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Ideological Language in the Transformation of Identity

Christians who have undergone conversion experiences usually claim that the experience has not only strengthened their religious commitment, it has in addition transformed their lives. The idea that a person may be transformed through using a set of symbols (called an "ideology" here) is not limited to Christianity; many ideologies make similar claims. Using the example of the conversion experience, I argue that ideologies may indeed create a sense of self-transformation in the subject. This sense arises out of the fact that the subject is able to use the ideological language to resolve enduring problems of meaning in his or her life. Such problems are not, however, resolved once and for all; rather, the discourse of informants reveals that self-transformation is an ongoing process wherein ideological language is used to express and come to terms with persisting emotional ambivalence.

IT IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED THAT A PERSON CAN BE CHANGED in significant ways through contact with an organized system of symbols, what I will call an ideology. Psychotherapy, curing rituals, and religious conversions provide ample evidence that aspects of identity may be transformed through interaction with an ideology.[1] Alcoholics become sober, sinners become saints, neurotics are cured of their symptoms, and so on. This article is intended as a contribution to the long-standing debate over how this can happen. How can an ideology transform identity?

I will consider in detail two narratives in which believers describe their conversions to Evangelical Christianity. The narratives were collected as part of a research project on Christian conversion experiences in contemporary American society. A conversion, as most readers are aware, is a religious experience in which believers claim to arrive at a new or revitalized faith in the Christian deity; in addition, stories of conversions in Christianity nearly always contain reference to personal transformation (Snow and Machalek 1983:264). That is, it is generally asserted that the conversion brings with it significant changes in the life of the convert.

Conventionally, the conversion is viewed (both by believers and by students of the conversion) as a historical, observable event which is referred to in the conversion narrative (see, for example, James 1958). It is furthermore assumed that the transformational efficacy of the conversion experience occurs in the original event. However, even assuming no conscious intent by the narrator to deceive, the status of the original conversion as an observable event is problematic.[2] A conversion experience is a combination of observable events and the person's immediate and subsequent reactions to those events. The analyst cannot assume that the events narrated in the conversion story simply happened in the way the narrator claims, in part because much of the story may reflect emotional reactions that have taken shape since the time of conversion. Any analysis based on the assumption that the conversion narrative may be taken to refer unproblematically to a conversion event is seriously flawed.

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A conversion narrative, on the other hand, is an observable event. Unlike the conversion it presumably depicts, the narrative is immediately available as evidence to the researcher. Thus, if one wants to study the conversion experience, one is better off looking first to the conversion narrative, and exercising caution about inferences concerning events the narrative presumably describes. In particular, if the conversion has some efficacy in transforming identity, that efficacy should be sought first of all in the narrative (Staples and Mauss 1987:143).

This article lays the foundation for such an approach. It will be demonstrated that the emotional conflicts which are said by the believer to have been resolved in the original conversion event persist in the present, in the narration of the conversion story. Although this fact could be taken to show that the conversion is in fact not effective in the transformation of identity, much evidence contradicts such an interpretation. In particular, both from the perspective of believers and of outside observers, people often do change their behavior after conversions. Thus, I pursue an alternative interpretation: Change does not occur once and for all, but rather must be constantly re-created. Conflicts do not disappear subsequent to the conversion, but rather come to be approached in a manner that makes their ongoing resolution possible.

In demonstrating this point, I do not concentrate on actual behavioral change but, rather, take believers at their word that they have a sense of being transformed. My goal here is to show how ideological language functions as a resource, which in enabling believers to come to terms with enduring problems of meaning in their lives, brings about the sense of having been transformed. This approach suggests the possibility that behavioral change wrought by ideology is not due to a one-time transformation of some aspect of psychological structure, but is rather the result of an ongoing practice that allows one to act consistently in a certain manner.[3]

In attending to the actual narrating of the conversion story, I draw on techniques developed in what is often referred to as "conversation analysis" (Moerman 1988; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Levinson 1983). Such techniques are invaluable for the analysis of cultural symbols. It should be noted, however, that I am using these methods in pursuit of an end that is quite different from those of conversation analysts per se, who for the most part are interested in investigating the structure of conversation. The result of this is that I run the risk of disappointing two audiences. Those who are accustomed to conducting symbolic analysis without the techniques of conversation analysis will be mystified or annoyed at the attention to detail these techniques require. More seriously, perhaps, conversation analysts may object to my attempt to "pin down" the psychological basis of utterances as I attempt to find evidence of identity and its transformations. To them, I will be woefully oversimplifying the conversation I present.

I am willing to risk making two audiences uncomfortable, however, in order to explore the possibilities of what both groups must certainly regard as a useful goal, the utilization of the powerful techniques of conversation analysis in projects that are ultimately cultural rather than linguistic. As long as conversation analysis is confined to the task of studying conversation, its potential for illuminating social, cultural, and psychological phenomena will remain incompletely developed.

My analysis is based on two interviews with converts which I conducted and recorded on audiotape in 1983. My first subject is a woman I will call Jean, a 35-year-old native English-speaker of Philippine descent. The second subject is a 67-year-old man, a self-labeled "Wasp" whom I will call George. My argument is that in both cases, the central concerns cited by believers as leading up to and constituting the conversion event also manifest themselves in stylistic features of the conversion narratives. Furthermore, these stylistic features provide strong evidence that the emotional ambivalence that presumably animated the original conversion event continues to be present in the narrative itself. This demonstrates that the emotional ambivalence was not resolved once and for all in the original conversion experience, but rather persists in the present. Ideological language—in this case the language of Evangelical Christianity—is therefore not just a

means of reporting a past event, but also a continuing means of articulating and presumably coming to terms with persisting ambivalence.

I turn now to the conversion narratives. The interview that I conducted with Jean took place in her home and lasted for about one hour. I had met her at a church where I was doing participant-observation research, and she had immediately agreed to an interview. My interaction with her prior to the interview had been superficial and had taken place in the midst of larger groups.

Jean's conversion occurred, according to her account, in this way: Shortly after leaving home to attend college, Jean heard a talk given by a Christian who had stressed the importance of "asking Christ into your life." Although she had been raised as a Roman Catholic, this was the first time Jean had heard that this might be considered a necessary part of being a Christian. She says that she regarded the speaker as "foolish," yet she found herself thinking about what he had said often over the next several weeks.

At this time Jean had begun to practice meditation, and had gotten into the habit of meditating under a particular tree on the college campus. One day, while meditating under the tree, Jean thought again of the speech she had heard, and decided to act on the advice she had received, to "ask Christ into her life." She prayed and "nothing happened." Gradually (over a period of several days), however, she began to feel that she was communicating with "the creator." (See Appendix for explanation of transcription symbols.)

Interviewer: um hm (.9) and- (.7) so that (.5) between
thos:e (.8) those two times sitting under the tree (1.1)
|you|
Jean: |um hm|
(5) *Interviewer:* started to feel as though (1.6) not only
that you COULD talk to the creator but that you wer:e
talking to the creator (.4) you-you had some sense of
really commu:nicating with him, (|you|)
Jean: |Yes| I felt like yes: it was possible to
(10) communicate and so: I did my thing about asking Christ
into my life (1.4) and I did (.7) but no::thing (.9) it
was just a slo:w realization that there was a
connection (.9) made ((dec.)) (.8) but that was it
(1.7)
Interviewer: uh huh
(15) *Jean:* that was the only connection (.9) 'h nothing
dramatic ha:ppened of course u:m (1.5) I wasn expecting
anything (1.6) but I had a sense of relief: tha:t
(1.4) that (1.2) u:m I was connected (.4) I felt
connected (.7) some spiritual forc:e (1.6) was |behind
(20) me|
Interviewer: |connected| connected to, |the creator|
Jean: |the creator?|
Interviewer: |uh huh|
Jean: |yes:| some connection (.5) som::e (2.0)
(25) *Interviewer:* so you felt relie:ved (.9) that you were
(.6) |connected|
Jean: |the=right| (.4) one of the reasons I was in (.4)
t-ta transcendental meditation was to: (.5) 'h (1.7)ike
I say (.5) uh communicate with the tree: I wanted to
(30) learn about life (.5) 'h I wanted (.4) to be integrated
inta life (1.5) |I wanted to be|
Interviewer: |um hm|
Jean: (.8) integrated inta just (.6) life itself
((dec))

A striking feature of Jean's description of her conversion is the repeated use of various forms of the words "communicate" and, in particular, "connect." The latter term recurs five times in this section. It is worth noting that pauses at lines 18 and 24 strongly suggest that here Jean is trying to express the idea of connection in other terms, but is unable to do so to her satisfaction, for she returns to "connection." Finally, at line 30, she hits upon an alternative phrasing of this idea, using the word "integrated." "Communication," of course, can also be thought of as a variant on the theme of connection, referring as it does to close and effective interaction.

In light of the importance of "connection" in Jean's description of her conversion experience, it is significant that her discussions of her family are marked by a stress on a terminological family (Burke 1970) related to "disconnection." These passages are, from a rhetorical perspective, the inversion of the ones in which Jean discusses her conversion. Whereas there she placed great stress on her connection to the creator, here she stresses her disconnection from her family (primarily using the words "different" and "detached").

Jean has one sibling, a twin brother. In the following passages, note Jean's repeated stress on forms of the word "different" as she discusses her brother and herself. Note also a recurring parapraxis (slip of the tongue) as she tells the story of how she and her brother converted, simultaneously, to Christianity. Here is Jean's first description of her brother:

Interviewer: So uh so you look ba:ck and you try to
(35) think of an ear:ly memory: or: (2.1) or something and
#you think theres# just not a whole lot there:? huh?
Jean: 'H I s: u:m so:me but its interesting my
brother-(.) and I ha:ve lived in the same house same
environment same parents? 'h and he? has totally
(40) diffrent perspective avwha I do. Fact my |bro|
Interviewer: |huh|
Jean: ther and I are very diff:erent.

Jean goes on to answer my question about early memories, and then returns to the topic of her brother:

Jean: and we're very different. And u:m (1.5) he's
(1.1) I hate to say this I mean he's still: a hippie
(45) I mean |like|
Interviewer: |ha|
Jean: |he still| he has always had longer hair than I
do #at I mean# its down to here (.6) u:m (.9) I've been
more academic oriented (.5)
((here some text is omitted))
(50) U::m (1.1) he's jist diffrent than I am. I'm (.4) the
opp:osite u::m (.7) u:m (.9) I like a lotuv a:ction
(.8) and I
Interviewer: |hm|
Jean: |like| a lot of movement (1.4)
(55) *Interviewer:* uh huh
Jean: an::d (1.4) like I say, were (.) real diffren:t
(.3) I like (.) business (.) I like to wheel and deal
and (1.5)
Interviewer: uh huh (.) |and|
(60) *Jean:* |and| he wouldn't care less: HE'LL
Interviewer: |right|
Jean: | JUST PAY| (pay) retail (.) I would never pay
retail (ha)
Interviewer: |(ha)|
(65) *Jean:* |(ha)| I HAVE TO |(ha)|
Interviewer: |uh huh uh huh| I see
Jean: 'h and actually thats how we (.) an its real

intersting because we did become Christians about the same time (.6) through diffrent diffrenor diffrent
(70) organizations (.7) 'H and we've always known that we were s (.) different. and we, even though we're twins, we've always had separate li, very separate lives. just, you know. and it was only when we became a Christian that we became really tight.

In these few lines of text, Jean explicitly asserts that she is "different" from or "opposite" to her brother a total of eight times (at lines 40, 42, 43, 50, 51, 56, 69, 71), in addition to emphasizing that she and her brother have had "very separate" lives. At line 40 there occurs an example of the other notable feature of Jean's discussion of her brother, parapraxes in which she refers to herself and her brother as a single unit ("when we became a Christian.")[4] I will refer to these parapraxes (following Labov and Fanshel 1977:46) as "deniable communications," for the reason that they are examples of speech acts through which messages can be conveyed without the speaker taking full responsibility for them. There are two more such slips in a period of about one minute while Jean discusses her brother. The first echoes the above formulation: ". . . we became a Christian simultaneously. . . ." In the second case, she refers to herself and her brother as "I" and then corrects the error (line 81):

(75) *Interviewer:* so that then when-when you were growing up do you remember like fighting with your brother er-
Jean: Yeah well yeah (1.5) But I mean you know like I guess iss jist kid's stuff I mean nothing: (.4) dramatic (.4) 'h we were jist (.4) we just sortof knew
(80) we were different (.7) He had his set of friends and I had my set of friends (1.0) I went to = we went to different schoo:ls and I went to a mor:e (1.1) academic
Interviewer: um hm
Jean: (1.2) a college prep (.6) school (.5)
(85) *Interviewer:* |um hm|
Jean: |high school| and he went to a mor:e (.4) nor:mal
Interviewer: um-hm
Jean: (.8) high school
Interviewer: uh huh ((rising tone))

These slips, of course, belie Jean's explicit statements that she and her brother are very different. In fact, the recurrent communication (Labov and Fanshel 1977) that this *difference* is significant is itself an example of the most basic of rhetorical devices: one seeks to convince by repeating. Jean's stress on her difference from her brother, in other words, can be taken as evidence she needs to convince someone of that difference. The passage quoted thus provides evidence of Jean's ambivalence around the issue of her connection or attachment to her brother: although she overtly asserts her separation and distance from him, she uses deniable channels of communication to assert her unity with him.

It is possible that Jean's concern with her degree of separation from her brother is related to the fact that he is her twin. It is a well-established point in the clinical literature that it is not uncommon for twins to manifest conflicts over identity issues (Leonard 1961; Dibble and Cohen 1981; Athanassiou 1986).[5] The theoretical reasoning behind this observation is most easily explained from the standpoint of ego psychology: If one makes the assumption that every infant faces the developmental task of forging a separate self out of an initial state of symbiosis with the mother (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975), then one can see how twins might face a particularly complex version of this task, because the twins may also identify closely with one another.

Although my contact with Jean was insufficient to trace the etiology of her concern with her separation from her brother, the evidence presented here clearly demonstrates that such concern exists. This concern with separation is not limited, however, to Jean's discussion of her relationship with her brother; it can be further documented in Jean's dis-

cussion of her relationship with her parents, where it is couched in terms of detachment and attachment. Again I quote a key section of the interview:

(90) *Interviewer:* can you tell: me anything about (3.1) I-I guess I don't have much sense yet of (1.9) of what your father or mother would-were were like as people or (.) around the hous::e or (1.1) u:m how they came across to you (.5) in this (.4) distant (.3) foggy (ha) |past| ((the last three words are pronounced slowly and dramatically, as if to create a sense of mock melodrama))

(95) *Jean:* |'H| well uh they-uh they I feel very deta-I'll be honest with you I feel very detached (.9) from them

Interviewer: um hm (.9) and m- (.3) maybe you did even then

Jean: yeah I still do

(100) *Interviewer:* uh huh

Jean: 'h a::nd #ackshalaI'll be hones with you# I've always felt guil:ty: (.7) of feeling that deta::chment

Interviewer: (1.4) huh, ((descending tone)) (1.4) uh huh

(105) *Jean:* and I don know why I jist do (.8) I do NOT feel close to them

Interviewer: (1.0) huh, an:d (.6) pretty much never have

Jean: 'h and ah always feel guilty I don't know WHY I

(110) feel guilty about it but I feel guilty about it

Interviewer: (.8) uh huh (.7) and that's kindof a: (2.0) I guess: (1.1) something that's been kindof stable in your life you've never felt close to them and you've always felt like you really kinda should but

(115) *Jean:* 'H yeah and I do:n't and I'm jist very different than they are they're very fa-they u:m (.8) 'h I feel (.5) they-Ith-it's almost like (.5) ((dec.)) they want me to be atta:ched to them (.9) and I'm no:t ((softly)) and I feel guilty because I'm not what they want me to

(120) be ((softly, dropping intonation))

Interviewer: uh huh (.8) u:m yes: wull (ha) this happens a lot with parents ((softly)) (.7) you know, they have expectations

Jean: um hm ((rising tone))

(125) *Interviewer:* 'h u:m

Jean: ((sounds of weeping)) (3.6)

Interviewer: o:kay ((descending tone))

Jean: um hm ((sharply rising tone))

The first comment I must make here concerns my role as interviewer, and the relationship I forge with Jean during the interview. As noted, at line 94 I conclude my question with an ironic tone, evidently in a manner that makes light of Jean's inability to recall her own past. I was surprised to hear this on the tape, for I do not remember doing this intentionally. Therefore, I am in no better position than any other observer to say why the question was posed in this way. However, the nature of my pauses earlier in the question (at lines 90, 91, 93, 94) indicates something I *am* aware of, namely that Jean felt uncomfortable talking about her childhood and I felt uncomfortable asking about it. The long pauses occur as I reformulate the question and fill time because I sense her resistance to answering the question. This would suggest that I concluded the question as I did in order to remove some of the tension from the situation, to take things in a lighter direction. As the overlap indicates, Jean signals her agreement to speak in a transition that was clearly carefully orchestrated to avoid further tension. However, she does not accept

my invitation to reframe the situation in a less serious manner (Goffman 1986). Rather, she plunges ahead in a very emotional manner: the tension is relieved by her decision to talk about what has been troubling her.

This eagerness to proceed is evident at line 101, where Jean breathes in audibly and draws out the appositional "and" in order to assert her right to speak, evidently before she knows precisely what she wants to say (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974:719). In the following section, there are again signs that the interviewer is trying to tone down the emotional content of Jean's speech and that Jean is not willing to do this. I refer in particular to the interchange between lines 107 and 110, when I offer Jean the opportunity to retreat from her confession of guilt to a recapitulation of her feelings of distance from her parents. She ignores my offer and continues on the topic that is relevant to her at that moment, her feelings concerning her relationship with her parents.[6] The form of this interchange clearly testifies to its overwhelming emotional importance to Jean. Of course, the most striking evidence of that importance is the fact that Jean begins to weep, probably at line 118.

It follows that the topics of this section, Jean's detached relationship with her parents and her feelings of guilt about that relationship, are emotionally salient for her. As was the case in her discussion of her brother, her intense feelings center around the topic of separation. Here the primary word used to describe those feelings is detachment. The fact that Jean says she feels guilty about her lack of attachment to her parents can be taken as evidence that she feels substantial ambivalence about the issue of separation from her family.

According to Jean, her conversion was important because it convinced her that she was "connected" to God. Throughout the interview, she refers in various ways to the fact that connections to people, groups, and God are important to her. For example, she breaks down in tears as she relates the story of the time she was excommunicated (another term in the "disconnected" family) from a small and closely knit church she had joined. (The reason for the excommunication was Jean's presumed sexual transgressions.) Jean's discussion of her family, however, makes it clear that connection is not unambiguously a good thing for her, that disconnecting herself from her family is also important. The style of the passages in which Jean discusses her relations with her family reflects in a very concrete way the larger theme of connection/disconnection, for her speech displays strong signs of ambivalence about the degree and nature of her connection to her family. (These signs include hesitations, demonstrated emotion that interferes with speech, overstress, and parapraxes.) Thus, the emotional issue with which Jean says she was dealing in her conversion experience was not resolved by that experience; if it had been, the interview would not show such clear signs of ambivalence around this issue. Rather, "connection" remains an issue Jean feels ambivalent about, especially in regard to her relations to her family. The conversion narrative itself is a way of giving expression to and coming to terms with this ambivalence, above all in the assertion that Jean has resolved this issue through her relationship to God. The ideological language gives Jean a vocabulary for coming to terms with her feelings, but this is an ongoing process, not something that was resolved once and for all in the original conversion experience.

My second subject, whom I will discuss in less detail, was interviewed in circumstances similar to the ones in which I talked to Jean: We had met few times prior to the interview, and our interactions had been brief. Like Jean, George understood me as a researcher from a nearby university who wished to hear people narrate their conversion stories.

In rough outline, the story George told me went like this: George's father, who died when George was 26 years old, was a committed Christian and a firm person. By this I mean he had strong opinions on things and shared them with his son. George emphasizes that he and his father had many disagreements, but insists that they did not fight with one another. Rather, for the most part George tried to bow to his father's wishes, for he admired the older man tremendously. Thus, for example, George had given up Christian-

ity by the time he entered college, but he had never directly confronted his father with this fact.

After college George married his high school sweetheart, but after three children and seven years of marriage he struck up an affair with a coworker. He eventually left home and decided to divorce his wife. The relationship with the coworker also broke up, and thereafter George embarked upon a period in which he dated many different women. However, on a visit to his family, George was shocked when the youngest of his children did not recognize him. He was troubled, and seeing this, his ex-wife recommended he go and speak to a minister.

George did so, and the minister asked him "where he stood with God." George answered that he did not believe in God, to which the minister responded that perhaps he should give that position some thought. George left the pastor's office with a Christian book and, after some days of debating with himself the existence of God, decided to pray to God and ask his forgiveness. Upon doing so he was flooded with a profound feeling of forgiveness; he refers to this as a "road-to-Damascus type experience" (comparing his conversion to the Biblical description of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus).

Having thus been converted to Christianity, George decided that he should put his life in order. He had already proposed to a woman he had been dating, and he decided to go and tell this news to his ex-wife. However, as he stood before her he found that he was physically unable to speak the message he had come to convey, and instead asked her to remarry him. She consented, and they have been married ever since that time.

Because of the prominence in this story of George's inability to speak, I was interested to notice that there are a number of moments in the interview where he has a milder version of the same problem. There are four places where George breaks down as he speaks and is unable for a moment to say what he intends.[7] The first of these occurs as George recalls his father:

George: he uh #he was not a wishy washy man# he was a
(130) (.) determined he was a typical Wasp (.8) he (.9)
believed that he had a pur:pose ((voice begins breaking
here)) (.) in life }he{ taught me a lot of (.6) very
wonderful things that I've later discovered were
(.6) #not original? ((stop voice breaking)) he didn't
(135) SAY they were,# (.) but #you know#
Interviewer: uh huh
George: maybe if we have time later on I'll (.4) }I
can tell you about some of them{
Interviewer: #no go ahead tell me# (.) |tell me one|
(140) *George:* |okay one| of them I':d I'd never forget is
the (.7) the i-is this short thing (1.0) 'h I cannot do
everything but I can do something (.5) I-I (.6) am but
one? (1.4) }but I (am one){ ? ((voice breaking,
weeping)) (1.5)
Interviewer: mm hmm

In all of the following examples, I have classified the situation as a "temporary inability to speak," not because of the presence of any particular marker, but rather because these instances each somehow convey the impression of extreme difficulty in speaking. In this case, this impression arises out of the stutters at lines 140, 141, and 142, the moderately long pauses at lines 141 and 143, and the breaking voice. The latter interferes with speech most thoroughly at line 143, where the listener gets a strong impression that it is very difficult for George to say "but I am one" (if that is indeed what he says; the transcription is uncertain).

The second case of "inability to speak" also occurs in connection with a discussion of George's father:

(145) *George:* |the-th| one of the most remar:kable
interviews we('d) ever had in our life (.9) 'h my f-

mother was awa:y (.7) looking after an aunt in Florida
t ((clicking sound)) (.8) and ah we were #just riding?
around,# (.5) which was za custom in those days that
(150) was one ah th-'h (.) ways you H:ADDA being #alone
with somebody# (.)
Interviewer: |uh huh|
George: |'H| and uh: he said George ((voice changes as
he quotes father)) (1.0) I = he said I: know you're not a
(155) Christian }}now{{ (("now" barely audible)) (.5)
Interviewer: uh huh
George: and uh (.5) but }I'm convinced you will? be{
((slowly, voice breaking))
Interviewer: huh ((high tone, then dropping off))
George: 'h }and when you are you'll be different{
((speech very soft, breathy—no support from
diaphragm)) (1.1)
(160) *Interviewer:* HUH ((high tone, then dropping off))

Here, as noted in the transcription, George's trouble in speaking culminates in the phrase of line 159, which sounds as if it were being forced out with no support behind it. Leading up to this phrase, George's voice again begins to break and the volume of his speech drops noticeably.

The third example of this phenomenon occurs in the interview as George recalls a visit with his children after he had divorced his wife:

George: and uh one of the first times like we had uh
child visitation }you know{
Interviewer: mmhmm
George: uh I really I mean I know hell on earth I
(165) mean I REALLY know hell on earth, (1.2) ((dramatic
change in tone between earth and two)) }two things
especially stand out in my (.) mind (.5) one time I
came home and our daughter didn't know me { }} I was
just a stranger{{ (.7) ((clicking sound)) (1.1) oh I
(170) tell you boy that really shook me up (.7)
Interviewer: }mmhmm{ (1.0)
George: she was just a little }}little thing{{
you know ((voice almost breaking))
Interviewer: mmhmm mmhmm
(175) *George:* 'h and then another time or maybe the same
visit I don't know (1.6) uh my son said (.) who was
five six said Daddy ((slight tone change)) aren't you
ever coming home (1.1)
Interviewer: mmhmm
(180) *George:* 'H (2.3) I mean ((breaks up during I mean,
then voice changes)) talk about a shake up (.) oh
brother (3.5) 'H ((voice change)) but uh (1.3) you
know Reno you'll never know this I suppose unless I
tell you but Reno is just very full of very attractive
(185) (.8) and very available (.9)
Interviewer: mmhmm (.5)
George: women (.4)
Interviewer: mmhmm

Here George experiences noticeable difficulty in speaking at lines 168–169 and 172–173, but I would not classify this difficulty as an inability to speak. The reason for this is that while the softness of voice and the breaking voice that occur here are in some sense dysfluent (Hill 1988), neither of these features gives the impression of a breakdown, an *inability* to speak. However, at lines 180 and 182 pauses of such length occur that they must be labeled lapses (Moerman 1988). These, together with a breaking voice, again

indicate an inability to speak. This impression is strengthened by the dramatic shift of subject at line 182, following a lapse of 3.5 seconds, which indicates that George simply cannot go on with the topic of his visit with his children. (That the topic is changed here to the presence of attractive women in Reno is itself significant, for it illustrates George's tendency to overcome extreme anxiety by fantasizing about attractive women. I say this is a tendency because of the events recounted in the story of his conversion.)

The final instance of a temporary inability to speak occurs at the crucial moment in the narration of George's conversion experience:

George: .h and finally h (.9) at no:on h on the third
(190) day (1.6) I was re (.3) I was (.9) thinking about it and
then all of a sudden I just felt I should pray (.4) and
I (.5) ((voice begins to break)) my prayer went
like this Dear God (.5) if you exist (3.8) 'h let me know
that you exist }and that you can forgive me{ (1.5)
(195) *Interviewer:* hmm (1.2)

In this passage, there is again a lapse (line 193) that is too long to be classified as a dysfluency and instead must be seen as a temporary inability to speak. As in earlier examples, the breaking voice and soft volume are also present here.

The conventional interpretation of a temporary inability to speak would be that "George is emotional" and that he is overcome by the emotion of remembering these events as he tells about them. For several reasons, I agree with Hill (1987) that this is an inadequate interpretation. First, it does not clarify anything. Emotion can make one eloquent as well as inarticulate, and there are several emotional moments in the interview where George doesn't break down. Furthermore, to say "emotion is interfering" and leave it at that is merely a crude device to avoid analysis by tracing the inability to speak to something that is presumably outside the social-scientific purview. I do not deny that emotion is centrally involved in George's temporary inability to speak, but I do deny that this is a sufficient explanation. What emotion is involved here and why should it lead to an inability to speak?

It is surely significant that all the instances of George's temporary inability to speak occur in conjunction with the direct quotation of the speech of people close to him (or in one case, his own earlier speech). But why should direct quotation be associated with being unable to speak in George's interview?

A recent paper by Urban (1986) suggests a line of thought that may lead to an answer to this question. Urban (1986:3) refers to the "I" that occurs in direct quotation as the "anaphoric I," for the reason that this "I" does not refer to the present speaker but rather to some other speaker identified in an earlier clause. Urban points out that the anaphoric "I" engages the speaker, to some extent, in role play. (The anaphoric "I" that engages the speaker in role play is also referred to by Urban as the "de-quotative I.") Urban in fact argues that the anaphoric "I" is the basis for such developments as a theatrical tradition.

Whether or not this is the case, it is certainly true that quoted speech is, in Goffman's (1986) term, a frame within speech in which the speaker is temporarily standing in for someone else. And that means that the speaker temporarily suppresses certain aspects of his- or herself in favor of expressing aspects of another person. Urban phrases this point as follows:

> The imitated discourse of the other is no longer simply subject to whim. It is also subject to the control that the imitated other exercises over the speaker, since modifying or overturning the words of another is understood with the awareness that they *are* the words of another. The anaphoric "I" . . . brings into one's discourse the real control that the imitated others have over one. [1986:7, emphasis in original]

I would suggest that George's temporary inability to speak is an impasse generated out of conflicting desires. George's narrative style tells us the same thing that his story tells us, namely that he struggles with the conflict between his desire for freedom and his desire

to obey the strictures he absorbed in his upbringing. What the instances of quoted speech share with the episode in which he cannot speak the words he had intended to his wife is the presence of a constraining force. In the instances of quoted speech, the constraint is "the real control that the imitated others have" over George. And when he cannot tell his wife that he has asked another woman to marry him, George feels the constraint of his obligations to the family he helped to create overriding his desire to escape them.

Recall now that the conversion itself was also generated out of an impasse between George's desire for freedom and the constraints of his moral convictions. George had been trying to escape those convictions, but in doing so he arrived at a paralysis of action that parallels his paralysis of speech. As with the utterance, the paralysis is a noticeable impasse, where George stands suspended between two models of what to be. But also as with the utterance, the impasse is overcome by submission to the authority that was temporarily resisted. George's situation parallels Jean's in that the central emotional ambivalence which by his testimony animated the conversion—in his case that of a desire to simultaneously resist and submit to authority—persists in the conversion narrative itself.

It has been shown that in two cases emotional ambivalence claimed by believers to have been resolved in a conversion experience in fact persists in the present, in the narration of the conversion story. In these cases, the ideological language thus seems to provide a framework within which ambivalence can be expressed and in some way resolved. The realization that emotional ambivalence can find resolution through the use of ideological language points to a solution of the problem with which I began, the transformation of identity.

I have used the term emotional ambivalence to refer to the simultaneous existence, within one person, of conflicting desires. To the degree that conflicting desires find expression in behavior, the person has not synthesized a stable identity. In this sense, identity can be understood as an issue in the realm of intentionality; this formulation provides the opportunity for a new perspective on the results of this analysis.

In the foregoing, I restricted my use of the term "deniable communication" so that it refers above all to parapraxes. However, could not much of the material revealed by a close analysis of conversation be interpreted, with equal justification, as deniable communication? Could not expressed emotion, overlap with another speaker, inability to speak, or virtually any of the phenomena to which I have called attention be taken as interactional strategies for accomplishing goals that are for the most part outside the sphere of conscious intention?

An expanded notion of deniable communication could also be applied to nonconversational behaviors, such as some psychological symptoms. A hysterical paralysis, for example, may be interpreted as a nonintentional behavior that communicates both unacceptable wishes and desires for "secondary gains," such as attention, escaping work or other unpleasant tasks, and so on. To refer to such a symptom as a deniable communication is to reconstrue what has traditionally been thought of as a conflict within the personality as a communicative strategy (albeit ultimately a distorted one).

Thus, unlike Freud (1964:70–71), who views the slip of the tongue as the expression of an unconscious intention, and unlike Goffman (1986:345ff.), who would view it as a temporary "frame break," I see the slip of the tongue as an aspect of the ambiguity of human communication. Rather than viewing the speaker as having a single intention, which can be contaminated by other intentions that are somehow less intentional, I would say that our medium of communication generally allows us to express a number of "intentions" at once, and that what emerges as our "true" intention depends in part on how our speech is interpreted by ourselves and others in interaction. Dysfluencies, then—and perhaps much behavior we tend to interpret as nonintentional—are deniable communications, expressions of intentions or desires that the speaker may wish to deny.

From this perspective, the lack of a coherent identity is equivalent to the communicating of multiple and contradictory intentions. The person who communicates multiple intentions will engage in behaviors that, at least in our own cultural context, will be con-

strued as "meaningless," behaviors that cannot be sorted out socially to adumbrate a coherent position, an identity. It was Freud's greatest intuition to see that much of what had been dismissed as meaningless—the dream, the slip of the tongue, the paralyzed arm—was, in fact, communication. I depart from his general perspective only to the extent that I (as do some contemporary psychoanalysts) resist the conclusion that such communications reflect conflicts between enduring psychological structures such as the ego and the id.

Thus, I suggest that a lack of identity is the production, whether on the level of speech or symptom, of meaningless behavior. What an ideology can do is to create meaning where previously there was none; many observers of religious systems, for example, have concluded that the purpose of such systems is precisely to endow the activity of the believer with meaning (see Geertz 1966; Berger 1967). Any full treatment of how this actually takes place is beyond the scope of this article. However, I can indicate the lines along which I believe this problem should be pursued.

From the perspective I am developing here, an adherent finds meaning in ideological language because it allows him or her to communicate intentions that are in other contexts denied, meaningless. That is, the ideological language provides the resources to integrate denied intentions into a coherent set of intentions, an identity. I will return to the two cases in order to clarify this claim.

In Jean's case, a feeling that she labels "connection" cannot, for some reason, be expressed in the context of the family. Thus, expressions of this feeling are meaningless, mere interference, when they appear in conjunction with the topic of family. Yet it is, of course, connection that is most important to her in the religious context. The ideological language provides her with a being to whom she can be connected, without that connection entailing any of the dangers that lack of separation from her parents or brother would entail. Here her desire can be expressed openly; precisely that which has been meaningless becomes the source of the most profound meaning.

From the standpoint of identity, Jean's access to the language of "connection" allows her to express an intention in a straightforward manner, and this makes her feel coherent, at one with herself. This is in fact how Jean sums up the benefits of a Christian faith:

Jean: OH YE:S I think that (1.1) just in gen:eral (.8)
(190) u:m (2.3) as I grow: and become a Christ ((slowly)) AS
I be (.5) come more and more wull I-I am a Christian #I
can't say I become more a Christian# 'h (.5) as I grow:
(1.8) ah in the Christian life (.7) I feel (.5) more
(1.9) I-I understand who I am (.4) and what I'm all
(195) about and I bec-I feel like I become more human

For George, the ideological language serves a similar purpose. Whereas Jean struggles with ambivalent feelings about connection, George struggles with ambivalent feelings about submission to authority, especially the moral authority that is represented by his father. His firm denial of conflict with his father is contradicted by the reported events of his early adulthood, for in these events he rejected everything his father had stood for: religion; fidelity; above all, "fatherhood" itself. At one point in the interview George told me that he had felt he had to leave his hometown, where he was just one of his father's sons, in order to be himself. This captures the conflict that is testified to throughout the interview, the contradiction between George's desire to submit to the authority of his father and his fear that doing so will make his individuality impossible.

As was the case for Jean, George finds in the terms of the religious language the means to express his desire, for, as George mentioned in discussing his conversion, God is the father. To submit to the authority of God is possible, for it does not threaten George in the way that submission to his father evidently does.

For both believers considered here, the ideological language serves as a means to express desires that are forbidden in family contexts, for in those contexts these desires would constitute a threat to a fully separate personhood.[8] It is my impression, based on

the conversion narratives I have heard, that this is frequently a component of the conversion experience. Further work will be necessary to substantiate this claim; the intent of the present argument is simply to propose an approach to the problem of how transformations may be brought about through an ideological system.

The conversion narrative can, not inaccurately, be compared to a ritual in which a drama of the conflict of supernatural forces is reenacted. It was Durkheim (1915) who first showed that such forces may actually be generated by a social group practicing a ritual; the case is the same for an individual recounting a conversion narrative. The ambivalent intentions and emotions that personhood may embrace find expression in the narrative, and the person finds solace in becoming able to communicate through the use of ideological symbols an intention that conflicts with other intentions when expressed in other contexts. The conversion narrative, like the ritual, induces a sort of "solidarity," in this case a solidarity of motives. The conversion narrative enables the believer to forge a sense of coherence by using the ideological language to embrace intentions that, as the analysis has shown, persist in spite of being denied. It is this sense of coherence that signals, both to the believer and to the observer, a transformed identity.

Notes

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[1]I do not attempt to address the complexities involved in providing thorough definitions of either ideology or identity in this article, for to do so would probably entail another paper. I have adopted what Thompson (1984) has called a neutral (as opposed to critical) definition of ideology; in other words I do not mean to imply, by using this word, that the symbol system under discussion is a system of domination. However, I also do not wish to insist that Evangelical Christianity or any other symbol system is *not* a system of domination. Rather, I just do not want to enter into the question here. As I have done with ideology, I prefer to offer a simple and "commonsense" definition of identity. I use the term to refer to a social position that is accepted as coherent by the actor and those with whom he or she interacts.

[2]Snow and Machalek (1984:175ff.) also point to the problematic nature of converts' stories about themselves. More generally, the problem of the relationship between events and the narratives that ostensibly describe them is a topic that has been much discussed in recent years. See, for example, Quinn and Holland (1987:7), Briggs (1986), and Baumann (1986:5). I should emphasize that my point is not that the conversion event cannot be assumed to be represented in the conversion narrative, but rather that the nature of that representation is not transparent. I assume, as I must, that the narrative is part of a genuine attempt to tell "what happened."

[3]The idea that changes in behavior are better conceived as changes in action rather than changes in psychic structure comes originally from Schafer (1976). I intend this formulation to be compatible with theoretical reorientations in anthropology that are often referred to as theories of practice (Bourdieu 1977).

[4]There is another slip here, at line 71, where Jean begins to say a word starting with an "s" sound and then immediately corrects herself to say "different." Although there is insufficient evidence to know what Jean is starting to say, my guess would be that the word she starts is "separate," since she immediately goes on to set up a phrase in which she can use that word. This sort of slip happens at several other points in the interview, although not in any of the material I use here.

[5]I went over this case in detail with a psychoanalyst, and his opinion was that there was substantial evidence in the interview that Jean continues to be concerned with the issue of merger with her twin.

[6]Ellen Basso (personal communication, 1989) helped me with the interpretation of this passage.

[7]There are four more places in the interview where George experiences some difficulty in speaking, although the difficulty is not as marked as in the examples I have discussed. Two of these instances of difficulty in speaking occur within a few seconds of the passages I discuss and hence are closely associated with direct quotation. (One of these, occurring at lines 168–173, is discussed in the body of the article.) The other two instances occur while George is directly quoting another speaker or, in one case, his own previous thoughts.

[8]My argument here that George and Jean feel a need to separate from their families in order to develop a "fully separate personhood" is not based on an assumption that this is a universal human need. I do assume, however, that members of American society feel a need, based in cultural pressures, to establish themselves as individuals to a great extent emotionally separate from their families of origin.

Appendix

Conventions of transcription (following Moerman 1988, with some modifications):

} { bounds speech spoken softly
}} {{ bounds speech spoken very softly
: extended sound
| | bounds utterances that are produced simultaneously by two speakers
(.x) indicates a pause of .x seconds
(.) indicates a noticeable pause too short to be accurately timed (.2–.4 seconds)
(( )) bounds transcriber's comments
( ) bounds uncertain transcription
'h, 'H soft and loud inbreath
CAPS loud volume
underlining words spoken with emphasis
dec speech slowing
(ha) laughter
bounds quickly spoken speech
? rising intonation
, falling intonation
= short transition time between two words
- preceding sound is cut off

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