Negroes who don't eat chit'lins?

MARY: [Interjecting indignantly] That's all I hear lately—soul food, soul food. If you say you don't eat it you get accused of being saditty [affected, considering oneself superior].

[Matter of factly] Well, I ate enough black-eyed peas and neck-

bones during the depression that I can't get too excited over it. I eat prime rib and T-bone because I like to, not because I'm trying to be white. [Sincerely] Negroes are constantly trying to find some way to discriminate against each other. If they could once get it in their heads that we are all in this together maybe we could get somewhere in this battle against the man.

[Mary leaves.]

BARBARA: Well, I wasn't signifying at her, but like I always say, if the shoe fits, wear it.

While the manifest topic of Barbara's question was food, Mary's response indicates that this is not a conversation about the relative merits of having one thing or another for dinner. Briefly, Barbara was, in the metaphors of the culture, implying that Mary (and/or I) is an assimilationist.

Let us first deal with the message itself, which is somewhat analogous to an allegory in that the significance or meaning of the words must be derived from known symbolic values. An outsider or nonmember (perhaps not at this date) might find it difficult to grasp the significance of eating chit'lins or not eating chit'lins. Barbara's "one of those Negroes that" places the hearer in a category of persons which, in turn, suggests that the members of that category may share other features, in this case, negatively evaluated ones, and indicates that there is something here of greater significance than mere dietary preference.

Chit'lins are considered a delicacy by many black people, and eating chit'lins is often viewed as a traditional dietary habit of black people. Changes in such habits are viewed as gratuitous aping of whites and are considered to imply derogation of these customs. The same sort of sentiment often attaches to other behaviors such as changes in church affiliation of upwardly mobile blacks. Thus, not eating or liking chit'lins may be indicative of assimilationist attitudes, which in turn imply a rejection of one's black brothers and sisters. It is perhaps no longer necessary to mention that assimilation is far from a neutral term intraculturally. Blacks have traditionally shown ambivalence toward the abandonment of ethnic heritage. Many strong attitudes attached to certain kinds of cultural behavior seem to reflect a fear of cultural extermination.

It is not clear at the outset to whom the accusation of being an assimilationist was aimed. Ostensibly, Barbara addressed her remarks to me. Yet Mary's response seems to indicate that she felt herself to be the real addressee in this instance. The signifier may employ the tactic of obscuring his addressee as part of his strategy. In the following case the remark is, on the surface, directed toward no one in particular.

2. I saw a woman the other day in a pair of stretch pants, she must have weighed 300 pounds. If she knew how she looked she would burn those things.

Such a remark may have particular significance to the 235-pound member of the audience who is frequently seen about town in stretch pants. She is likely to interpret this remark as directed at her, with the intent of providing her with the information that she looks singularly unattractive so attired.

The technique is fairly straightforward. The speaker simply chooses a topic which is selectively relevant to his audience. A speaker who has a captive audience, such as a minister, may be accused of signifying by virtue of his text being too timely and selectively apropos to segments of his audience.

It might be proposed that Mary intervened in the hope of rescuing me from a dilemma by asserting the absence of any necessary relationships between dietary habits and assimilationist attitudes. However, Barbara's further remarks lend credence to the original hypothesis and suggest that Mary was correct in her interpretation, that she was the target of the insinuation.

BARBARA: I guess she was saying all that for your benefit. At least, I hope she wasn't trying to fool me. If she weren't so worried about keeping up with her saditty friends, she would eat less T-bone steak and buy some shoes for her kids once in a while.

Although Mary never explicitly accuses Barbara of signifying, her response seems tantamount to such an accusation, as is evidenced by Barbara's denial. Mary's indignation registers quite accurately the spirit in which some signifying is taken.

This brings us to another feature of signifying: The message often carries some negative import for the addressee. Mary's response deserves note. Her retaliation also involves signifying. While talking about obstacles to brotherhood, she intimates that behavior such as that engaged in by Barbara is typical of artificially induced sources of schism which are in essence superficial in their focus, and which, in turn, might be viewed as a comment on the character of the individual who introduces divisiveness on such trivial grounds.

Barbara insulted Mary, her motive perhaps being to injure her feelings or lower her self-esteem. An informant asked to interpret this interchange went further in imputing motives by suggesting possible reasons for Barbara's behavior. He said that the answer was buried in the past. Perhaps Barbara was repaying Mary for some insult of the past, settling a score, as it were. He suggested that Barbara's goal was to raise her own self-esteem by asserting superiority of a sort over Mary. Moreover, he said that this kind of interchange was probably symptomatic of the relationship between the two women and that one could expect to find them jockeying for position on any number of issues. "Barbara was trying to rank Mary,"

to put her down by typing her. This individual seemed to be defining the function of signifying as the establishment of dominance in this case.

Messages like the preceding are indirect not because they are cryptic (i.e., difficult to decode) but because they somehow force the hearer to take additional steps. To understand the significance of not eating chit'lins, one must voyage to the black social world and discover the characteristics of social types referred to and the cultural values and attitudes toward them.

The indirect message may take any number of forms, however, as in the following example:

3. The relevant background information lacking in this interchange is that the husband is a member of the class of individuals who do not wear suits to work.

WIFE: Where are you going?

HUSBAND: I'm going to work.

WIFE: (You're wearing) a suit, tie, and white shirt? You didn't tell me you got a promotion.

The wife, in this case, is examining the truth value of her husband's assertion (A) "I'm going to work" by stating the obvious truth that (B) he is wearing a suit. Implicit is the inappropriateness of this dress as measured against shared background knowledge. In order to account for this discrepancy, she advances the hypothesis (C) that he has received a promotion and is now a member of the class of people who wear suits to work. B is obviously true, and if C is not true, then A must also be false. Having no reason to suspect that C is true, she is signifying that he is not going to work and moreover, that he is lying about his destination.

Now the wife could have chosen a more straightforward way of finding an acceptable reason for her husband's unusual attire. She might have asked, e.g., "Why are you wearing a suit?" And he could have pleaded some unusual circumstances. Her choice to entrap him suggests that she was not really seeking information but more than likely already had some answers in mind. While it seems reasonable to conclude that an accusation of lying is implicit in the interchange, and one would guess that the wife's intent is equally apparent to the husband, this accusation is never made explicit.

This brings us to some latent advantages of indirect messages, especially those with negative import for the receiver. Such messages, because of their form—they contain both explicit and implicit content—structure interpretation in such a way that the parties have the option of avoiding a real confrontation [Brown (1958:314) provides a similar discussion]. Alternately, they provoke confrontations without at the same time exposing unequivocally the speaker's intent. The advantage in either

case is for the speaker because it gives him control of the situation at the receiver's expense. The speaker, because of the purposeful ambiguity of his original remark, reserves the right to subsequently insist on the harmless interpretation rather than the provocative one. When the situation is such that there is no ambiguity in determining the addressee, the addressee faces the possibility that if he attempts to confront the speaker, the latter will deny the message or intent imputed, leaving him in the embarrassing predicament of appearing contentious.

Picture, if you will, the secretary who has become uneasy about the tendency of her knee to come into contact with the hand of her middle-aged boss. She finally decides to confront him and indignantly informs him that she is not that kind of a girl. He responds by feigning hurt innocence: "How could you accuse me of such a thing?" If his innocence is genuine, her misconstrual of the significance of these occasions of body contact possibly comments on her character more than his. She has no way of being certain, and she feels foolish. Now a secretary skilled in the art of signifying could have avoided the possibility of "having the tables turned" by saying "Oh, excuse me Mr. Smith, I didn't mean to get my knee in your way." He would have surely understood her message if he were guilty, and a confrontation would have been avoided. If he were innocent, the remark would have probably been of no consequence.

When there is some ambiguity with reference to the addressee, as in the first example, the hearer must expose himself as the target before the confrontation can take place. The speaker still has the option of retreating and the opportunity, while feigning innocence, to jibe, "Well, if the shoe fits, wear it." The individual who has a well-known reputation for this kind of signifying is felt to be sly and, sometimes, not man or woman enough to come out and say what he means.

Signifying does not, however, always have negative valuations attached to it; it is clearly thought of as a kind of art—a clever way of conveying messages. In fact, it does not lose its artistic merit even when it is malicious. It takes some skill to construct messages with multilevel meanings, and it sometimes takes equal expertise in unraveling the puzzle presented in all of its many implications. Just as in certain circles the clever punster derives satisfaction and is rewarded by his hearers for constructing a multisided pun, the signifier is also rewarded for his cleverness.

4. The following interchange took place in a public park. Three young men in their early twenties sat down with the researcher, one of whom initiated a conversation in this way:

- I: Mama, you sho is fine.
R: That ain' no way to talk to your mother.

[Laughter]

I: You married?

R: Um hm.

I: Is your husband married?

[Laughter]

R: Very.

[The conversation continues with the same young man doing most of the talking. He questions me about what I am doing and I tell him about my research project. After a couple of minutes of discussing "rapping," he returns to his original style.]

I: Baby, you a real scholar. I can tell you want to learn. Now if you'll just cooperate a li'l bit, I'll show you what a good teacher I am. But first we got to get into my area of expertise.

R: I may be wrong but seems to me we already in your area of expertise.

[Laughter]

I: You ain' so bad yourself, girl. I ain't heard you stutter yet. You a li'l fixated on your subject though. I want to help a sweet thang like you all I can. I figure all that book learning you got must mean you been neglecting other areas of your education.

II: Talk that talk! [Gloss: *O!e!*]

R: Why don't you let me point out where I can best use your help.

I: Are you sure you in the best position to know?

[Laughter]

I: I'mo leave you alone, girl. Ask me what you want to know. Tempus fugit, baby.

[Laughter]

The folk label for the kind of talking engaged in by I is *rapping*, defined by Kochman as "a fluent and lively way of talking characterized by a high degree of personal style," which may be used when its function is referential or directive—to get something from someone or get someone to do something. The interchange is laced with innuendo—signifying because it alludes to and implies things which are never made explicit.

The utterance which initiated the conversation was intended from all indications as a compliment and was accepted as such. The manner in which it was framed is rather stylized and jocularly effusive, and as such makes the speaker's remarks less bold and presumptuous and is permissive of a response which can acknowledge the compliment in a similar and jokingly impersonal fashion. The most salient purpose of the compliment was to initiate a conversation with a strange woman. The response served to indicate to the speaker that he was free to continue; probably any response (or none at all) would not have terminated his attempt to engage

the hearer, but the present one signaled to the speaker that it was appropriate to continue in his original style. The factor of the audience is crucial because it obliges the speaker to continue attempting to engage the addressee once he has begun. The speaker at all points has a surface addressee, but the linguistic and nonlinguistic responses of the other two young men indicate that they are very aware of being integral participants in this interchange. The question "Is your husband married?" is meant to suggest to the hearer, who seeks to turn down the speaker's advances by pleading marital ties, that such bonds should not be treated as inhibitory except when one's husband has by his behavior shown similar inhibition.

The speaker adjusts his rap to appeal to the scholarly leanings of his addressee, who responds by suggesting that he is presently engaging in his area of virtuosity. I responds to this left-handed compliment by pointing out that the researcher is engaging in the same kind of speech behavior and is apparently an experienced player of the game—"I ain't heard you stutter yet"—which is evidenced by her unfaltering responses. At the same time he notes the narrowness of the speaker's interests, and states the evidence leading him to the conclusion that there must be gaps in her knowledge. He benevolently offers his aid. His maneuvers are offensive and calculated to produce defensive responses. His repeated offers of aid are intended ironically. A member of the audience interjects, "Talk that talk!" This phrase is frequently used to signal approval of some speaker's virtuosity in using language skillfully and colorfully and, moreover, in using language which is appropriate and effective to the social context.

The content of the message is highly directive. Those unfamiliar with black cultural forms might in fact interpret the message as threatening. But there are many linguistic cues that suggest that the surface meaning is not to be taken seriously. Note particularly the use of such expressions as "scholar," "cooperate," "area of expertise," "fixated on your subject," and "neglecting other areas of your education." All these relatively formal or literary expressions occur in sentences spoken with typically black phonology and black grammar (e.g., "I ain't heard . . ." and "Are you sure you in the best position to know?"). By his code selection and by paralinguistic cues such as a highly stylized leer, the speaker indicates that he is parodying a tête-à-tête and not attempting to engage the researcher in anything other than conversation. He is merely demonstrating his ability to use persuasive language, "playing a game," as it were. The researcher signals acknowledgment by her use of black forms such as "That ain' no way no way . . ." and ". . . we already in . . ." The speaker indicates that the game is over by saying, "I'mo leave you alone," and redirects the conversation. The juxtaposition of the lexical items "tempus fugit" and "baby," which typically are not paired, is meant to evoke more humor by accentuating the stylistic dissonance of the speech sequence.

Signifying as a Form of Verbal Art

All other conditions permitting, a style which has artistic merit is more likely to be selected than on which does not because of positive cultural values assigned to the skillful use of speech. Having discussed some of the characteristics of signifying, I would now like to examine briefly the artistic characteristics of signifying.

No attempt will be made here to formulate an all-encompassing definition of art. That individuals may differ in their conceptions of art is made patently clear, e.g., by Abraham's (1964:54) summarizing statement that signifying is "many facets of the smart-alecky attitude." That my appreciation differs has, more than likely, been communicated in these pages. For present purposes, what is art is simply what native speakers judge witty, skillful, and worthy of praise. This is a working definition at best. It nevertheless serves to limit our field of discourse and, more importantly, to base our judgments on the native speaker's own point of view.

It is true that poor attempts at signifying exist. That these attempts are poor art rather than nonart is clear from comments with which some of them are met. Needless and extreme circumlocution is considered poor art. In this connection, Labov has made similar comments about sounding (Labov et al. 1968). He cites peer group members as reacting to some sounds with such metalinguistic responses as "That's phony" and "That's lame." Signifying may be met with similar critical remarks. Such failures, incidentally, are as interesting as the successes, for they provide clues as to the rules by violating one or more of them while, at the same time, meeting other criteria.

One of the defining characteristics of signifying is its indirect intent or metaphorical reference. This indirection appears to be almost purely stylistic. It may sometimes have the function of being euphemistic or diplomatic, but its art characteristics remain in the forefront even in such cases. Without the element of indirection, a speech act could not be considered signifying. Indirection means here that the correct semantic (referential interpretation) or signification of the utterance cannot be arrived at by a consideration of the dictionary meaning of the lexical items involved and the syntactic rules for their combination alone. The apparent significance of the message differs from its real significance.

Meaning conveyed is not apparent meaning. Apparent meaning serves as a key which directs hearers to some shared knowledge, attitudes, and values or signals that reference must be processed metaphorically. The words spoken may actually refer to this shared knowledge by contradicting it or by giving what is known to be an impossible explanation of some obvious fact. The indirection, then, depends for its decoding upon shared

knowledge of the participants, and this shared knowledge operates on two levels.

It must be employed, first of all, by the participants in a speech act in the recognition that signifying is occurring and that the dictionary-syntactical meaning of the utterance is to be ignored. Second, this shared knowledge must be employed in the reinterpretation of the utterance. It is the cleverness used in directing the attention of the hearer and audience to this shared knowledge upon which a speaker's artistic talent is judged.

Topic may have something to do with the artistic merit of an act of signifying. Although practically any topic may be signified about, some topics are more likely to make the overall act of signifying more appreciated. Sex is one such topic. For example, an individual offering an explanation for a friend's recent grade slump quipped, "He can't forget what happened to him underneath the apple tree," implying that the young man was preoccupied with sex at this point in his life and that the preoccupation stemmed from the relative novelty of the experience. A topic which is suggested by ongoing conversation is appreciated more than one which is peripheral. Finally, an act of *signifying* which tops a preceding one, in a verbal dueling sense, is especially appreciated.

Kochman cites such an example in the context of a discussion of *rapping*:

A man coming from the bathroom forgot to zip his pants. An unescorted party of women kept watching him and laughing among themselves. The man's friends hip (inform) him to what's going on. He approaches one woman—"Hey, baby, did you see that big Cadillac with the full tires, ready to roll in action just for you?" She answers, "No, mother-fucker, but I saw a little gray Volkswagen with two flat tires" (1969:27).

As mentioned earlier, signifying may be a tactic used in rapping, defined by Kochman as "a fluent and lively way of talking, always characterized by a high degree of personal style" (1969:27).

Verbal dueling is clearly occurring; the first act of signifying is an indirect and humorous way of referring to shared knowledge—the women have been laughing at the man's predicament. It is indirect in that it doesn't mention what is obviously being referred to. The speaker has cleverly capitalized on a potentially embarrassing situation by taking the offensive and at the same time, displaying his verbal skill. He emphasizes the sexual aspect of the situation with a metaphor that implies power and class. However, he is, as Kochman says, "capped." The woman wins the verbal duel by replying with an act of signifying which builds on the previous one. The reply is indirect, sexual, and appropriate to the situation. In addition, it employs the same kind of metaphor and is, therefore, very effective.

Motherfucker is a rather common term of address in such acts of verbal dueling. The term *nigger* also is common in such contexts, e.g., "Nigger, it was a monkey one time wasn't satisfied till his ass was grass" and "Nigger, I'm gon be like white on rice on you ass."

These two examples are illustrative of a number of points of good signifying. Both depend on a good deal of shared cultural knowledge for their correct semantic interpretation. It is the intricacy of the allusion to shared knowledge that makes for the success of these speech acts. The first refers to the toast "The Signifying Monkey." The monkey signified at the lion until he got himself in trouble. A knowledge of this toast is necessary for an interpretation of the message. "Until his ass was grass"—meaning "until he was beaten up"—can only be understood in the light of its common use in the speech of members of the culture and occurs in such forms as "His ass was grass and I was the lawnmower." What this example means is something like: "You have been signifying at me and, like the monkey, you are treading on dangerously thin ice. If you don't stop, I am likely to become angry and beat you!"

"Nigger, I'm gon be like white on rice on your ass" is doubly clever. A common way of threatening to beat someone is to say, "I'm gonna be all over your ass." And how is white on rice?—all over it. Metaphors such as these may lose their effectiveness over time due to overuse. They lose value as clever wit.

The use of the term *nigger* in these examples is of considerable linguistic interest. It is often coupled with code features which are far removed from standard English. That is, the code utilizes many linguistic markers which differentiate black speech from standard English or white speech. Frequently, more such markers than might ordinarily appear in the language of the speaker are used. Thus participants in these speech acts must show at least some degree of bidialectalism in black and standard English. They must be able to shift from one code to another for stylistic effect. Note, e.g., that the use of the term *nigger* with other black English markers has the effect of "smiling when you say that." The use of standard English with *nigger*, in the words of an informant, represents "the wrong tone of voice" and may be taken as abusive.

Code selection and terminological choice thus have the same function. They highlight the fact that black English is being used and that what is being engaged in is a black speech act. More is conveyed here than simple emphasis on group solidarity. The hearer is told that this is an instance of black verbal art and should be interpreted in terms of the subcultural rules for interpreting such speech acts.

Code and content serve to define the style being used, to indicate its tone, and to describe the setting and participants as being appropriate to the use of such an artistic style. Further, such features indicate that it should be recognized that a verbal duel is occurring and that what is said is

meant in a joking, perhaps also threatening, manner. A slight switch in code may carry implications for other components in the speech act. Because verbal dueling treats a fine line between play and real aggression, it is a kind of linguistic activity which requires strict adherence to sociolinguistic rules. To correctly decode the message, a hearer must be finely tuned to values which he observes in relation to all other components of the speech act. He must rely on his conscious or unconscious knowledge of the sociolinguistic rules governing this usage.

Marking

A common black narrative tactic in the folk tale genre and in accounts of actual events is the individuation of characters through the use of direct quotation. When in addition, in reproducing the words of individual actors, a narrator affects the voice and mannerisms of the speakers, he is using the style referred to as *marking* (clearly related to standard English 'mocking'). Marking is essentially a mode of characterization. The marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer implicit comment on the speaker's background, personality, or intent. Rather than introducing personality or character traits in some summary form, such information is conveyed by reproducing or sometimes inserting aspects of speech, ranging from phonological features to particular content, which carry expressive value. The meaning in the message of the marker is signaled and revealed by his reproduction of such things as phonological or grammatical peculiarities, his preservation of mispronounced words or provincial idioms, dialectal pronunciation, and, most particularly, paralinguistic mimicry.

The marker's choice to reproduce such features may reflect only his desire to characterize the speaker. It frequently signifies, however, that the characterization itself is relevant for further processing the meaning of the speaker's words. If, e.g., some expressive feature has been taken as a symbol of the speaker's membership in a particular group, his credibility may come into question on these grounds alone.

The marker attempts to replay a scene for his hearers. He may seek to give the implications of the speaker's remarks, to indicate whether the emotions and affect displayed by the speaker were genuine or feigned, in short to give his audience the full benefit of all the information he was able to process by virtue of expressive or context cues imparted by the speaker. His performance may be more in the nature of parody and caricature than true imitation. But the features selected to overplay are those which are associated with membership in some class. His ability to get his message across, in fact, relies on folk notions of the covariance of

linguistic and nonlinguistic categories, combined, of course, with whatever special skill he possesses for creating imagery.

The kind of context most likely to elicit marking is one in which the marker assumes his hearers are sufficiently like himself to be able to interpret this metaphorical communication. Since there is, more likely than not, something unflattering about the characterization, and the element of ridicule is so salient, the relationship between a marker and his audience is likely to be one of familiarity and intimacy and mutual positive affect.

An informant quoted a neighbor to give me an appreciation of her dislike for the woman. She quoted the following comment from Pearl in a style carefully articulated to depict her as "putting on the dog," parodying gestures which gave the impression that Pearl is preposterously affected: "You know my family owns their own home and I'm just living here temporarily because it is more beneficial to collect the rent from my own home and rent a less expensive apartment." "That's the kind of person she is," my informant added, feeling no need for further explanation. This is, incidentally, a caricature of a social type which is frequently the object of scorn and derision. The quote was delivered at a pitch considerably higher than was usual for the informant, and the words were enunciated carefully so as to avoid loss of sounds and elision characteristic of fluid speech. What was implied was not that the phonological patterns mimicked are to be associated with affectation in a one-one relationship but that they symbolize affectation here. The marker was essentially giving implicit recognition to the fact that major disturbances in fluency are indexes of "monitored" speech. The presence of the features are grounds for the inference that the speaker is engaged in impression management which is contextually inappropriate. Individuals who are characterized as "trying to talk proper" are frequently marked in a tone of voice which is rather false.

A marker wishing to convey a particular impression of a speaker may choose to deliver a quotation in a style which is felt to best suit what he feels lies underneath impression management or what is obscured by the speaker's effective manipulation of language. In the following example, the marker departs radically from the style of the speaker for purposes of disambiguation. The individuals here, with the exception of S₁, had recently attended the convention of a large corporation and had been part of a group which had been meeting prior to the convention to develop some strategy for putting pressure on the corporation to hire more blacks in executive positions. They had planned to bring the matter up at a general meeting of delegates, but before they had an opportunity to do so, a black company man spoke before the entire body. S₂ said, "After he spoke our whole strategy was undermined, there was no way to get around his impact on the whites."

S₁: What did he say?

S₂: [Drawing] He said, "Ah'm so-o-o happy to be here today. First of all, ah want to thank all you good white folks for creatin so many opportunities for us niggers and ya'll can be sho that as soon as we can git ourselves qualified we gon be flin our applications. Ya'll done done what we been waiting for a long time. Ya'll done give a colored man a good job with the company."

S₁: Did he really say that?

S₂: Um hm, yes he said it. Girl, where have you been. [Put down by initiating S₁, was being literal]

S₁: Yeah, I understand, but what did he really say?

S₂: He said, "This is a moment of great personal pride for me. My very presence here is a tribute to the civil rights movement. We now have ample evidence of the good faith of the company and we must now begin to prepare ourselves to handle more responsible positions. This is a major step forward on the part of the company. The next step is up to us." In other words, he said just what [S₂] said he said. He sold us out by accepting that kind of tokenism.

S₂ attempted to characterize the speaker as an Uncle Tom by using exaggerated stereotyped southern speech coupled with content that was compromising and denigrating. It would certainly be an overstatement to conclude that southern regional speech is taken by anyone as a sign of being an "Uncle Tom," but there is an historical association with the model of this stereotype being southern.

The characterization of individuals according to the way they speak is, of course, not peculiar to black people, although the implicit association of particular ways of speaking with specific social types may be more elaborated than elsewhere.

The parodying of southern regional black speech may sometimes serve as a device for characterizing a speaker as uneducated or unintelligent, and sometimes it is used to underscore the guilelessness of the speaker. The marker encodes his subjective reactions to the speaker and is concerned with the expressive function of speech more than its referential function.

Because marking relies on linguistic expression for the communication of messages, it is revealing of attitudes and values relating to language. It frequently conveys many subtleties and can be a significant source of information about conscious and unconscious attitudes toward language. An individual, on occasion, may mark a nonblack using exaggerated black English, with the emphasis clearly being on communicating that the subject was uneducated and used nonstandard usages. Perhaps more than anything, marking exhibits a finely tuned linguistic awareness in some

areas and a good deal of verbal virtuosity in being able to reproduce aspects of speech which are useful in this kind of metaphorical communication.

Conclusion

Signifying and marking exemplify the close relationship of message form to content and function which characterizes black verbal behavior. Meaning, often assumed by linguists to be signaled entirely through code features, is actually dependent upon a consideration of other components of a speech act (cf. Gumperz 1964b). A remark taken in the spirit of verbal dueling may, e.g., be interpreted as an insult by virtue of what on the surface seems to be merely a minor change in personnel, or a minor change in code or topic. Crucially, paralinguistic features must be made to conform to the rules. Change in posture, speech rate, tone of voice, facial expression, etc., may signal a change in meaning. The audience must also be sensitive to these cues. A change in meaning may signal that members of the audience must shift their responses, and that metalinguistic comments may no longer be appropriate.

It is this focus in black culture—the necessity of applying sociolinguistic rules, in addition to the frequent appeal to shared background knowledge for correct semantic interpretation—that accounts for some of the unique character and flavor of black speech. Pure syntactic and lexical elaboration is supplemented by an elaboration of the ability to carefully and skillfully manipulate other components of the speech act in order to create new meanings.