

1 The Struggle and the Tools

Lucy Cadens didn't even give me a chance to sit down that day I walked into her house: "I need to get this to DSS [Department of Social Services] today." She waved a stack of papers in my direction and headed for the door. Her second youngest child was nineteen and pregnant, and her eldest daughter (age twenty-four) was too old to be living with her, so Lucy was anxious to get them on their own. To do this, she had offered to help with the paperwork involved in getting her daughters into their own households. The following excerpt of a conversation between a DSS representative, Lucy, and myself is taken from my ethnographic field notes written shortly after we left that office. The caseworker began:

"So you're looking to get your daughters their own social assistance?"

Lucy agreed. "I came in last week and got a list of all the papers I need to fill out." Lucy handed over the stack of the papers to the woman. The assistant accepted them and compared what Lucy turned in to the checklist that Lucy obtained the week before.

"Do you have your daughter's birth certificate?"

Lucy put her hand on her cheek and leaned against the partition. "It was right there on the table too. I was just so busy this morning." The social worker smirked. Lucy continued: "I been having her on my case though."

"We only have this file here. The bigger one is on the other side of the building."

There was a pause and Lucy looked at me and said quietly: "get me every time."

The social worker spoke again. "That's all you're missing too." Lucy looked at her. Another pause and the social worker continued, "you'll have to bring it in next time. Just a photocopy and then you're all set." Lucy said she would and we got up to leave. Once out the door, Lucy vented: "What would it have taken that lazy fu—in' bitch to get off her sorry white ass and get my other file?"

This exchange is typical—it represents just one of many encounters where inner city residents struggle for resources and respect using their vernacular language tools. When this interaction took place, Lucy, a forty-two year-old African-American¹ woman with six kids, was living in an inner city community in Quayville, a medium-sized town in the Northeast. I spent three and a half years in Quayville observing and participating in community members' family and social networks. During my ethnographic research, I studied the oral and literate skills these individuals need in order to negotiate the many institutional influences that enter into their lives. I open with this interaction because it represents precisely the place where many critical theorists would stop their analysis. Here, we see what looks to be yet another example of domination and quiescence—the caseworker sends Lucy back home to get a document that already exists on file; and even though Lucy knows the caseworker is asking for too much, Lucy agrees with the caseworker's unnecessary demand and leaves. Many social and cultural theorists would point to this exchange as convincing evidence of systematic oppression in inner cities, and would paint Lucy in the dull colors of someone who blindly reproduces the social structures that may not be in her best interest. Here, their arguments would leave off—without asking what happened before or after this public interaction, without seeking the hidden ideologies informing Lucy's statements, without acknowledging the subtle ways in which Lucy bends her language to be both accommodating and challenging. And their convincing discussions leave us with not only an inaccurate portrayal of the overly determined politics of day-to-day life, but worse, a shallow and reduced characterization of Lucy as "disempowered" and unreflective in the face of these politics.

Residents in this inner city have agency—they're savvy negotiators of highly nuanced, everyday interactions with wider society's institutional representatives. Community members have critical consciousness that manifests itself in various linguistic events and artifacts that scholars often overlook, or simply dismiss as rudimentary

(responding with silence, reading newspapers, doodling, talking with judges, completing applications). Their resistance and agency in the face of asymmetrical power relations rests in the very places one would least expect to find such agency and political awareness.

Within the context of day-to-day inner city life, individuals continually develop linguistic skills, skills imbued with oppositional ideologies. Their language tools, as well as their values attendant upon these tools, complicate the notion that overarching power structures are simply reproduced, carbon copy, over and over again. Social structures, we learn, are not bloodless, unyielding, monolithic forces of oppression and domination, but are instead continually remade, fissured, and manipulated in everyday interactions. This book reveals the daily linguistic means by which residents make social structures more humane, subvert, and co-opt them for their own ends. Systematic oppression—"the struggle" as community members say—isn't the totalizing and erasing experience scholars assume it to be for the "disenfranchised." Rather, the struggle always works simultaneously with "the tools," the linguistic forms of agency residents use in their daily living.

In the final analysis, this work complicates our dichotomous ways of describing daily politics: micro/macro; agency/structure; power to/power over; confrontation/domination; resistance/oppression. Everyday language always already indicates both agency and structure; both power to and power over; both confrontation and domination; both resistance and oppression. Language use fluidly circulates betwixt and between social forces that are "oppositional and interdependent" (Huspek 1993); "constraining and enabling" (Giddens 1984); "durable and transposable" (Bourdieu 1990).

This book centers discussion around the cyclic process by which language develops in this inner city. Specifically, I exemplify ways the residents learn, deploy, and retool their linguistic strategies as they move across many institutional contexts. In comparing opinions of their encounters with institutional representatives, community residents often spoke of not only their material struggles to obtain housing, food, clothing, and resources, but they also spoke of their ideological struggles to gain respect, to complicate insidious stereotypes, and to challenge belittling attitudes. Because public institutions influenced so much of their daily lives, neighborhood members continually honed their language skills. Thus, the most salient example of their agency rests in their cyclic development of linguistic

strategies used to push at, resist, and obviate, the structuring ideology of institutional workers.

I want to elucidate a critical theory that moves beyond the dismissive assumption of false consciousness and the facile discussions of reproduced power structures. I'll analyze many forms of strategic consciousness present in community members' daily language development employed to enact their subversive ideologies when dealing with institutional representatives. In everyday experiences with wider society, how do individuals linguistically negotiate a balance between both the constraints and opportunities institutions present them?

To address this question, I use critical discourse analysis to explore a wide variety of language strategies used by members of Quayville's inner city community as they interacted in politically keen ways with wider society's institutional representatives. My intention is to honor what individuals in this community call the "struggle" and the "tools." During face-to-face interactions with institutional agents, their struggle is both material and ideological. The tools are the linguistic strategies that these individuals use to navigate institutions in wider society and negotiate the struggles. To best portray the struggle and the tools, I create a threefold analytical framework: I examine how language strategies were taught and learned in this community; I then characterize the ways in which community residents deployed their linguistic skills in their daily interactions with institutional representatives; finally, I analyze how individuals metacommunicatively assessed and revamped their language strategies after these interactions. We need to study both the struggle and the tools in tandem if we hope to move away from a critical theory that demeans the ones it attempts to uplift, if we hope to characterize the multifaceted ways language carries with it both dissent and compliance in everyday practices.

Silencing the Subordinate

Social theories that characterize systematic forms of oppression too often mute the subordinate. Because critical theory can mistake accommodation for quiescence, placation for false consciousness, silence for submission, subtlety for passivity, it overlooks resistance in the most common language practices and thus silences those it most hopes to liberate. We need a theory of hegemony that makes room for subversive ideologies where we least expect to find them, a theory that allows for the many forms of critical consciousness and action sus-

tained therein. Such a theory moves well beyond the structuralist determinism of Marx and Gramsci, and begins at the places where Bourdieu and Giddens leave off—the places where James Scott picks up.

To their credit, Bourdieu and Giddens advanced critical theories that moved structuralist thought away from the staunch determinism of Marx and Gramsci. Using different terms, Bourdieu and Giddens to some greater or lesser extent rescue the agent, characterize the flexible nature of social structures, and develop notions of power that reveal the cumulative and structuring effects of everyday lived experiences. How they do this merits discussion.

Pierre Bourdieu begins his critical theory with the individual's habitus, a "system of durable, transposable dispositions" (1990, 53) to act in particular ways within "infinite, yet strictly limited generative capacities" (55). The agent, although restricted by social constraints, emerges from the bleakness of structural determinism to find "a relation to what is possible . . . , a relation to power" (64). To Bourdieu's mind, these social structures are more flexible; they "make possible the free production of all thoughts, perceptions, and actions inherent in the particular conditions of productions—and only those" (55). Structures yield to many forms of individuals' strategies. In light of the habitus, Bourdieu's sense of power stems from daily dispositions of giving and receiving:

A man possesses in order to give. But he also possesses by giving. A gift that is not returned can become a debt, a lasting obligation; and the only recognized power—recognition, personal loyalty or prestige—is the one obtained by giving. (126)

Power is reciprocal, in other words, flowing in a "process of circular circulation" (125) between durable and transposable dispositions to give and receive. In all, Bourdieu's descriptive power resides in the acumen with which he represents agents, structures and power. Agents strategically act within constraints and contribute to the malleability of social structures through dialogic, daily interactions of reciprocity.

With similar descriptive force, Anthony Giddens defines a theory of hegemony that rescues the agent from notions of overly restraining social structures. Giddens's agent "has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons" (1984, 3). Individuals reflexively monitor their actions and the actions of others, and this monitoring is fundamental to the maintenance of a

continuous flow of day-to-day activities (1984, 9). The daily activities of agents coalesce over time and space, and thus become organized, regularized social practices, or systems. The patterning of behavior in systems of daily routines eventually congeal together to form sets of rules for legitimate behavior, or structures. Agents, their repeated actions, and the rules for those actions, combine in the slow move of history and thus produce the “duality of structure”:

According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize. . . . Structure is not to be equated with constraint, but is always both enabling and constraining. (1979, 25).

Giddens’s theory, then, is predicated upon the recursive ways in which knowing individuals routinely (re)enact flexible structures, structures that allow for possibilities and opportunities in the daily circulation of power relations.

In three crucial ways Bourdieu and Giddens forward an understanding of hegemony: (1) They shift critical attention to the agent while remaining aware of structuring conditions; (2) they characterize the pliancy of structuring conditions; and (3) they account for the fluid ways power circulates in and through and from everyday interactions. Thus, they refresh critical theory that had previously focused on the top down flow of power in rigid structures, and as a result, downplayed individual agency.

As with many critical theorists, though, Bourdieu’s and Giddens’s frameworks rest on the seriously flawed notion of false consciousness. When subordinate people have false consciousness, they view their daily lives as the result of a natural social order. They accept their living conditions because they see no alternatives; they suffer because they believe the prevailing ideology that says they deserve their low positions on the hierarchy; the subordinate acquiesce to their lot in life. False consciousness holds that the most people are victims of ideological domination—they subscribe to the belief system and cultures that perpetuate their own disempowerment. “Briefly put, the argument is that a system of social domination often appears to be inevitable. Once it is considered inevitable, the logic goes, it is apt to be considered natural even by those who are disadvantaged by it” (Scott, 1985, 331). The less powerful blindly reproduce their domina-

tion by taking for granted the terms of their social positions—or so the idea of false consciousness leads one to believe.

However, social scientist James Scott critiques the notion of false consciousness and hegemony. He shows how theories of hegemony rest on the assumption of false consciousness, or ideological domination. Ideological domination

define[s] for subordinate groups what is realistic and what is not realistic and drive[s] certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible. . . . By persuading underclasses that their positions . . . are unalterable and inevitable, such a limited hegemony can produce the behavioral results of consent without necessarily changing people's values. (1990, 74)

Ideological domination suggests that the less powerful view social order as destined, taken-for-granted. With the argument of ideological domination, individuals can be said to contribute to their own domination because they reify their lived conditions as natural and just. This view of hegemony compellingly accounts for the "situation of subordinate groups throughout their history [that] has seemed an unmovable 'given,' and realistically so" (75). When hegemony is viewed as natural, the agency of people in their daily experiences is reduced to silent and mere reproduction—agents' intervention in the production of events is read summarily as false consciousness. From the remove of high critical theory, ideological domination, as a concept, seems to have the descriptive power to show why, in the face of continually harsh living conditions, people consent to the structuring actions of elites.

Even in those theories that resurrect notions of individual will and intelligence, we see hegemony discussed in terms of a naturalized form of domination. For Bourdieu,

the practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the habitus, acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realized ends—procedures to follow, paths to take. . . . This is because the regularities inherent in an arbitrary condition . . . tend to appear as necessary, even natural, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended. (1990, 53–54)

Despite severe living conditions, people consistently act as they do because the relentless repetition of their everyday lives contains the only set of options and possibilities from which they can conceive a better life. In other words, the framework of habitus assumes the idea of ideological domination where people unconsciously, unstrategically, consistently make choices that perpetuate their own living conditions. "The habitus [as] a spontaneity without consciousness or will" (66) makes precious little room for subversive ideologies and for individuals' linguistic strategies attendant upon these hidden ideologies.

Giddens, like Bourdieu, supports a conception of hegemony where people suffer under their own false consciousness. In Giddens's duality of structure, "the reification of social relations, or the discursive 'naturalization' of the historically contingent circumstances and products of human action, is one of the main dimensions of ideology in social life" (1984, 26). Even though people have the ability to reflexively monitor their actions, they unwittingly naturalize their living conditions at the ideological level. And because they believe their daily life is part of the natural order, Giddens's argument goes, people reproduce the oppressive structures of status quo: "Forms of signification which 'naturalize' the existing state of affairs, inhibit recognition of the mutable, historical character of human society thus act to sustain such interests" (1979, 195). Ideological domination leads people to reify existing social practices—to believe they are unflinching. In the end, both Bourdieu and Giddens compromise their notions of agency when they adopt a notion of false consciousness.

When critical theorists support an idea of false consciousness, as many do, they stop looking for ways hidden ideologies can flourish (especially) in the worst living conditions—they silence the subordinate in a tight argument that basically blames the victim. When judged through the lens of false consciousness, hegemony seems to be sustained by acquiescing dupes who themselves are responsible for reproducing their own domination in their taken-for-granted daily activities. Under the banner of false consciousness, theorists sell out their dialogic notions of power to the notion of socially determined actions by uncritical actors. But I've found agency is more than mere blind obedience to the inevitable.

At the local level of politics, agency includes careful assessment of power situations, conscious and continual crafting of language strategies, and a firm, but not naive, belief in the opportunities and possibilities to be found in institutional structures. In the minute interactions

taking place in contexts of highly asymmetrical power relations, individuals will both accommodate and resist, both reproduce and undermine, both enact and challenge. If we are to complicate notions of false consciousness and hegemony, we can no longer assume that ideological domination explains the seeming quiescent actions of those who are most influenced by disparities of resources and opportunity. We must assume, instead, that individuals cultivate counterhegemonic ideologies in and from their everyday lives. Working from this assumption, we can better distinguish the nuances of strategic actions individuals employ in their daily strivings to gain resources and respect. If we hope to move away from a critical theory that obscures the politics of daily practices, we must ask: What are the subversive actions and attitudes that individuals craft when challenged with institutional practices and beliefs that least represent their interests?

As they deploy their evolving linguistic skills, Quayville's inner city residents often work from the presumption that opportunity exists in gatekeeping encounters, particularly when gatekeepers linguistically enact institutional structures in more enabling and less constraining ways. My data show that both community residents *and* gatekeepers can actually communicate effectively, mutually indexing the shared task of providing and accessing resources. I point out that the tension between residents' linguistic agency and institutional structures can be fruitful and as such allows us to reconcile political binaries. Institutional language does indeed include both resistance and accommodation, and as a result, community residents' language neither entirely subverts nor wholly reproduces the structuring ideology of institutions. All of these results call into question the validity of "hegemonic" processes described by so many cultural critics.

Within a year from the start of this study, I began to notice how residents crafted linguistic tactics in response to their grapplings for resources and respect. When seen across time and contexts, a cyclic pattern of language development emerged from their interactions with gatekeepers, a pattern where residents first learned, then deployed, then evaluated language skills. By virtue of its existence, this process indicated the oppositional ideology residents' tacitly held. They continually practiced strategies to counter the undue intervention and belittling attitudes of institutional representatives. The remainder of this work examines this threefold process of language learning, deployment, and retooling and locates this process in community members' antihegemonic symbolic systems.

Learning the Tools

Community residents in Quayville's inner city gained institutional language abilities through acquisition and learning. Institutional language includes the reading, writing, and speaking skills continually developed in their daily struggles to obtain resources and respect from institutional representatives. James Gee defines language acquisition as "a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching" (1990, 146): language acquisition and language socialization are one in the same process where, *without formal direction*, someone picks up patterns of language uses through immersion in a speech community. On the other hand, language learning is "a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching . . . or through certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection" (146). When people consciously add new linguistic features to their repertoires *with formal instruction*, they learn language. Acquiring language, then, is an unconscious activity requiring no instruction; but learning language is a conscious activity requiring instruction. Acquisition and learning are lifelong processes: adults acquire and learn language from their interactions in community, institutional, and formal settings, and pass these on to their kids through both example and direct teaching.

In the vignette that opens this chapter, although it may be easily overlooked, Lucy satisfied the most difficult part of the DSS application process, namely filling out these forms. When Lucy sat down with the social worker, she handed over a stack of papers, a description that glosses the complexity of the linguistic resources needed to fill out these forms in the first place. I mentioned that Lucy offered to help her daughters complete the applications necessary in order to get them their own cases with DSS. A few weeks after Lucy's encounter with the caseworker, I found out why she had to help her daughters. Lucy and I had just come from shopping and, during our trip, she expressed her concern that Afriganzia wasn't doing enough to find herself a new place and get out on her own. When we returned to Lucy's apartment, I went to Lucy's room and sat at the end of her bed where Afriganzia reclined watching TV. We chatted some and our conversation turned to her getting her own case with DSS.

"I don't know how to do this shit like Ma. She know what to say and what papers to fill out. If she can get me through it this time,

I can do it on my own." Afriganzia continued: "I mean, yeah, I know what the forms look like and all, but filling them out on my own? Unh-unh, no way."

"You could do that. I know how good you read and write" (she and I had been co-directing a summer literacy program and had been writing a journal back and forth together). She smiled.

"Yeah, but that's different. You seen how long those forms be? You answer one question wrong, and you ain't getting shit. I can't risk that. So I ask Ma for help."

Lucy appeared in the doorway to her bedroom. She looked sternly at her daughter as though she had heard what Afriganzia had been saying: "You need to get your WIC [Women, Infants, Children] appointment scheduled." Afriganzia nodded to Lucy and looked back at the TV. "You also need to tell them at welfare that you're in a crisis situation. You got nowhere to live come the end of this month [Lucy knew she would be moving soon]. They'll give you money up front for moving and the security."

"To me or the landlord?"

"The landlord, but you got to get them to agree to it ahead." Lucy put her hands on her hips.

"Do I got to give them anything else?"

"They'll give you the papers once you ask."

"Should I bring them home?"

"I told you what to say. Just gonna take longer to bring them home."

Even when the actual literacy artifacts of a welfare application are not present, as in this example, individuals can be socialized into and learn about the language tools needed to negotiate them. Afriganzia had already acquired some skills needed to complete welfare application materials. After all, she knew the importance of every blank on the application ("You answer one question wrong, and you ain't getting shit"). She acquired her knowledge of these forms from her exposure to and observation of family members completing these forms time and again. She had seen their trial-and-error processes with these forms enough to know the "risk" she would take as she filled in each blank. Afriganzia expanded upon this already acquired knowledge through her mother's direct instructions: "You need to get your WIC appointment scheduled"; and "You also need to tell them at welfare that you're in a crisis situation." Lucy knew about the welfare guidelines and taught her daughter about the literacy and orality needed to obtain and complete these forms.

Community residents use careful linguistic choices to complete a welfare application—the amount and type of resources they receive depends upon the rhetorical selections they make when completing these forms. Afriganzia asked if she could bring these forms home because she wanted to receive input from Lucy about ways to answer the questions on these applications. Her mother assured her that she already gave her the best linguistic strategy (“I told you what to say”). As we’ll see in later chapters, community members often brought home forms from agencies and institutions in order to complete them collaboratively and in privacy. This short exchange suggests how individuals can add to their linguistic repertoire just by talking about the oral and literate strategies needed to work within an institution. With this brief illustration of language learning in mind, we’re more likely to assume that thought went into what appears to be the simplest of language activities—filling in the blank. This conversation between Lucy and her daughter offers a glance at the language tools community members use to complete the stack of forms like the one Lucy handed over to the caseworker. With this, we are in a better position to appreciate how she negotiated the face-to-face encounter with the social worker.

Deploying the Tools in a Struggle

The transfer of language reveals how community-based language practices are brought to bear in gatekeeping situations in both adopting and adapting ways. To transfer language in gatekeeping encounters, people gather, select, and deploy their rhetorical skills according to the social particulars of the situational context. Here, I assume that language and cultural assumptions are mutually informative and inseparable. That is, our linguistic choices represent our cultural values and our cultural values influence our linguistic choices. In the situational context of most institutional exchanges, the onus to adapt to the rhetorical skills and cultural assumptions of gatekeepers has historically been placed squarely on the shoulders of those seeking services. Many times, the situational context of institutions implies a melting-pot ideology—to receive services or resources, those needing the services and resources must adapt to predominant language norms and cultural values, or at least appear to. However, the social particulars of gatekeeping interactions also allow for, and at times manifest, the pliancy of structuring ideologies that make room for possibility and opportunity where multiple language codes are valued.

The ways in which organizational structures can potentially be enabling or constraining depend greatly upon the actions of institutional agents. In important ways, institutional representatives act as gatekeepers of society's material and ideological resources; their decisions and actions affect community members' opportunities, liberty, intellectual growth, and pursuit of daily necessities. Gatekeepers, particularly those in public institutions (education, criminal justice, health, and welfare) deeply and widely contribute to social (in)equalities in daily language activities. An "institutional gatekeeper . . . has the responsibility to make decisions about the social mobility" of others within the institution and wider society as well (Erickson and Shultz 1982, 4). A social service gatekeeper's position is difficult and often thankless with large caseloads, stark working conditions, and low pay and job status. On top of this, the person in the "gatekeeping interview is supposed to be entirely universalistic in his/her higher gatekeeping judgments, yet s/he cannot be, given the practical circumstances of face-to-face interactions by which the gatekeeping decisions must be made and communicated" (40). The gatekeeper is both "judge" and "advocate" then, and disadvantaged people must transfer their linguistic strategies from their community to the gatekeeping encounters.

Language transfer is a socially complicated process that can best be understood when examined in a back-and-forth fashion between community and institutional contexts. For example, we have identified the rhetorical features of dialect which people carry over or change in gatekeeping encounters. Gumperz examined passages of speech where people alternate between two different sets of grammatical rules; he calls this alternation between dialects "code switching" (Gumperz 1983a, 59), and this alternation generally influences the meaning inferred from the statements. Given research on the features of Black English (Smitherman 1977; Labov 1969), we can easily identify the transfer of it to situations where White English is the prestige dialect. A wide analytical framework for linguistic transfer allows us to consider the variations of language used as people tack back and forth between community and institutional contexts as well as the political and ideological implications of doing so. Turning to the exchange that opened this chapter, let me characterize the ways Lucy transferred language practices and the ways in which this transfer couched a struggle, even as it appears to reproduce the structuring ideology that colors the caseworker's language.

Lucy used both Black and White talk in this exchange. Gumperz would call this a diglossic phenomenon, where “distinct [linguistic] varieties are employed in certain settings” (1983a, 60). This diglossic exchange is historically linked to the “social pattern in early Black America where status—and even survival as a freeman—depended to a great extent on competence in White English. White America has insisted on White English as the price of admission into its economic and social mainstream” (Smitherman 1977, 12–3). The features of Black English and White English differ enough on a structural level to make their use easily identifiable. Lucy started the interaction by selecting and deploying White talk, “I came in last week and got a list of all the papers I need to fill out.” (Note that Lucy had gathered beforehand the written linguistic tools, the applications, she would need to transfer language in this oral gatekeeping encounter.) And when the caseworker asked for the birth certificate, Lucy continued, “it was right there on the table too. I was just so busy this morning.” Lucy spoke White English by including a tense indicator in her verb “came,” where in Black English she would “rely on the context of the immediate sentence to indicate time” (Smitherman 1977, 26). She spoke White English in the second sentence by using a form of “to be”—in Black English, she would drop the verb altogether, or use “I’s.” Lucy code-switched to White English, perhaps to make a favorable impression, or because she hoped to be more persuasive to the gatekeeper. She deployed her rhetorical skills in White English up until the point where the caseworker smirked.

Lucy then code-switched to Black English with “I been having her on my case though.” Here, Lucy challenged the caseworker by indexing common knowledge they both shared: Lucy had a large file and a long history with DSS. The challenge was subtle, but the caseworker knew what Lucy is after. “Been having,” in Black semantics suggest a habitual behavior taking place over a period of time (Smitherman 1977, 22). Lucy was asking the caseworker to refer to the copy DSS already possessed. The worker’s reply, “We only have this file here. The bigger one is on the other side of the building,” indexed an understanding they both shared. The worker was under no obligation to get the certificate, even though she knew the certificate was on file. While Lucy’s transfer of language was understood, it appears not to have potency, because after all, the worker made Lucy return home again in the snow. At least, an initial analysis of the rhetorical features of transfer leads us to this conclusion.

But our analysis of transfer must include an assessment of the ideological undercurrents in Lucy's statement "get me every time." On one level, Lucy cleverly placated a caseworker with this statement, and on another level, Lucy warded off this worker's exertion of influence. Sociolinguists have characterized the logic of the verb structure of Black English in which both the third person singular and plural forms of conjugated verbs drop the "s" (Labov 1969; Mitchell-Kernan 1972). Thus, the verb "get" in Lucy's statement had an ambiguous subject that could be *she*, *it* or *they*. From the transcript, the caseworker's response to Lucy's statement ("that's all you're missing too") indicates that the worker apparently understood the subject was "it," referring to Lucy's own forgetfulness.

But when Lucy said "get me every time," she also transferred one of the most important vernacular strategies of her cultural ideology: signification. Signifying is one of many complex rhetorical (Gates 1988) and linguistic tools of Blacks (Smitherman 1977; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Kochman 1970; Abrahams 1974; Baugh 1983), where the speaker says something that has at least two meanings. One meaning is taken literally by people who stand outside Black cultural ideology; the other meaning typically includes a value judgment or political critique and is directed to any hearer familiar with Black culture. Thus, to me, the pronoun "they" was the subject of the sentence "get me every time;" and this pronoun referred to gatekeepers (Erickson and Shultz 1982; Shoemaker 1992). Lucy signified to me that she was in the process of yet another gatekeeper's rigid application of a social structure; at the same time, to the caseworker, Lucy seemed to be accepting responsibility for the missing document. Signifying, then, is one rhetorical skill that allows a person to simultaneously consent to an assertion of power and signal a counterhegemonic assumption as well. We begin to amass more evidence that "the public representations of claims by subordinate groups, *even in situations of conflict*, nearly always have a strategic or ideological dimension that influences the forms they take" (Scott 1990, 92). Thus, transfer includes both the rhetorical skills and cultural assumptions individuals gather, select, and deploy, given the social particulars of an encounter.

Lucy's linguistic transfer paints in broad relief the gatekeeper's behaviors as being much more constraining than necessary. The caseworker's gestures and language show us how even the smallest of our contextualization cues (a smirk) and utterances can be interpreted as unnecessarily dismissive, harsh, and finally unyielding. In encounters

like this, we see a caseworker, perhaps unintentionally, undermining the democratic philosophy inherent in her position—she is a public servant, a social worker, after all. Even with this characterization of community-based language abilities and cultural assumptions transferred in interactions, we must still examine the efficacy of these tools and struggles from the perspective of those in the community. If we don't, we risk underestimating the effects of institutional influences on the daily living and language of these inner city residents.

Evaluating the Tools

When individuals assess their language skills after their interactions with institutional representatives, they display politically savvy metacommunicative interpretations of language used in gatekeeping encounters. Metacommunication, or "statements that report, describe, interpret, and evaluate communicative acts and processes," index many types of social knowledge (Briggs 1986, 2). Briggs, a sociolinguist who studied a Mexicano community in New Mexico, describes how children in this community acquire and learn "a set of metacommunicative skills relating to the transference/transformation of speech in a manner that will be deemed appropriate in a broad range of social settings" (76). These Mexicanos' metacommunicative skills differ from those skills interviewers typically bring with them from their culture, which means that adjustments in linguistic techniques have to be made by both the interviewer and the respondent. In order to facilitate the anthropological interview, Briggs and the participants together honed their language skills in meta-analyses of communicative acts appropriate for their respective cultures.

In another anthropological study that features metacommunication, Keith Basso reveals the metalinguistic knowledge indexed by Apache caricatures of the mannerisms and language of Whites; on a metacommunicative level, these jokes reveal "an ongoing process of change in which the conceptions of 'the Whiteman' . . . are being assessed and reassessed, formulated and reformulated, modified and modified again" (80). Rather than simply mocking the Whiteman's culture and language use, these jokes serve as social commentary and cultural critique of Whiteman's ways.

Alongside Briggs and Basso, I'm interested in providing another location for the study of metacommunication. Inner city residents develop an intricate and continually evolving metacommunicative knowledge regarding the language strategies they use to negotiate,

subvert, and question what they see as oppressive behavior. This metacommunication often centered on the paradoxes involved in linguistic integration. Du Bois describes one such paradox, the double consciousness of Blacks:

Born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world, . . . one ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals. (1990, 8)

Integration into the language and social norms of wider society during interactions affects the ways in which these community members construct their possibilities, their struggle, their tools and their identities. “Language is always spoken (and written for that matter) out of a particular *social identity* (or *social role*), an identity that is a composite of words, actions, and (implied) beliefs, values, and attitudes” (Cook-Gumperz 1993, 140). Unless we view integration from the perspective of those pressured to adapt, we risk underestimating the linguistic means and metacommunicative knowledge they use to resist, navigate, and challenge what they view to be onerous behavior by institutional agents.

For instance, some may still question the point of Lucy’s resistance and the extent to which it reduced this caseworker’s stonewalling. Clearly, Lucy’s opposition did not make the worker refer to the form that would have facilitated Lucy’s application process; again, the caseworker unflinchingly applied an overarching bureaucratic structure in the face of Lucy’s needs. However, if our level of inquiry stops here, we will miss what happened during that interaction and then back at her home that evening. We’ll hand over our assumption of agency and counterhegemonic ideology to what at first glance does indeed seem to be an example of Lucy’s overly determined situation. If we want to measure the ground gained by a challenge like Lucy’s, we need to do so from her point of view saturated in her own community-based hidden ideology. From Lucy’s perspective, when the representative smirks, her expression revealed a disrespectful assumption. Lucy read this paralinguistic gesture as a sign of the caseworker’s apathy to the difficulties of Lucy’s life. Lucy made an overt challenge to the woman by pointing out that the document could be found in her main file. Then she signified to me. Taken together, these all mitigate to

some extent the indignity of the caseworker's indifference. Simply stated, by signifying to me and resisting the caseworker, Lucy saved face in front of us (Goffman 1967, 1981). She lessens the disparagement of the caseworker's disrespect by maintaining her own self-respect and my respect for her.

When Lucy went home, she described her encounter to a kitchen full of siblings. Over the course of the fifteen-minute conversation that ensued, Lucy's niece, daughter, and sister volunteered alternate language strategies that Lucy could have used.

Her 16 year-old niece said, "I would have got all over her . . . ooh, she would have heard from me."

"You do that and you ain't never gonna get no help from none of them. They'll see you coming, know you gonna get in their face, and say, 'Sorry, none for you,'" Lucy's thirty-five year-old sister rejoined. "'Sides, that just makes you look like you think the system owes you. You want them to think that about you?"

"I don't care what they think."

"Well you will care when your ass got kids to feed." She looked at Lucy, "I would have talked to her superior. You know, asked her real nice 'May I speak to your superior.'"

Lucy curled her lip at her sister: "I ain't gonna be their 'uppity nigger.'" Her sister shrugged to admit Lucy's point. Finally, Lucy's eldest daughter suggested that Lucy could have told the caseworker a hard-luck story. Lucy's sister added, "They got so many people telling them their mother died, or their baby sick, or the buses weren't running. They ain't hearing it anymore."

In the end, Lucy maintained that all that effort wasn't worth the trouble, that her daughter would have to bring in her own birth certificate. As they listed and critiqued these linguistic strategies, they displayed metacommunicative knowledge that was politically strategic. They weighed each strategy to determine the extent to which it might actually, on the one hand, motivate the caseworker to act more as a facilitator and less as a bureaucrat, and, on the other hand, obviate the possible negative stereotypes caseworkers may hold. The struggle here is both material and ideological, then, and is matched with language tools that assess the political factors contributing to the gatekeeping encounter. Note too, the competing subversive ideologies between generations. The older generation held that language is most useful and valuable when its subtlety persuades bureaucrats to open up

opportunity and cut them some slack; but at the same time, the language strategy would lose both its efficacy and value if it ended up supporting caseworkers' stereotypes ("I ain't gonna' be their 'uppity nigger.' "). For the younger generation, though, the subversive ideology borders more on separatism than negotiation ("I don't care what they think"). These competing, counterhegemonic ideologies between generation and gender we will see exemplified further in later chapters.

Still, some will describe Lucy's signifying and code-switching as nothing more than coping mechanisms. Choosing to see this interaction in isolation, they will say resistance only counts when it is framed in overt, sweeping political terms and social upheavals. However, James Scott reminds us that thousands of such "'petty' acts of resistance have dramatic economical and political effects" (1985, 192). Many times interactions like the one that opened this chapter were recounted in kitchens, in living rooms, and on front stoops. Here, people clarified, agreed with, suggested other, sympathized with, even, at times, applauded the vernacular methods of striving used with gatekeepers. From these micro-interactions, we see just where "counterhegemonic discourse is elaborated," and where "infrapolitics may be thought of as the . . . foundational form of politics" (Scott 1990, 201). These minute political struggles taking place daily in the language between these individuals and institutional workers, as well as the discussions they generate "in the 'hood," are the building blocks for the more "elaborate institutionalized political action that could not exist without [them]" (201). Lucy, by preserving her own dignity in light of this worker's disrespect, walked away from the welfare office with some of her own status intact, and this struggle, then, became grist for the resistance and meta-analysis mill at home—another example of the type of language tools to be used in the struggle. We must remind ourselves that grand-scale political struggles take root in these hidden language strategies.

The ways in which community residents reflect on their talk and interactions, and inscribe ideological import to specific linguistic and paralinguistic features, can be terribly instructive for gatekeepers. We can see how our actions become constructed in ways we may not have intended. We understand how we all too often appear onerous and oppressive to the people whom we strive to serve in our positions as institutional representatives. In other words, their metacommunicative tools reflect our social and political actions back to us, and with these in mind, we can begin to reflect on our own language strategies. These inner city residents have a lot to teach us about using language to undermine stereotypes and open up the promise always present in public institutions.

Conclusion

This three-pronged analysis, which considers language learned, deployed, and revamped, builds on previous studies pertaining to African Americans' literacy and discourse. This study elaborates on African-American communicative competence and adaptive strategies in the face of long-standing social deterrents to their advancement. Researchers in anthropology, education, and sociolinguistics challenged ethnocentric deficit theories: Hannerz (1970) and Stack (1977) described the logic and complexity of African Americans' social and cultural practices; Labov (1969) and Smitherman (1977) revealed the internal coherence and sophistication of Black English; and Heath (1983) challenged the artificial dichotomy between "oral" and "literate" cultural practices with her comprehensive ethnography *Ways with Words*. The work of Labov, Smitherman, and Heath has proven especially informative for any analysis of the "communicative competence" of Blacks. Hymes defined communicative competence as the acquisition of the abilities to "produce, understand, and discriminate any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language," as well as to discern when and with whom to use this grammatical knowledge (1974, 75). Expanding our view of the linguistic and literate competencies of African Americans, I relate these individuals' language tools across contexts to their daily burdens of working with the legal system, finding better housing, gaining entrance into college, and getting off welfare.

In other words, I reveal the political significance of African Americans' everyday communicative competence. In doing so, we can understand how their communicative competence gives voice to the material and ideological struggles taking place in daily interactions with the wider society. The counterhegemonic principles imbued in ever-developing communicative aptitudes provide a cornerstone for critical theory: we can begin to appreciate the strategies and attitudes of individuals who neither wholly comply, nor wholly resist, in their daily dialogic power relations with institutional agents. In the remaining chapters, I strive to detail a theory of hegemony that honors the critical consciousness of individuals in this community as well as depicts the multifaceted means by which they both enact and challenge structuring ideologies.