Proverbs, Naming and Other Forms of Veiled Speech

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Abstract

How should one studies formulations that belong to oral tradition, but that emerge directly from ordinary discourse, such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, or message-names attributed to people? How can they be studied as folklore data, and as practices that make sense socially too? The first-generation of French ethnographers were aware of language issues, under the influence of Marcel Mauss. The ethnolinguistic perspective proposed by Geneviève Calame-Griaule in the 1960's encouraged scholars to pay even closer attention to speech, particularly in the oral tradition, as well as its uses and effects on social life. This chapter contributes to this cross-disciplinary approach, with a study of veiled speech and unspoken in Africa. Beginning with an investigation of proverbial speech, it proceeds to look at the naming process, and in particular the use of names as indirect messages. In the African context, when the power and dangers of speech are taken into consideration by people, identifiable discursive strategies reveal, not only meaning, but also social relationships. By paying attention to indirectness and other uses of implicit information in ordinary communication, the aim of this chapter is to refine the principles and tools of a pragmatic approach to oral traditions and language practices for both anthropologists and folklorists.

About the author

Cécile Leguy is professor of anthropology at the *Université Sorbonne Nouvelle*, Paris (France). Her research explores implicit information in oral communication, following apragmatic approach. The use of proverbs, which are ubiquitous in her field context (Mali and Burkina Faso), has led her to investigate discursive strategies related to the social issues they reveal. Her current research is oriented towards anthroponyms and their use in the communication process. Co-editor of the journal *Cahiers de littérature orale*, Cécile Leguy has notably published *Le proverbe chez les Bwa du Mali. Parole africaine en situation dénonciation*, Paris, Karthala (2001) and, with Sandra Bornand, *Anthropologie des pratiques langagières*, Paris, Armand Colin (2013). She has also edited, in collaboration with Brunhilde Biebuyck and Sandra Bornand, *Pratiques d'enquête*, *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* n° 63/64 (2009) and, with Sophie Chave-Dartoen and Denis Monnerie, *Nomination et organisation sociale*, Paris, Armand Colin (2012).

<1>Introduction

How should one study formulations that belong to oral tradition, but that emerge directly from ordinary discourse, such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and message-names attributed to people? How should they be studied as folklore data, and as practices that make sense socially too? In France, linguistics and anthropology have developed independently of each other. First-generation ethnographers were, however, aware of language issues, under the influence of Marcel Mauss, who can be considered a trailblazer for his approach to language as a social phenomenon. Then, with the publication of *Words and the Dogon World* (*Ethnologie et langage*) (1965/1986), Geneviève Calame-Griaule founded French ethnolinguistics as an autonomous scientific discipline, encouraging scholars to pay close attention to speech, particularly in the oral tradition, as well as its uses and effects on social life. The present paper applies this cross-disciplinary approach to a study of veiled and unspoken communication in Africa. By paying attention to indirectness and other uses of implicit information in ordinary communication, its aim is to refine the principles and tools of a pragmatic approach to oral traditions and language practices for both anthropologists and folklorists.[2]

First, I will briefly set out the foundations of the French anthropological approach to language practices, starting with the Mauss's seminal work, then look at the turning point in the 1960s with Calame-Griaule's work and ethnolinguistics as a new discipline. Then, I will present the terms of proverbial speech, and seek to show how the study of ordinary communication leads us to better understand social relationships. Finally, drawing from research on naming, I will show the power that implicit words can have, and conclude by demonstrating the necessity of a pragmatic approach, paying close attention to the "unmentionable".

<1>The basis for a pragmatic approach to oral tradition in French anthropology

Marcel Mauss is an important reference point for French anthropologists on a great many topics. He introduced social anthropology in France, and also wrote many essays on various topics with keen intuition. His successors continued to reflect on them and develop them further. However, from the point of view of linguistic anthropology, when he broached "the prayer", the subject of a thesis he never completed but one part of which was published in 1909, he developed an approach that can be considered "pragmatic" (Leguy 2013). Unfortunately, this approach was ignored for a long time after him. With hindsight, we can see that he was indeed a pioneer. In fact, what interests Mauss is not only the place of prayer as an oral rite in all the religions of the world, but also its effectiveness and its role as an action:

> In the first place, every prayer is an act. It is not just dreaming about a myth or simple speculation on dogma, but it always implies an effort, an expenditure of physical and moral energy in order to produce certain results. (Mauss 2003: 54)

However, this interest in what we might call the pragmatic aspect of speaking was consistent with a concept of language that was dominant at the turn of the 20th century. At the same time, Malinowski – whom Mauss read fervently – exposed his own ideas about language[3] (1916), later developed in *Coral Gardens* (1935). He perceived language as both an action and a system, but the concept was somewhat ignored before being rediscovered. The period from the late 19th and early 20th centuries is indeed rich in reflections on language as action, notably in France where approaches emerged that would lead to the theory of enunciation, mainly represented by Benveniste (1971). Mauss, following in this tradition, is considered by Nerlich and Clarke (1999: 279) to be representative of the "proto-pragmatic" approach to social anthropology:

> The theory of enunciation, being originally rather psychological in nature, was however counterbalanced and also influenced by a more sociological theory of language which included a theory of speech acts and a theory of conversation. The main proponents of this approach were Frédéric Paulhan (1856—1931), Gabriel

Tarde (1842—1904) and Marcel Mauss (1872—1950), the first an individual psychologist, the second a social psychologist, the third a social anthropologist.

So Nerlich and Clarke (1999; 1996), laying out the basis of the modern pragmatic approach, present Mauss as a pioneer in recognizing the importance of speech acts (1996: 265ff), which was only truly established in the second half of the 20th century. As Nerlich and Clarke state, "Tarde's work as well as Mauss's prefigure microsociology and the ethnography of speaking" (1996: 280).

Mauss's interest in social facts leads him to an approach to language phenomena as language facts.[4] He encourages his students to start from what is concrete, from observation. But for Mauss, speech acts are not only to be observed in their details like others social facts, they also provide ways to gain access to reality. In this respect, Mauss is also interested in investigating the meaning of what is unspoken (2007: 158).

In France, the 1950s and 1960s were dominated by structuralist theories. In these approaches, the context-in-itself is not a priority, even though Lévi-Strauss takes into consideration the ethnographic context in his analysis of myths.[5] This period is not really favorable towards a "language as used in social life" approach. In his well-known chapter, "The Sorcerer and His Magic" (1963: 167-185), Lévi-Strauss proposes a sensitive approach to the effects that words can have on people. He is, however, more particularly interested in the psychology of persuasion and manipulation. In another chapter, he discusses the psychological manipulation performed in a song to facilitate difficult childbirth, viewing this phenomenon, as the title makes clear, as "the effectiveness of symbols" (1963: 186-205). For Lévi-Strauss, the shaman's power resides more in the collective faith in this power than in his use of language.

Calame-Griaule's landmark book about speech among the Dogon people (1965/1986) opens a new avenue in French research by focusing on the use of language (cf. Buggenhagen 2006). Calame-Griaule participated for the first time in a field study in 1946 alongside her father, Marcel Griaule, the year that he met the old blind hunter Ogotemmêli (Griaule 1965). Like a

lot of anthropologists of that time, Griaule was interested in "mythical speech" or cosmology, about which the anthropologist, through inquiry, can identify a system. Calame-Griaule, on the other hand, is more interested in ordinary speech, meaning the everyday use of language (see her preface to the 2009 French edition, p. iv).

The publication of *Words and the Dogon World* established a new approach, one might even say a new paradigm, to linguistic anthropological research in France. Just as Duranti (2003) points out that a new paradigm was established in America in the 1960s, following the work of Dell Hymes,[6] in the same way, a complete reorientation was necessary following Calame-Griaule's research in France. Indeed, Calame-Griaule and Hymes have much in common. Hymes was aware of Calame-Griaule's work, referring to it as "pioneering". In the preface to the English translation (1986), he draws links between her work with the Dogon and the methods of "the ethnography of speaking" that he was promoting himself. Hymes presents Calame-Griaule's book as "the first and perhaps still fullest ethnography of speaking" (1986: vi) insofar as it offers a complete ethnography of speaking carried out in specific contexts. Few studies, indeed, express such attention to detail and such sharpness in understanding different communicative practices.[7]

Duranti notes that the work of Hymes and the ethnographers of speaking led to a radical change in researchers' approach towards speech events; "the study of language use across speakers and activities" (2003: 329) became central. What counts here is the emphasis on the study of speech events in situation, in relation to the socio-cultural context in which they take effect. This emphasis on context is also found in Calame-Griaule's work, distinguishing it from other studies of that time. While retaining some analytical tools that seem relevant to her from structural analysis (Calame-Griaule was not radically opposed to structuralism), she was able to propose a new way of doing anthropology from the early 1960s which, in fact, represents a paradigm shift in several respects:

- First, in dealing with the notion of speech among the Dogon, she highlights a phenomenological approach close to the emic perspective advocated by Olivier de Sardan (1998): she started listening to the way people speak in their daily lives, thereby taking into account speakers' concepts and their ways of speaking. She was not only interested in "everyday talk" (*la parole vécue*), she also sought to understand indigenous concepts.

- In her research on verbal art, she focuses on performance (especially in her work among the Tuareg and Isawaghen in Niger beginning in 1967). By advocating an "ethno-linguistic approach of African oral literature" (1970), she stresses the importance of accounting for everything that surrounds the utterance of poetic words, of the larger context of the performance event. She encourages scholars to seek out enunciation rules regarding time, place and participants with respect to the genre studied.

- She deplored the fact that France had fallen behind in taking into account "the heterogeneity of performances" (1977: 12, footnote 1). If the analytical framework she proposes in the introduction to this book seems rather static, she nonetheless pays great attention to the event and to the actor, especially in her chapter on "narrative gestures" published in the same book (303—59). In her very innovative – and too often ignored – work on gestures of storytellers, she pays close attention to individuals, for example by emphasizing the differences in the use of the gestures she observed. A young nobleman, she tells us, is expected to act with a certain restraint whereas blacksmiths and storytellers of servile origin are much freer in their actions and use of words. Thus, the study of gestures leads to an understanding of the social issues of speech. In the same way, more specific attention to the context of a performed tale allows for improved understanding of the issues between people of different social statuses and of power relations.

- A conception of speaking of an oral society like the Dogon led Calame-Griaule to develop an interest in the power of speech, both in its embodiment and by the inclusion of its power

and independence. For the researcher, this implies close attention to ways of managing everyday talk. Calame-Griaule dedicated a chapter in *Words and the Dogon World* to "monitoring speech"[8] (1986: 296—338), which has inspired many scholars. It concerns representations of good speech, seen by the Dogon as constructive and lifegiving, and of bad speech, such as insults, which have negative consequences and that one must learn not to use. "Monitoring speech" involves first and foremost acquiring some mastery of speech. The first step is to not produce bad speech unintentionally. In that sense, special attention is paid to women, who the Dogon consider as being more sensitive and capable of being overtaken by uncontrolled words.

Speech, as experienced by the Dogon and more widely in West Africa, is a power that one learns to master, especially in the use of metaphors and euphemisms. This aspect of language is valued in many societies all over the world. Calame-Griaule teaches us to understand it in its totality. In reality, although her monograph focuses on a local context it is of much more general interest, because it raises questions about the ways in which all cultures manage this creative and unpredictable dimension of language.

<1>Proverbs and other forms of veiled speech

How can we understand ordinary communication strategies, when they consist of speaking in poetical forms? And how can we study verbal art as ordinary speech? In West Africa where I do my fieldwork – principally among the Bwa people of Mali and Burkina Faso – as in most regions of Africa, proverbs are highly valued, and are not only used by the elders. In general, people like to express their opinion or give advice without being explicit. Proverbs, the sayings of the ancestors, make use of implicit information and metaphors. Moreover, this emphasis on veiled speech requires harnessing language as a strategy to regulate social relationships in way that is no less effective for being inexplicit.[9] Proverbs are interesting to anthropologists, then, not only as aspects of folklore expressing a given cultural context, but

also in the way they reveal social issues that may be difficult to grasp because they are not directly expressed. However, even though it became clear from the 1960s onwards that proverbs should be studied in relation to the context in which they are spoken,[10] few researchers have actually taken up this challenge, as Mieder (1997: 19-20) remarks:

> Today it has almost become a cliché to point out that proverbs must be studied in context, but it took a long time for anthropologically oriented proverb collectors to go beyond mere texts and look at the use and function of the proverbial materials in actual speech acts. (...) We clearly need other studies of this type.

In my own fieldwork, I have always given priority to collecting speech events in natural contexts, whether proverbs or other speech genres. Practicing this method of observation and collection is not only an attempt to understand a word in its context (in the broadest sense) but also to better understand the proverb itself, or any other word for that matter. It also, and perhaps above all, requires grasping what is at stake in communication, in order to access the meaning of the situation itself. Paulhan (2008) demonstrates this in a pertinent description of his own Malagash language learning, including the challenge of using proverbs wisely and in a way that would be understood.[11]

Many Bwa people are indeed reluctant to employ any word that might be understood as abusive, insulting, or even simply critical. Like the Dogon, they identify such language with "bad words" (*dɛmu'ue*) as opposed to "good words" (*dɛmu tetia*). At the same time, everyone intends to be understood. For the anthropologist, paying attention to ways of speaking is a means whereby some understanding can be achieved: not only of the ways people speak in a given context, but also of the means for regulating social relations and the hidden violence that animates them (Abu-Lughod 1986; Casajus 2000; Fabian 1990; Yankah 1989, 1995).[12] As an observer, the aim is thus to consider what is implied behind ways of speaking, the social games people play, and their scope for action in social reality.

Undertaking research on proverbs, then, involves studying ordinary speech. Data collecting methods are different from those used when studying oral literature, where narrative and

poetic genres are presented as extraordinary forms of speech, often introduced with designated formulas. The same cannot be said of proverbs: the best way to hear them is to listen to everyday conversations, although admittedly even in ordinary speech they do stand out because of their form, their rhythm and the emphasis which is sometimes placed on them.

The word for proverb is *wawe* in Bomu, the Bwa language.[13] The same word refers to the riddle, a word game practiced mostly by children and young people during festive evenings in the form of question-and-answer competitions. This dual designation is found in other African languages such as Zande (Evans-Pritchard 1956).[14] In fact, the Bomu word *wawe* seems to qualify a rhetorical process more than a speech genre. In both proverbs and riddles, something is unspoken and must therefore be guessed by the listener. The same thought process is triggered by both speech acts, even though they cannot be confused in practice. To use a proverb rather than another figure of speech is to encourage the listener to "guess" what needs to be heard.

Whatever the social context, no one can afford to say something carelessly. This is arguably even more true in a society where solidarity and reciprocity are the ideal goal, not to say imposed. The proverb is often expressed as a criticism or a comment, when propriety calls for someone to be understood without speaking too explicitly. Thus, this type of speech can be observed and studied as an indicator of meaning: in other words, if a proverb or another form of veiled speech is ventured, it is because there is something left for the listener to decipher. And, of course, for the anthropologist as well.

However, using a proverb means taking the risk of not being immediately understood. Speakers must accept this margin that gives listeners the freedom to misunderstand (Siran 1987; 1993 about proverbs among the Vute (Cameroon)). When a proverb is spoken, the speaker hands over interpretation to the listener. Indeed it is the listener who provides the

answer to the riddle (and riddles, like proverbs, can have several possible answers). In this way, the one who hears a proverb is actively involved in the construction of its meaning.

To perform a proverb one must first be somehow empowered to do so. Such power results from one's own social status and also depends upon one's relationship with the addressee (Leguy 2000). So a father can afford to make disapproving comments to his son, but the son cannot respond in the same way, given his inferior status. He can pretend to not understand the criticism of his father, but only to a certain extent. If his father speaks with a simple proverb, it is impossible for the son to pretend to not understand without appearing foolish. It is therefore up to son to take advantage of this language game. Uttering and interpreting a proverb is a matter of knowing one's proper place in life. It also involves preserving it and preparing for future authority as anchored in language use, formulaic expressions and social relationships. Thus, a person who uses polemical proverbs against older people, without having acquired some form of social authority, would be criticized for that, and would be denied certain responsibilities. Indeed, people who do not control their language plant seeds of doubt about their ability to control themselves in general. Conversely, people who do understand when they can respond and when to be silent — what they can afford to say and what they can afford to accept without comment — will slowly gain the trust of their elders and thereby obtain an honorable position in society. The exchange of proverbs in such a case is not only experienced as a pleasure or as a need to share common references, but also as a means of self-construction made possible by language (possible but also risky, as Paulhan 2008 notes). Power management is more important here than comprehension itself, which leads us to challenge Grice's (1975) 'Conversational maxims'[15]. Intelligence and keenness of mind are highly appreciated qualities: mastery of proverbs is a reliable indicator of them.

Thus, in relation to speech where innuendo is favored, we might question whether the use of the proverb, as a well-known formula with a relatively limited meaning, is not a way to

escape from the vagueness of what is left unsaid–the unspoken–while taking care not to say things directly.

In this respect, while the cause of a potential conflict (disagreement, annoyance, misunderstanding etc.) is revealed, the conflict itself is neutralized by the use of veiled speech that makes it possible to point it out without anger and without using bad words. Indeed, social relationships are such that, sooner or later, everyone will need help from others to solve problems. The aged father knows he will need the support of his son if he becomes ill or bedridden for example. Use of innuendo and implicit messages is a way to protect oneself from bad words and to maintain good relations with others, even when one does not agree with them.

<1>Naming and the power of the implicit

Numerous Africanists have written on the topic of naming. In my own fieldwork, I quickly became aware that naming is, quite often, a means of using language that is related to proverbial speech, and that a name given to a child, or sometimes to a dog, entails certain discourse strategies.

Indeed, many names given by the Bwa, as in most other African societies, can commonly be called "message-names" (or "proverbial names" as Obeng (2001: vii) calls them with reference to Akan, in the sense that "Proverbial names criticize, admonish, praise, or explain a course of action by a member or members of the community and are used as strategic alternatives to confrontational discourse"). Often, they are messages expressed to a third person. Thus, the naming of a newborn baby provides a pretext to express something that cannot be said openly: an insult, a reproach, angry words, or even hope or a cry of victory. Thus, investigating names can give the anthropologist access to the unspoken. As with proverbial speech, that which is said in a veiled manner can reveal precisely what cannot be said, and what may be of greatest importance.

Community members are indeed very attentive to the simple utterance of a name, a choice that cannot be changed, and that can be especially bitter or critical. Whatever its virulence, the name will be repeated every time the person is called by it, until the end of their life. In this way, the name-giver has the assurance that the intended message will not fall into oblivion, and that their voice will continue to be heard beyond their own death.

An attempt to interpret implicit meaning as it is practiced in a given context will at times lead us to contradictions between what is said and what is done. Such contradictions may be significant. What especially caught my attention in my fieldwork is the difference between the unspoken messages of names given by a member of the maternal lineage and those given by a member of the paternal lineage (Leguy 2005). Social tensions at weddings are especially common. The strong desires of the young often awaken old disputes. For example, a rivalry between lineages may prohibit a new marriage, or hidden truths about a forgotten servile origin may come to surface. Thus marriage often reveals past conflicts among the older generations. And when this occurs in a context where the value placed on personal freedom, such as one finds among the Bwa, outweighs any objection, only well-crafted discourse strategies can overcome such difficulties. It is generally the grandparents who name the child at its birth. Names related to marriage chosen by a maternal grandparent often express dissatisfaction, or even protest, in the case of a disapproved union. Handing over a daughter to an unknown family or, worse, allowing her to marry a member of a lineage with which a long-time rivalry has been maintained, can make things complicated for the marriages of other family members. It can be heartbreaking, especially for parents who regard the marriage of their daughter as a way of building or renewing an alliance. Many names found in my corpus carry a negative message addressed indirectly by the grandparents to the mother of the child, such as "we failed to restrain a daughter and she is in love with a stranger". This happens more and more frequently as young women leave their village to take up

housekeeping jobs in the city. In such cases, parents might name their granddaughter *Weta*, which means "make your choice". In other words: "you have not listened to our advice, this is the choice you have made and so you are not to complain", addressed to their own daughter.

What finally seems to unfold through the allusions made in these names is the manifest desire to maintain good relations and to maintain the network of alliances. When marrying their daughter, a family aspires to establish new relationships that will bring the promise of future weddings for the family. Interestingly, the paternal grandparents may also seek to pacify and rectify hostile situations with their son in-law when naming the child in order to ensure the strength of their network for future marriages. In the end, the two sides want the same thing while having a different perspective. Criticisms and disappointments are not expressed explicitly; however, in this language game allowing for the allusive naming of newborn babies, deep sentiments and judgments are consciously brought out into the open. One might think that, if the objective is to avoid conflict, it would be best to say nothing. In reality, such veiled speech is not only better received than silence, but with such a strategy, one can also be confident of its reception (Leguy 2011).

Relational or political problems may also inspire name givers, who thus find a way to express their views on decisions or situations that they do not like. This is often what the old women do. They do not necessarily take part in village decisions, but may suggest, with use of an allusive message, that a contentious situation has lasted too long, or that a decision is unwise. They give the speech indirectly knowing that they will be heard. For example, *Sabuse*, "I am tired of that", was named by her grandmother who, because she was unwilling to openly denounce family conflicts, took advantage of the birth of her grand-daughter to open her heart without directly criticizing anyone.

So most names are the expression of an implicit criticism, a sort of violence contained in this language strategy, which is not as innocent as it seems. For anyone who has the power to

name, that one single word, – never forgotten, spoken every day, carrying on after the death of the name giver throughout the named person's life – becomes a real weapon: it recklessly carries the virulence of the name giver's thoughts; it perpetuates suspicion, bitterness and infidelity; it reveals secrets, forcing them into the open. A name has the power of the implicit, namely to make one's voice heard by the concerned person, who is thus ordered to change their behavior or acknowledge wrongdoing. Message-names given to children are like poisoned arrows, the carriers of family secrets, shot at just the right moment, and hitting their targets with precision.[16]

The name stated in the simple settlement of a small familial ceremony without pomp and presented as unimportant event is often the expression of a deliberate strategy. It expresses the intention not only to give meaning (a viewpoint, a disappointment, bitterness, etc.), but also to get the person concerned to act. Such names are indirect messages aimed "against" someone (as the Bwa say); that is, they connote disapproval of actions that disrespect Bwa customs. In this way, the elders hope to be heard by future generations. They will not fail to comment on the name given, to clarify the message and to convey its meaning, transmitting the conventional and critical viewpoint it contains at one and the same time.

The advantage of using this kind of strategy is similar to that found in the use of proverbs, replacing harsh words or critical comments that someone might otherwise make. The target of the proverb is the only one who will feel concerned. However, they cannot complain, for fear of revealing their faults or bad behavior implicitly denounced. As for names, the same act is carried out with nothing more than a few syllables. Indeed, someone chooses a name to express an opinion or dissatisfaction, while allowing tensions to be pacified with implicit words, with kindness and without threatening social cohesion. But it is also a matter of being heard and bringing back into line those who deviate from a certain "standard". Naming is indeed a strategy implemented to communicate ways of thinking and ideas that would not

otherwise necessarily be received. In certain societies, for example the Baatombu of northern Benin, names of dogs are based on proverbs, making the naming a doubly indirect means of communication (Schottman 1993).

On the basis of the Bwa names in the corpus along with whatever could be learned about the context of their first utterance and the identity of the giver, it is often social organization which is really at stake (Leguy 2012). Finally, when someone denounces a misalliance or, conversely, manifests satisfaction with a marriage, is the real message not broader, by virtue of the fact that it recalls and reinforces social norms that are intended to guarantee the sustainability of the group? Similarly, when someone tries to outwit fate by pretending until death that he doesn't care for a child by naming it *Dofio* ("manure pile"), or when someone expresses a desire to have a boy by naming a girl *Mahɛɓo* ("not refused on a whim"), isn't it a way to register the child as belonging to history, by making reference the desire for progeniture? However, the messages carried by such names remain in the domain of the implicit and are not necessarily comprehensible to those who are unaware of the context of their initial utterance. If it is a speech strategy to make one's own conception of social organization heard, only those who are truly concerned may gain access to the message. However, speech is veiled in order to be better understood by those concerned: it is always the intention of the speaker to be heard. Thus every birth brings about anxious expectation in the parents of the baby, as they ask "What name will the elders give the child? What is the message that they intend for us to hear?"

We see that naming, even circumstantial or anecdotal as it may appear in the practice of African message-naming, is never reduced to a simple choice of a word. In a context where the word is viewed as having significant performative value, to be able to state indirectly what cannot be openly spoken is not only proof of speech mastery, but also of kinship management within the family and more broadly, within the field of social relations. Giving names to

children (or dogs) is a bargaining process. Naming acts as a modulator between these two poles of social life that are standards (normative discourse, alliance rules, and classifications) and practices. Naming, which is needed in everyday life and openly transmits allusive, discreetly chosen messages, ultimately fits social relationships into a rather rigid framework. Chosen, spoken, and reiterated, ordinary and circumstantial names therefore have some effectiveness. They are like implicit discourse aimed at adapting speech to actual practices, but also demonstrating their effectiveness as pragmatic "tools"[17] tending to adapt practices to standardized speech (Leguy 2011).

<1>Conclusion

This paper has highlighted a gap in anthropology concerning use of the implicit in speech. Research such as Abu-Lughod's (1986) analysis of Bedouin poetry indicate the usefulness of learning to listen for what is not explicitly stated. A more focused study of the strategic uses that people make of proverbs and naming of children, as well as other tropes, clearly has much to reveal to anthropologists.

As I have shown, veiled speech is often a vehicle for meaningful messages to be deciphered by the listener. We have seen how different motivations for choosing a child's name can often reveal social and family conflicts and disagreements. However, one should not be too quick to infer the presence of recurring relationship problems from the frequency of such names in an attempt to draw a statistical conclusion: names are also selected for the pleasure obtained by their use. People enjoy commenting on their names and using them to recall important moments in their family history. However, the "veil" can be understood as being an indicator of meaning, of the fact that there is something there to "unveil"; it is that which hides by revealing. When someone attributes a message-name, it is because they have something to say. When a proverb is performed, something important is communicated. Speech acts are undertaken not only for the purpose of making poetry even though this function is also

important. For those who use such strategies, they do so in order to be heard and to ensure that their words have an impact on their audience.

This type of speech is significantly effective. It is commonly held that a well-crafted message is more powerful than loosely spoken words. This is especially true for contexts in which a direct criticism, for example, or failure to create a proverbial veil, may have the consequence of being ignored. Such language practices are a way of acting efficiently in the world and towards others.[18] Veiled speech is used by those who are in a position of authority over the others, specifically the elders, and also by those who find themselves in an unfavorable situation, as a means of making themselves heard (Yacine-Titouth 2001).

When someone performs a proverb to express a complaint; when an elder gives a name to a child to drive home his or her opinion; when someone responds to criticism by giving a different name to the same child or a younger one (or a dog), clearly something more than a simple communication game is taking place. Indeed, naming is a particularly effective communication strategy, and the use of the implicit is an indicator of *what matters* in a given context. In this sense, the anthropologist is interested in the importance attached to it, not just because of an interest in speech and communication, but also in the hope of finding elements that will make it possible to untangle the complexities of social life.[19] This paper has sought to show how the proverb – and more generally the use of the implicit in any genre of speech – leads us, as anthropologists, to be more attentive to the diversity of communication strategies: how social relationships are constructed and deconstructed, how disputes are settled, and how the contingencies of daily life are managed. These questions seem even more crucial in an African context where, even in rural areas, a form of "individualism" is increasingly imposed (Marie 1997; Dacher 2005).

This approach should be of particular interest to those who study power relations. Masquelier (2000: 414) states with respect to works promoting this methodology:[20] "Several recent

studies confirm that it is vain to try to understand the dynamics of power if we continue to ignore the place that language activity holds in its various forms".[21] One can only regret the lack of interest in the analysis of language practices, including literary practices, found in the works of those conducting investigations in political anthropology.[22] Whatever the topics of their investigations, anthropologists stand to benefit not only from paying careful attention to word choice, as Mauss and Malinowski encourage us to do, but also to be attentive to language practices and communication strategies based on observed social situations.

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Notes :

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[2] This goal is shared by my colleagues at Lacito, a research laboratory affiliated to the French National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris, and is especially developed in our seminar series on metaphor. It has also been promoted in a book co-authored with Sandra Bornand, *Anthropologie des pratiques langagières* (Paris: Armand Colin (collection U), 2013), which is an attempt to synthesize European and American linguistic anthropology for the first time.

[3] As far back as 1910, Malinowski explains his concept of language in a note in Polish about Frazer's "The Golden Bough" (see Thornton and Skalnik, 1993: 117-122).

[4] I use the term "fact" to insist on the factual or empirical existence of a linguistic phenomenon.

[5] Lévi-Strauss, whose research covers the entire American continent, presents myths as being much more determined by each other than by their enunciation context. However, he does not completely neglect the socio-cultural context. Indeed, he even gives it some importance and considers it interesting insofar as the dialogue with the socio-cultural context alone makes it possible to understand the scope of a mytheme. In his analysis, he is thus continually led to study a particular element of social organisation, the symbolism of a particular animal, rite or custom etc. He suggests three methodological guidelines for succeeding in the study of myths, including knowledge of the ethnographic context being the second part of the third guideline (1976: 60-67 "Comparative Religions of Nonliterate Peoples"). So although he completely neglects the enunciation context of oral production, it cannot be said that he neglects the socio-cultural context. However, it is not so much the context that interests him as the functioning of the human spirit in its various manifestations. Moreover, even though the socio-cultural context is indispensable to the analysis of myth, it is not this existing reality that myth retranscribes according to Lévi-Strauss. Rather, myth speculates about possibilities and latent potentiality; it does not pretend to represent reality, but rather to suggest the various possibilities that it offers.

[6] Dell Hymes, along with John Gumperz, initiated a new and influential theory which they initially called 'the ethnography of speaking', and later 'the ethnography of communication' (Hymes 1962 ; Gumperz and Hymes 1964 ; 1972).

[7] We can, however, criticize some aspects of Calame-Griaule 1986, including a forced construction of indigenous concepts, which are, in reality, disparate and fragmentary. This reproach specifically concerns the first part of the book, devoted to the theory and mythology of speech, in line with her father's work. However, the part she devotes to "speech in society" ("la parole vécue" as it is called in the French version), Calame-Griaule looks more closely at the diversity of situations and interlocutors. It is this sizeable part of Calame-Griaule's work that has proven significant and innovative in the field.

[8] The title in the French original is *"Le soin de la parole"*.

[9] For a discussion of the performativity of unmentionables, see Fleming and Lempert (2011).

[10] Particulary since the publication of Arewa and Dundes (1964).

[11] "The Experience of the Proverb", written in 1913, was published for the first time in 1925. Paulhan spent more than twenty years writing this PhD thesis about proverbs but never finished it. About Jean Paulhan, see Syrotinski 1998; Milne 2006.

[12] See also Argenti-Pillen's (2003) research about Sri Lanka.

[13] Bomu (ISO 639-3: bmq), a dialect of Bwamu, is a Gur language.

[14] Zande has no designated term defining the proverb as a traditional saying. The word *'sanza* is wider in meaning and refers to "any remark or action which is intended to be oblique, opaque, ambiguous, any words or gestures which are intended to suggest a meaning other than they have in themselves" (1956: 166).

[15] See also Ochs Keenan (1976) for a discussion about Grice's conversational maxims.

[16] In a similar context, among the Kasina of Burkina Faso the behaviour of young men is often questioned by the elders in the names they give to newborn babies. Since the young men cannot respond directly, not being entitled to name children themselves, they respond instead through the names they give to puppies (Bonvini 1985, 1987, 1988).

[17] See Bloch (2006: 98) who defines names as: "tools used in social interaction, which can be put to ever-new uses".

[18] See for example the texts presented in Furniss & Gunner 1995.

[19] As James Fernandez writes, this is the case even in a context of acculturation where the use of metaphors may have been modified by a change of life and activities. "However men may analyse their experiences within any domain, they inevitably know and understand them best by referring them to other domains for elucidation. It is in that metaphoric cross-referencing of domains, perhaps, that culture is integrated, providing us with the sensation of wholeness. And perhaps the best index of cultural integration or disintegration, or of genuineness or spuriousness in culture for that matter, is the degree to which men can feel the aptness of each other's metaphors." (1986 : 25)

[20] See also Duranti (1994), Bloch (1975), and Paine (1981).

[21] Our translation of the French original.

[22] Anthropology has much to learn from literary studies as Furniss and Gunner (1995: 5) point out: "Oral literature in Africa, as discussed here, is not a discrete and self-contained, inward-looking sphere of human activity but constitutes a field in which the dynamics of the political process and the daily representation of social life are central. Song, poetry, popular representations of kinds, are an integral part of the way in which people in Africa today are commenting upon what is happening to their societies."