

Racism in Professional Settings: Forms of Address as Clues to Power Relations

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Since the Reagan administration, commitments to affirmative action programs have waned precipitously, inner cities have been decimated, high-paying manufacturing jobs have been replaced by high-tech service sector jobs, and a burgeoning Black middle class has developed; yet racial inequality persists. Although great strides have been made, people of color still confront racism in various arenas. One of the most difficult areas in which to identify subtle but pernicious forms of racism is professional office settings. This article explores how power relations are signified by subtle cultural rules. Specifically, it demonstrates how the cultural rules used by co-workers to address each other emerge as a way of articulating interethnic power relations in office settings. The research concludes that even the best efforts to diversify the workforce of an organization often perpetuate racial inequality because members of various ethnic groups are still under-represented in the top management positions.

In 1985, Ronald Reagan reconstituted the U.S. Civil Rights Commission by appointing Clarence Pendleton, Jr., as chair. Pendleton made the number one priority of the Civil Rights Commission the investigation of "reverse discrimination." Pendleton reassured Reagan that the commission was "working on a color-blind society that has opportunities for all and guarantees success for none" (cited in Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 1). The revamping of the Civil Rights Commission was a benchmark in the erosion of strides made by people of color during the civil rights movement. Ironically, the efforts of Republicans during the 1980s to eliminate race-based preferential hiring, promotion, college admissions, and contract procurements were couched in the rhetoric of

the civil rights movement. After all, it was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had a dream that his children would be judged solely on the "content of their character."

From Reagan's Civil Rights Commission during the 1980s to the proposed California Civil Rights Initiative during the 1990s, neo-conservatives have rearticulated the notion of racial equality by conflating it with "traditional" American and family values.¹ Simultaneously, less conservative interests have failed to attack structured racial inequality systematically (Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Gregory & Sanjek, 1994; Winant, 1994). While conservatives have been dismantling affirmative action programs, liberals have been consumed with promoting notions of multiculturalism and furthering ethnic diversity. Developing multicultural curricula for the public schools and fostering or managing diversity within the workplace are exceedingly important endeavors. However, even if ethnic diversity is embraced and racial parity (in the aggregate) is achieved, one cannot lose sight of the fact that these efforts do not eliminate racial inequality and equalize the disparity of power and economic relations between people of color and Whites. Legal scholar Derrick Bell explains that

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. (Bell, 1992, p. 12)

Regardless of efforts to "integrate" the workforce, systemic racism remains within the larger society and within particular work sites. Political scientists, sociologists, and legal scholars have all demonstrated that institutional racism often persists within various work- and marketplaces, legislative bodies, and courtrooms despite efforts to manage or institute ethnic diversity (Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Grofman, Handley, & Niemi, 1992; Guinier, 1994; Shull, 1993; Terkel, 1992; Winant, 1994). In professional office settings, racism does not take on the virulent form of racist slurs, violent acts, or even overt discrimination, yet racial as well as gender inequality persists. Despite great strides made in hiring people of color and women within the managerial and professional sectors, they remain scattered in lower-level positions and grossly under-represented within the top ranks (Shull, 1993).

What can anthropologists offer to help explain the menacing problem of the color line as well as to help manage diversity?² One effective approach is to draw from the discourse of anthropologists interested in issues of political economy who employ ethnographic methods to interrogate how culture serves to articulate or disarticulate structure and agency. In less arcane words, anthropology can help explain this dynamic: On the one hand, people's everyday lives become shaped by legal, economic, bureaucratic, political, or state structures; but on the other, people shape their everyday lives to resist or manipulate the structural forces that often repress them. This delicate balancing act is done through the learned behavior of culture—sometimes consciously, other times not.³

By analyzing subtle sociolinguistic and cultural rules through ethnographic inquiry, I make an argument that an ethnically diverse workplace, by itself, does not constitute a change in the structural power relations or how that power is culturally signified. Yet, work sites are often contested spaces, and when an organization's hierarchy is

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challenged, aspects of the cultural significance of power shift. With the Supreme Court soon to render decisions on *Tammi v. Piscataway*, *Hopwood v. Texas*, and *Adarand Constructors v. Peña*, the legislative apparatus that has provided a modicum of equitable access to power for people of color will soon be dismantled.⁴ It is incumbent on anthropologists and other behavioral scientists to help executives and personnel managers understand that ethnic diversity itself does not change structured inequality or directly confront the new face of racism. Leone Bennet, Jr., executive editor of *Ebony* Magazine, reminds us that

we hear people say, "We tried integration and it failed." That isn't so. Integration has never been tried in this country. It has not even been defined. What is integration? If you put two, three blacks in an all-white institution, it's not integrated. It requires a complete change in the way you think as an institution. Real integration involves a change in values. (Terkel, 1992, p. 380)

NEW FACES OF RACISM

African Americans have been engaged in an incipient class formation process as a consequence of the civil rights movement, affirmative action programs, and rising numbers of African American college graduates (Brooks, 1990). This process began precisely at the point when the U.S. economy moved from an industrial and a manufacturing base to one motored by finance, information, and service (Harvey, 1989). As the economy became increasingly deindustrialized, cities lost hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs and billions of dollars in federal funds. These trends have been augmented by a general pattern of uneven development that has been systematically decimating many inner cities. This has led to an increase in crime, infant mortality rates, high school dropouts, and drug trafficking (Kennedy, Gastón, & Tilly, 1990).

The combination of decomposing inner cities and the loss of high-paying union, manufacturing, and industrial jobs has driven an invisible wedge between the more mobile clerical and professional African Americans and the structurally underemployed, underpaid, or unemployed African Americans in the inner cities (Edsall & Edsall, 1992; Myers-Jones, 1988; Wilson, 1978). The structural rift within the African American community has been accompanied by the construction of two competing images within the "Black" racial construct, which is perpetuated primarily by the media.

The first image—a positive image—is formed primarily on prime time television sitcoms such as *The Cosby Show* and through genuinely positive media personalities such as Oprah or newscasters. In addition to television, there are a myriad of elected and appointed African American public officials that are ensconced within the vehicles of popular culture and contribute to the image that "Blacks have made it." This image is reified by an even larger number of upwardly mobile African Americans who are part of the professional middle class (Brooks, 1990; Davis, 1992).

The second image of African Americans—a negative image—is framed by crime and ideas of "the under class." This image is produced at the movie theater, on the

nightly news, and by pundits and politicians who view "illegitimacy" and crime in terms of an individual's lack of traditional values (Gingrich & Arney, 1994). This image of the under class is almost always couched in the criminal activity of people of color (Williams, 1994). A *Time* magazine cover story described the world of the under class as a mixture of dilapidated housing, broken furniture, inadequate and/or terrible food, alcohol, and drugs (Franklin, 1991, p. 98). To round out this image, one merely needs to envision the Black male gang member contemplating his next carjacking on a dimly lit street corner riddled with graffiti and littered with garbage, 40-ounce beer bottles, and crack viles.

These two competing images of successful minorities and "gangsters/welfare mothers" serve to bifurcate prejudice along class lines, which circumvents allegations of individual racial discrimination.⁵ This occurs because the construct of race that is imposed on poor Blacks is often juxtaposed with the construct used for and by the Black middle class. If one begins to isolate the inequality within the criminal justice system along racial lines, one needs only to look at the burgeoning Black middle class to assume that members of the so-called under class could have made it or pulled themselves up by their bootstraps.

Yet, members of the Black middle class (which I am admittedly using as a gross generalization) still are faced with racism that is sophisticated, is subtle, and often goes unnoticed by its perpetrators. Often this form of "racism with a smile" occurs in the workplace and cannot be readily identified or prosecuted.⁶ For example, cultural and social isolation, lack of promotion, last-hired first-fired, disaffection, stress, and discrimination accompanied by nonracial factors⁷ are some examples of institutional racism that contribute to disempowerment in the workplace (Brooks, 1990).

POWER PLAYS: HEGEMONIC FORMS OF ADDRESS

Whereas power in the workplace is most often articulated structurally, economically, or interpersonally, it is also often signified culturally by subtle cultural patterns that dominate specific settings or permeate entire organizations where people work. The cultural patterns that govern how people interact with each other in a specific factory, institution, corporation, or office can be used as a window to view how ethnic or racial groups dominate or contest the structural and economic power relations within each context. One way of getting at the dominant culture of a particular work site is to observe how language is used. A revealing use of language in the workplace is the *form of address* that managers and staff use with each other. Significant clues about power relations in the workplace are provided by the way managers and staff address each other formally or informally using titles, first names, given names, or nicknames.

My research demonstrates a simple pattern: Certain sociolinguistic rules that are unquestioningly observed within the workplace correspond with the cultural rules of the racial group that holds the top positions within an organization. The rules that govern usage of forms of address signal cultural ascendancy at the work site. If the traditional African American pattern for addressing peers is the general pattern used in a professional setting by Whites and Blacks, then the cultural milieu of that setting

challenges the ascendancy of Euro-American cultural hegemony. For example, White staff members employed within an organization run primarily by African Americans unquestioningly observe African American forms of address. Similarly, Black staff members who are employed within organizations run predominantly by White Americans unconsciously use Euro-American forms of address. (It should be noted, however, that in the United States, teasing out what is "American culture"⁸ and what is distinctively Euro-American culture, African American culture, Latino-American culture, and even "corporate culture" is exceedingly difficult. These sociological categories of ethnic groups' cultures are themselves exceedingly problematic.)

Rydell's loose interpretation of Gramsci's notion of hegemony is useful to introduce here. Hegemony denotes the exercise of economic and political power in cultural terms by the established leaders of American society and the

consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony, moreover, is the normal means of state control in a pluralistic society. (Rydell, 1984, p. 4)

Prestige and confidence are thus markers of hegemony. Hegemonic forms of address are the forms used within White-dominated work sites such as IBM Corporation, New York Life Insurance Company, and Harvard University. My observation of forms of address in offices of these institutions revealed that *first name* (FN) *reciprocity* was overwhelmingly used to address organization members, regardless of ethnicity or role. I call this the hegemonic form of address. This typical conversation at New York Life Insurance Company between the general manager and the assistant manager is an example of FN reciprocity, which makes them seem to be peers.

Manager: Billy, how's the monthly plan coming? We need it tomorrow.

Assistant Manager: Rick, you know I'll have it.

Manager: So it's done!

Assistant Manager: Done!

If the traditional African American pattern for addressing peers is the general pattern used in a professional setting, by Whites and Blacks, then the cultural milieu of that site challenges the ascendancy of Euro-American cultural hegemony. This is the case at some historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Conversely, the power to control the language pattern can be linked to contesting structural and economic power relations in a larger context than the work site. This is the case, I show, in the African American studies department at Temple University.

TRADITIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN RULES OF ADDRESS

Unlike the hegemonic (FN) form of address already shown, the traditional African

social club, office, grade school, and the like is *title + name* (T+N) *reciprocity*. The following phone conversation at Lincoln University, an HBCU, is typical of a traditional African American form of address. Although only one side of the conversation was recorded, the T+N reciprocity is clear.

Staff 1: Hello, may I please speak with Mr. Foley?

[Pause]

Staff 1: It's Ms. Johnson.

[Pause]

Staff 1: Mr. Foley, it's Ms. Johnson in Admissions. I would like to know . . .

Within this form of address, there is a host of patterns that emerge, and they are contingent on everything from generational distance to academic credentials. Similarly, titles and names can range from fictive or real kinship designations to terms of endearment. The general impetus of T+N reciprocity is respect and deference. The impetus is *not* demarcating social hierarchies (e.g., military ranks), which is the pattern associated with Euro-American use of T+N in

status marked situations [which] are settings such as the courtroom, the large faculty meeting, and Congress, where statuses are clearly specified, speech style is rigidly prescribed, and the form of address of each person is derived from his social identity, e.g., "your honor" or "Mr. Chairman." (Ervin-Tripp, 1986, p. 220)

The important issue here is that the traditional African American form of address is a different cultural and language pattern from the general pattern employed at corporations imbued with hegemonic prestige. If African American forms of address are used at a work site, then, at the cultural level, we can assume that African Americans have power.

SETTINGS AS CONTESTED SPACE

There are two terms that need to be defined before proceeding: *setting* and *locale*. Dell Hymes provides the most important description of setting for this investigation. In "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," Hymes (1986) suggests that the "setting refers to the time and place of the speech act and, in general, to the physical circumstances" (p. 60). I argue that the ethnic group that has structural power over the setting provides the contextualization cue that signals the form of address. Implicitly, then, the forms of address signal who has power over the setting where work is done. If the setting is the physical and geographical context where the organization is located or embedded. Although the term setting has been used here to describe the work site, neither setting nor situation has been defined consistently within the sociolinguistic literature. Blom and Gumperz (1986), in "Code-Switching in Norway," provide a nuanced distinction between setting and locale, and it helps to better

understand that delicate differences in sociolinguistic rules are sensitive indicators to power in the workplace. Blom and Gumperz state that they

use the term *setting* to indicate the way in which natives classify their ecological environment into distinct locales. This enables us to relate the opportunities for action to constraints upon action provided by the socially significant features of the environment. (p. 422)

I observed how forms of address were used in a number of office settings. These include a branch office of IBM Corporation in Portland, Oregon; a branch office of New York Life Insurance Company in Philadelphia; Howard University in Washington, DC; an administrative office at Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania; a Puerto Rican community development organization in Philadelphia; an administrative office and an academic department at Temple University in Philadelphia; and the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I have also made casual observations of how people address each other in various churches, fraternal organizations, parties, and conferences. In all but two locales, the sociolinguistic rules of each setting corresponded with rules of the locale. I call these corresponding settings. I provide only two examples to illustrate the office settings that typify the concept of corresponding settings (settings where the ethnic majority sets the cultural rules). The first example is the nonprofit Puerto Rican community development organization in North Philadelphia; everyone speaks Spanish. If anyone calls the organization to do business, as a vendor or contractor, he or she must speak Spanish. This organization is predominantly Puerto Rican, and Puerto Ricans have power. Another example of the correspondence of power to the ethnic majority's cultural patterns and rules from my observations is a branch office of IBM in Portland. The language that is used in this setting is English, and the forms of address are also Euro-American. Not surprisingly, the majority of the employees are Euro-American. No ethnic minority group has any significant power in the larger organization, even though the branch manager is Black. These two examples demonstrate the uncomplicated understanding that language and cultural rules correspond with the ethnic group that occupies the majority of the positions and has power within the organization. What becomes interesting and provides an entrée into the power and ethnic relations of an organization is when language patterns do not correspond with the ethnic majority of the workers in the organization.

NONCORRESPONDING SETTINGS

I looked at the problem of noncorresponding settings (where language use does not correspond with ethnic majority) in two locales and three settings. The first locale was Temple University. This organization is a large Pennsylvania Commonwealth University with more than 30,000 students. Just more than half of the Temple student population is Euro-American, and there is also a relatively large African American, Latino-American, and Asian American student population. The administration and the faculty of the university are overwhelmingly Euro-American, but the university is

located in the African American community of North Philadelphia. Therefore, much of the staff employed by the university is African American.

The other locale was Lincoln University. This organization is one of the 117 HBCUs, and it is a small Pennsylvania Commonwealth university of about 1,700 students. The vast majority of Lincoln students are African American; however, there are some Euro-American and Puerto Rican students. The administration and the faculty of the university are overwhelmingly African American, but the university is located 1 mile from Oxford, a predominantly White rural farming community in southeastern Pennsylvania. Therefore, much of the staff employed by this university is Euro-American.

I investigated three settings at these two locales. At Lincoln, I observed forms of address in the office of admissions. In that office, there were three Euro-American secretaries, two African American admission counselors, and two African American work study students. In addition, the director of admissions was African American. At Temple, I explored two settings. The first was the office of the Graduate School, which was predominantly African American. The African American workers in this office included three secretaries, two coordinators, four work study students, and a computer programmer. The Euro-Americans in the Graduate School office of Temple included one coordinator, one office administrator, and the dean for graduate studies. The ethnic makeup of the structure of these two settings reflected their respective locales: The staff reflected the makeup of the surrounding community, but the management represented the ethnic group that had power within the organization.

The second setting at Temple that I explored was the African American studies department. The staff, faculty, and administrative personnel in this department were entirely African American. In this setting, the ethnicity of both staff and management was representative of the surrounding community. The ethnicity of the people in power within this department was not representative of the ethnic group that held power within the overall organization.

PATTERNS OF FORMS OF ADDRESS

For this investigation, the administration offices are the speech situations, a request to see an application of a particular student is a speech event, and the addressing of the interlocutor to request the scores is a speech act. It became obvious that in each one of these settings, the same style of standard business English (SBE) was spoken. There was no evidence during routine office speech events (e.g., answering telephones, granting and accepting requests or discussing plans, budgets, recruiting trips, test scores, policies, etc.) in each office for code switching, diglossia, or co-occurrence of style repertoires. At Lincoln's admissions office, the form of address consisted of *title + last name* (T+LN); at Temple's Graduate School office, the form of address was FN; and at Temple's African American studies department, both forms were employed.

At Temple's Graduate School office, there were no rank, generational, gender, or ethnicity decision sets that were considered before the speech act of an address was made. Therefore, an African American undergraduate work study student called the

Euro-American dean, who had a Ph.D., by her first name. Answering the telephone varied. Some individuals addressed themselves as FN+LN and others just as FN, but titles were never used in telephone conversations or in face-to-face conversations. Further, status that refers to their position in the office (e.g., secretary, coordinator, work study) was also not considered. The hegemonic form of address previously identified as FN reciprocity was the form used in this office. A typical example of FN reciprocity is this exchange at the Graduate School.

Secretary: Michelle, I sent off the memo you requested yesterday.

Dean: Okay, thanks, tell Mary [a coordinator] to keep a soft copy and file the hard.

In this dialogue, both FN reciprocity and SBE are evident.

Within the admissions office at Lincoln, there were no status nor ethnicity decision sets considered before the speech act of an address was made. However, there were rank, gender, and generational considerations made before the form of address was used. T+LN reciprocity was the general rule of address. Therefore, a Euro-American secretary referred to the director of admissions as Dr.+LN and addressed other secretaries and the admission counselors as Mr.+LN or Ms.+LN. The secretaries and admissions counselors addressed each other as Mr.+LN or Ms.+LN, but the director as Dr.+LN. The director addressed himself on the telephone as Dr.+LN, and each of the other members of the office addressed themselves as T+LN on the telephone, except the work study students, who addressed themselves and were addressed as FN. There was no marital status consideration for the women. For example, no woman was addressed as Mrs.; all were addressed as Ms. The conversation between a Euro-American secretary and one of the African American admissions counselor provides a general description of the T+LN reciprocity that was the rule of address at the admissions office at Lincoln, although there was some variation to this rule in other departments at Lincoln.

Counselor: Ms. Collings, can you make 20 copies of this and give 10 to Dr. Brown.

Secretary: Sure, but doesn't Mr. James need some?

The description of the address forms in either setting does not consider personal telephone conversations, break conversations, lunch conversations, or gossip conversations. Nor does it consider written communication, in which forms of address and specific speech styles differed.

Some interesting decisions were made to address someone in the African American studies department at Temple. Generally, T+LN reciprocity was used. However, some of the staff and faculty had names that were explicitly African. Rarely did the T+LN reciprocity occur with an African name, unless both the first and last names were African or a faculty member was addressed, in which case the form was Dr.+[African] LN. Otherwise the address was simply [African] FN or [African] LN. The administrative assistant had an African name, but she was rarely called Ms.+[African] LN. However, the secretary, who had a European name, was generally addressed as

Ms.+LN. Graduate students who were close to their advisers or other faculty called their soon-to-be colleagues by their first names. However, male graduate students more often used first name reciprocity with faculty than did female graduate students. Faculty members sometimes used FN reciprocity and at other times did not. The cultural pattern of addressing peers was not as clear-cut in the African American studies department as it was at Lincoln. However, a cultural pattern emerged in the African American studies department that was different from that in the Graduate School and in the larger Temple community. This was demonstrated clearly by staff members in the Graduate School who conformed to the African American rules of address in conversations with staff members in the African American studies department. An explicative situation is when a staff member from the Graduate School had to hand deliver a confidential fellowship nomination to the chairs of both the math and the African American studies departments. Two different forms of address were decided on. The same individual, 5 minutes apart, engaged in two different forms of address.

Math Department

Staff: Is FN in, I need to deliver these nominations to him.

Receptionist: I'll see, let me buzz him.

Receptionist: FN, FN+LN is out here and she has your nominations.

Staff to chair: Here are the nominations. I need for you to review them . . .

Chair: Okay, I'll have them first thing tomorrow. Tell FN [the dean] that I need to speak with her before the meeting Tuesday.

Just 5 minutes later and about a half block away, the same staff member had to deliver the same packet to the chair of the African American studies department.

African American Studies Department

Staff: FN [African name], is Dr.+LN [African name] in? I have to hand deliver the nominations.

Secretary: Yes, one moment.

Secretary to chair: Ms.+LN, from the Graduate School, is here to see you.

Chair to staff: Oh, hello, Ms.+LN, I have been waiting for these.

I asked the staff member, "Why did you address people differently in the African American studies department and the math department?" She shrugged her shoulders and replied, "I didn't even realize that I addressed anyone differently."

WHAT'S MY CUE?

What are the subtle differences between these two settings that made the Graduate School staff member decide to address people differently? The answer to this question

must be prefaced by a brief explanation of the rules of alternation and co-occurrence. Ervin-Tripp (1986) explains that alternation refers to the choice made in implementing alternate styles (from a repertoire, e.g., Black English, Urban American Spanish, or Pidgin English) within a situation, setting, or speech event. Co-occurrence refers to the rules that govern to what extent alternate styles can co-occur within a situation, setting, or speech event. For example, within the situations described in this analysis, there is a restriction on any co-occurrence. The only style that occurs within "an office situation" is SBE. However, at lunch, on break, or during a personal telephone conversation, other styles may co-occur, and the interlocutor may choose from his or her repertoire of styles and engage in a different style of discourse. Therefore, within the office setting, while speaking to fellow peers (the office situation), there are rules that restrict any co-occurrence of styles. The same sociolinguistic rules for the co-occurrence of style applies to speech acts, within a given style. For example, within the style of SBE, a repertoire of various acceptable forms of address may co-occur. However, there are sociolinguistic rules that govern which form the interlocutor implements and to what extent they can co-occur.

In the settings described, the only co-occurrence of forms of address ensued within the African American studies department at Temple (excluding work study students at Lincoln). Co-occurrence was restricted to all forms except T+LN at Lincoln's admissions office and FN at Temple's Graduate School office and the larger Temple community. But the co-occurrence of address forms was allowed in the African American studies department. People in this department contested the hegemonic form of addressing people (FN), which is the general rule in other Temple departments and offices.

Therefore, in a larger context, the cultural rules were the same, but in a narrow context there were cultural rules that applied to making decisions about what form of address to use.

The subtle differences between these two settings were obvious enough to make the staff member from the Graduate School make an unconscious decision to address people differently in settings that were only half a block away. These differences are linked to the power of an ethnic group over the space or setting where work is performed. The only variable that was markedly different was the ethnicity of the people in power in each setting. The empowered ethnic group that dominated the setting provided the contextualization cue, which mandated an alternate form of address or allowed the co-occurrence of forms. Conversely, the forms of address signaled that a particular ethnic group was empowered and/or was contesting larger power relations.

Gumperz (1982) highlights this idea of signalling within a context. In *Discourse Strategies*, he describes a contextualization cue as

any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions. Such cues may have a number of such linguistic realizations depending on the historically given linguistic repertoire of the participants. . . . Lexical and syntactic options, formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closing and sequencing strategies can all have similar contextualizing functions. (p. 131)

One can justify the setting of the situation as a contextualization cue that dictates the form of address employed because context cues carry information and implicit meanings that are conveyed as part of the communicative process and are rarely talked about. These cues are taken for granted and tend to go unnoticed when the participants comprehend and notice them as relevant cues within interpretive processes.

However, when a person does not react to a cue or is unaware of its meaning or function, the interpretation of the missed cue can lead to misunderstandings. Often these misunderstandings are couched in attitudinal terms: "A speaker is said to be unfriendly, impertinent, rude, uncooperative, or to fail to understand" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 132). Therefore, miscommunication due to failed interpretation of context cues is regarded as a social faux pas and leads to misjudgments of speaker's attitude, or intent, and is not likely to be identified as a mere linguistic error. The explanation of "misjudgment of attitude" corresponds to the reaction of the staff at each setting if the dominant pattern is not followed in their setting.

At Lincoln's admissions office, when asked about their interpretations of people who use the FN form of address within the office, the general response of workers (regardless of ethnic affiliation) was that the person would be seen as being disrespectful. However, at Temple's Graduate School, when people were asked about the interpretation of an individual who uses the T+LN form of address, they generally responded (regardless of ethnic affiliation) that T+LN was too formal and that if someone expected to be called by T+LN, he or she would be considered "uppity."

SUBTLE DIFFERENCES = POWER

These subtle cultural differences do relate to power in the workplace. The ethnic group that has power dominates the cultural milieu of the setting. Although the majority of the staff members at Lincoln are Euro-American, they generally conform to traditional African American forms of address because African Americans have power at this locale. Similarly, the majority of the personnel at Temple are African American, but they consent to the Euro-American forms of address because Euro-Americans have power within this organization. However, in the African American studies department at Temple, the workers generally conform to African American rules of address and do not consent to the hegemonic Euro-American forms of address. Within this particular setting, the smaller department is challenging the cultural ascendancy that dominates the larger organization. For the most part, the staff members at each one of these settings were oblivious to their conformation, or lack thereof, to the language patterns in each setting. Most people would conform or consent to the cultural rules in each setting without even being aware of it.

One can see that these delicate differences in sociolinguistic rules are sensitive indicators of cultural differences and differences of ethnic minority empowerment in different settings or work sites. The control of the cultural context of the work site is important because it is often contingent on the ethnic group that is empowered in that workplace. However, if that work site or setting is on the periphery of the organization

or otherwise marginalized, as one can argue is the case for the African American studies department at Temple, then the use of different rules of address can be indicative of a counter hegemonic struggle against the larger organization. Similarly, if the whole organization or institution is marginalized (e.g., Lincoln could be considered marginal with 1,600 students compared to Temple's 20,000+ students in the same system of higher education), this can be indicative of an entire organization that is engaged in a counter hegemonic struggle against institutionalized racism.

When the African American workers do not challenge and simply consent to the dominant culture of an organization, even if they are the majority, then chances are they still do not hold, or have easy access to, structural power. Similarly, rural working-class Whites at Lincoln conform to the traditional African American form of address. Within this organization, they do not have easy access to structural power.

Looking at the struggles that are mediated culturally is important in the wake of "diversity policies," affirmative action, and halfhearted commitments against racism because these can blur historically contingent forms of institutionalized racism. In many organizations, there is ethnic diversity, but ethnic minorities still do not have easy access to power, and when and if they do obtain a powerful position, they must, at least in the context of work, assimilate into the hegemonic culture and reproduce its relations.

Ultimately, this sociolinguistic analysis confirms the pessimistic thesis that Bell (1992) advances in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*—that racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of U.S. society. These data confirm that structural power relations are often signified through subtle cultural rules within specific organizations. These cultural rules within specific organizations are only emblematic of larger social relations within society. Programs and efforts to manage diversity cannot change historically contingent patterns of oppression. However, they can confront these patterns by recognizing that members of underrepresented minority groups and women must have access to the very top leadership positions within any organization. I did not want to suggest that the presence of traditional African American forms of address should be viewed as a test for African American empowerment because the logical extension would entail segregated or Balkanized organizations where one group controls one organization and another group controls a different organization. I wanted to provide a unique approach to demonstrate how organizations in which nontraditional staff members are well represented often maintain inequitable power relations. By any criteria, Temple is a model for diversity efforts. However, the structural inequality and racial disparity remain so pervasive that they are systematically articulated by subtle cultural patterns.

Morrison (1992), in *The New Leaders: Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America*, has also recognized the issue. She suggests that top managers must "make diversity a pervasive part of the culture" and argues that "when diversity is institutionalized in an organization, support has a better chance of continuing even after personally committed top executives leave" (p. 193). Her approach to these issues is consistent with this study because she asserts that the only way an organization can confront racial inequality and manage diversity effectively is to change the racial composition of the board of directors, ensure the commitment of the CFO, and employ

stringent but balanced diversity policies. Her emphasis on a balanced approach to managing diversity is paramount to its efficacy.

Although efforts to manage diversity must be orchestrated from powerful positions, programs and strategies cannot be dictated authoritatively because subordinates will find strategies to resist such mandates, which will only increase racial animosity. This balance is difficult but fundamental. It is increasingly difficult within the context of palatable arguments for a color-blind society. Proponents of a color-blind society are simply turning a blind eye to White supremacy and the permanence of racism.

NOTES

1. An excellent example of this dynamic is welfare reform as it has been outlined in the Personal Responsibility Act for the *Contract With America* (Gingrich & Arney, 1994; also see Edsall & Edsall, 1992).
2. Wolf (1994) suggests that "each endeavor to understand humankind works with a set of characteristic ideas that orient its inquiries and justify its existence, and for anthropology ideas about race and culture . . . have played that guiding and legitimizing role" (p. 1).
3. Marcus and Fischer (1986) suggest that investigating the political and economic relationship between state structures and the everyday life of people is grounded in work "pioneered during the 1960s by such scholars as Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, June Nash, and Eleanor Leacock" (p. 84), who continued to be prolific through the 1990s. Other examples of this genre include Taussig (1980), Fay (1982), Willis (1982), Sabel (1982), and Williams (1994).
4. The *Taxman* case concerns the Piscataway, New Jersey, school board that hired a White woman and a Black woman on the same day and at the same school to teach business skills. Facing budget cuts in 1989, the school board decided it could not afford to keep both teachers and fired the White teacher. The seniority and qualifications of the two teachers were identical, and the board acted to ensure diversity within the Department of Business Education in that high school. In the *Hopwood* case, Cheryl Hopwood is challenging the University of Texas Law School admissions policy that seeks to duplicate in each incoming class the approximate percentage of Mexican Americans and African Americans graduating from colleges in Texas. The *Adarand* case concerns the Department of Transportation contracting procedures that give more points in a competitive bid for subcontracting jobs to disadvantaged construction firms.
5. Many people structure their racist attitudes and prejudice along class lines. Because they do not feel any animosity toward middle-class people of color, they feel that they are exempt from allegations of racism. This dynamic is demonstrated clearly in *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession* (Terkel, 1992).
6. In recent years, the strides made to alleviate discrimination and empower people of color have eroded, in part because the Supreme Court has devised difficult definitions of employment discrimination under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. These definitions are *disparate treatment* (requiring proof of racial motivation) and *disparate impact* (requiring statistical analysis of the impact of discrimination). Both definitions are burdensome, time consuming, and expensive to prosecute (Brooks, 1990). One of the biggest hurdles in prosecuting disparate impact cases is the lack of statistical significance for promotion cases or discrimination in higher levels of management. Often there are so few people in top management positions that attorneys cannot substantiate the statistical impact. On the other hand, to prosecute disparate treatment cases, attorneys need "smoking gun" evidence of overtly racist discrimination, which is difficult to prove in the light of the subtle patterns of racism prevalent in many workplaces (Oni & Winant, 1986, p. 120). In short, the Supreme Court in 1978 (*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*) made a concerted effort to relax or eliminate the Justice Department's efforts to enforce affirmative action. Securing power in the workplace, for African Americans, has and continues to be a struggle. The struggle is for ownership and access to power.
7. "John Henryism" is another form. This is a description of a personality type that is derived from the fictional African American laborer of legendary strength. John Henry died while pitting his sledgehammer

against a steam drill. This term is used to define a syndrome of stress and hypertension found within the African American middle class. John Henryism manifests itself when one struggles to get into the mainstream. It is said to be characterized by the belief that "one can triumph despite the odds." Unlike the aggressive "type A" personality, the John Henry personality "shows extreme patience and tends to suppress anger in order to deflect white hostility" (Brooks, 1990, p. 40).

8. I understand "American hegemonic culture" to be those aspects of culture that are promoted by the state and capitalist interests and are shared across ethnic, racial, and class lines in the United States. This gloss of American hegemonic culture is informed by Davis (1990), Gramsci (1971), Omi and Winant (1986), and Winant (1994).

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