At one point in her long imprisonment, already contemplating the possibility of death, Mary Queen of Scots wrote to the Pope asking whether her sins would be forgiven if, repeating the words Jesu, Maria at the moment of death, she spoke them with her heart rather than her mouth.

Students of religion will see in this concern an example of the Christian's view of death and afterlife. Catholics, commending the believer's faith, might, however, argue over what precisely was required at this crucial moment without a confessor and the last rites. Protestants can cite this case to illustrate the Pope's authority over a Catholic. A sociolinguist sees something entirely different. He sees the way in which language is used in the performance of a religious act. Mary wanted to be certain that she would be doing the right thing, saying the proper words in the required manner. For the theologian this would be an act of faith; for the sociolinguist an act of speaking. The theologian sees in it an expression of a system of belief; the sociolinguist a
realization of patterns of language use. Mary, for example, was taking for granted the priority of audible speech.

Sociolinguistics, the study of language in relation to social realities, examines religion only because it is another domain of human behavior where language is an important component. Its primary allegiance is to linguistics—the science of language. Within this discipline it has its own goals and methodologies. But because it is 'socio'-linguistics, it draws from and contributes to a wide range of studies.

Sociolinguistics

When we talk about the 'language of religion' or 'language in religious practice', we mean something quite different from what philosophers and theologians mean by these expressions. The way people use language is what we are concerned with. (Speech, instead of language, might be a more appropriate term if it were not for the fact that every means of linguistic expression must be examined, the written no less than the spoken.) Sociolinguistics—in contrast with linguistics, that deals with the complex system of rules (the grammar) that permits a set of speakers abiding by the rules to verbally interact with each other—studies the ways speakers select products of their grammar (one might call them texts or discourse) according to social variables. It is therefore concerned with choices or decisions that speakers make (a) where the linguistic code (or grammar) allows them and (b) where they have cultural significance.
It is axiomatic to our approach that speakers of all languages, but according to the patterns of their respective speech communities, have many ways of speaking that require selection, according to what—in a given setting—may be obligatory or more appropriate, etc. (The 'meaning' of any choice is, of course, a separate problem.) Even in a monolingual community there are different ways of talking. If there is a 'formal' manner different from 'informal', they are different, for example, in vocabulary, sentence structure, and diction. But there are frequently other options as well: different dialects (rural vs. urban, working class vs. middle class) of different languages. In a broad sense, any of these ways of talking can be called a 'language'; and if it is consistently used with religion, it would be appropriate to call it the religious language.

The linguistic repertoire of a community, however, is only one of its sociolinguistic dimensions. Another set of variables is represented by the genres of discourse: conversation, narrative, prayer, divination, sermon, etc. These also have linguistic features that submit to careful analysis and description.

In another sense, then, a 'religious language' is the product of the intersection of language variables of different sorts within this one domain of human experience. It is this localization of ways of using language in a given sphere of social action that attracts sociolinguistic attention, for we expect to find here, as elsewhere, linguistic means responding to social motivation and having cultural meaning.
The 'motives' for linguistic choices are in such factors as place, time, topic of discourse, participants (role of speaker, nature and size of audience), nature of the speech act, etc. One needs only to think of different sorts of Protestant prayers to begin to understand how these variables intersect with each other to produce such prayer events as invocations, blessings, and meal-time prayers.

For 'meaning', we need only find a recognition of what is deemed appropriate. It may be acceptable in a given Protestant church to use contemporary pronouns while praying in Sunday school, but the main worship service requires the use of thee and thou. For every speech community, whether it be a whole denomination on a national scale or the congregation of one church in this denomination, there are taken-for-granted expectations for the way language will be used and for what purposes: at ritualized 'worship' services, weddings, funerals, hospital visits by the clergy etc.

If sociolinguistics brings a new perspective to religious studies, as indeed it does, we should expect to learn more about the nature of religious practice: how it is structured and how it relates to other aspects of a given culture; and we should surely refine our generalizations about universal religious practices. If this is to hope for some things not yet seen, we already have a promise in a number of published studies.

Sociolinguistic studies of religion seek to determine the way in which language is exploited for religious ends. We start with no different assumptions. For us religion is no unique domain of experience; we do
not begin our examination of religious language expecting to find here what we might not find elsewhere. Whatever validity we might claim for religious propositions, we insist on the inescapable fact of the thoroughly human, therefore common and accessible, mediation of religious experience.

There are theologians in the Christian tradition who accept the human mediation of religious 'faith' through language but who also claim that language serves religious ends. They go even further, to insist that language is transformed or is adapted to the expression of religious propositions. Religious language is therefore unique; it is more than ordinary language serving a religious purpose. And then they take the product and make it a tool, using language not only as a hermeneutical device for the explication of religious assertions but even as a means to defend their validity. Language is crucial in contemporary theological discussion. (There must be scores of books on 'religious language' or 'God-talk'.)

And one such linguistic philosopher even claims that the crisis in Roman Catholic thinking, if not in all Christendom, is really a linguistic one.

Sociolinguistics may have some bearing on religious language as philosophically understood. For the time being, however, our goals are modest. We aim for a kind of ethnography of religious language; and although we do not begin with the a priori notion of the uniqueness of religious linguistic usage, we should be happy if we were to discover it.

But the uniqueness, that is, the domain specificity, of language in
religion would be in any number of points where sociolinguistic variables intersect. In the following pages we discuss some of the functions (ends, goals, etc.) that language serves in religion, the various kinds of linguistic resources that are exploited, and some of the social processes that characterize the use of language.

Religious ends

Whatever the term 'religion' might comprehend, language serves in a number of ways to set it apart from the profane or nonreligious. This specialization might be expected with practices that occur only with this domain (as with prayers), but a religious event elicits appropriate speech even when the separate parts are neutral (like announcements in a church service). Within a single religion there may be different levels of perception or experience. At the one extreme are found the numinous or mystical, like the use of sacred syllable om in Hinduism, Piyut hymns with esoteric vocabulary in Judaism (Rabin), and 'holy words' in an African independent church (Turner 1967).

Religious communities — if we define these simply as groups adhering to a given set of beliefs and practices — are also set apart linguistically. The fact that language is used as an ethnic boundary marker, symbolic of social oneness, is not itself in any way surprising. What we need to give attention to is the way in which language is used to reinforce the social identity: Arabic is the sacred language of all Muslims; the Chamul language is part of the fourth (and best) Creation (Gossen); if Amish children are taught in English, so these people insist, the Amish way of life will disappear. Language is either looked at in very pragmatic terms or it is made integral to the ideology of the community. In either case this leads to legitimating linguistic theories (like those of contemporary theology we
have just mentioned) that need to be studied for their own sake.

The range of linguistic resources used in social marking is broad but still relatively limited. The least interesting perhaps are instances of language differences inherited from migration, conquest, and the like. Thus, the immigrant Molokan and Doukhabor sectarians of the United States and Canada continue to use Russian in all of their religious events in spite of the fact (as is the case for Molokans) that an urban environment leads to intense and intimate interaction with the dominant language. More interesting are cases where linguistic differences are asserted in unilingual settings. The Ashkenazi-Sephardi differences with respect to the pronunciation of Hebrew is not really an example, because these differences are the result of the geographical separation of these communities in the past. This is just a case of dialect speakers finding themselves living together. A better field for study would be the linguistic usage of Israeli youth who have been indoctrinated in Modern Israeli and have experimented with new synagogue liturgies. What we seek to know is how people establish a new social identity.

The assertion of a new social identity can, of course, be accomplished by adopting an entirely different language as the religious one. Pidgin Sango is the Protestant language of the Central African Republic even where there is no need for it (for example, unilingual villages). But social change can lead to new feelings of identity that revive interest in the native language (as with those ethnic groups in the Cameroon Presbyterian church that had used Bulu as lingua franca and as religious language).
On the other hand, the 'new' language may be an old one that is disguised
or one that is drastically altered. Argots or 'secret languages' — where
communication, perhaps minimal, is possible — are often of the first
type. Of the second type are pseudolanguages. Cargo cults in the
Papua-New Guinea area have arisen with 'new languages' that were hardly
more than a mish-mash of words from non-native languages (Worsley 1957).

New 'languages' in a different sense — more accurately argots —
arise in a new movement as the effect of the new ideology. The emergence
of Spiritualist churches in the last century, for example, led to an
argot where words as common as see and feel have special meanings (Zaretsky
1972).

In the present discussion the word language is an ambiguous one, for
it refers both to form and function in the dynamics of interaction.
It should be made clear that in religion, as in other human experience,
the replacement of one language by another need not be complete either for
form or for function. The practitioners of a religion require only that
the 'language' fulfill its immediate function. A Spiritualist minister must
certainly give the impression of talking English even though her ambiguous
messages only provide suggestions to a seeker for getting its meaning.
There is less need for satisfying intellectual requirements in a Rhodesian
Spirit-cult rite (Blakney 1969), with Pentecostal glossolalia (Samarin 1972a)
or in a Ceylonese healing ritual (Tambiah 1968).
The need, of course, is determined by the given religious phenomenon, and it is a product of several factors. For example, 'identifying one's social identity' can include conversion experiences and initiation rites, but it can occur without them. Becoming a member of the neo-Pentecostal movement, for example, necessitates the learning of its argot as in Spirituallist churches. A person is not incorporated into a social unit (a prayer fellowship, church congregation, week-end retreat, etc.) simply because he assents to the group's belief, but also because he can talk about it. From one point of view, therefore, Pentecostal talk is more important than glossolalia in this movement. Yet glossolalia is the linguistic evidence, traditional Pentecostal doctrine claims, of the new religious experience. De facto socialization into the movement is through the Argot; the symbol of the new social reality is glossolalia. The convert to Pentecostalism therefore acquires two 'new' languages.

An argot is undoubtedly learned when one becomes a member of the Jamaa movement in Zaire (Fabian 1971), for there are many Swahili words whose meanings are peculiar to the movement. But full membership, which is formal and explicit, is achieved by going through four stages of initiation each of which is characterized by a specific kind of speech event and reflects kinds of qualities of personal relationships established during this process. (Jamaa means 'family' in Swahili).

Time is only one of the factors that determine the nature of the language of initiation. Where neophytes are brought into cult membership
during a relatively brief training period, the acquisition of a real foreign language is virtually impossible, but disguised forms of languages and pidgins are more accessible. Easier yet are pseudolanguages. This is why glossolalia is so effective an initiation symbol, because it marks the precise moment when a seeker at a revival meeting gets the experience. (Many people like to remember the precise day and hour when this happened.)

It would be a mistake to think that language serves religious ends without being influenced by or venturing into the profane world. We thus find language being used to support structure and privileged position. In Spiritualist churches the four ranks in leadership are characterized by the right to use certain argot terms, each rank using terms from those available to the lower one(s), but not vice versa. The minister is alone at the top, and she can discipline the colleague who violates the rule. Igbo go to shrine priests to have prayers said to certain capricious gods, but these priests are descendants from former conquerors who still have political power in the villages (Shelton). And members of a Kewa cult in New Guinea use their argot to extort food from unwary fellow villagers (Franklin, Ms.). This is possible, because the argot consists of words and expressions that replace standard Kewa words that, on the initiative of the cult, have become taboo: for example, ipa agi, literally 'water mother' for nogo 'girl'. The villager who mistakenly violates the taboo is required to atone with a payment of pigs or pearl shells.
Linguistic means

It is a social-linguistic premise that speech is adapted to culturally relevant functions. In a description of the linguistic means at the disposal of religion we are concerned with the parts of language that are exploited and the products of the exploitation. Substitutes for native language have already been mentioned: like switching from English to Hebrew or an argot or a pseudolanguage. But even without these more or less drastic departures from normal speech, special varieties of native language can be built with available resources or with an admixture from other languages. The result is a register or style. There is, for example, a testimony-giving style among traditional Pentecostals (such as the Assemblies of God) that consists of rapid delivery at a flat and higher-than-usual level of pitch. And cutting across different genres of discourse—such as sermons, prayers, and testimonies—is the practice of breaking speech up into rhythmic units, sometimes punctuated by verbal ejaculations or grunts. (On sermons see Rosenberg 1970 and Samarin 1972b.)

The general picture for religion, then, is similar to that for other domains of experience. Religion may not be unique in its inventory of linguistic resources, but it may be with respect to their predominance. What in other domains are infrequent may in religion be frequent. This would seem to be the case with the use of anomalous utterances of the mumbo-jumbo and abracadabra type. (Here too the form-function relationship cannot be ignored, remembering that what is linguistically 'normal' in the cognitive-determinative sense may in its magical use be meaningless. Examples are to be found in the repetitive verbalization of names, words, or sentences. The adherent of a 'high' religion may thus be the religious brother...
of an adherent of a ‘low-religion in a specific use of language, if not in
the form used.

Perhaps, however, there is a higher-level typology of which the use of
anomalous speech is just one instance. It would appear that in religion
greater liberty is taken to satisfy the esthetic appreciation for the
substance of language. The average man does not have an opportunity to
speak in metered units, but he can do this, for example, when he prays
or repeats a spell. This happens in extemporaneous Pentecostal prayers
(since Pentecostals are hardly given to liturgical ones), but satisfying
sounds (the alliteration is deliberate in this non-religious essay) are
also provided in the corpus of religious texts. Yet even these texts
must be seen as the products of deep-seated motivations. And where texts
have an entirely different origin, they may be interpreted (in the elocutionary
sense) so that they are prosodically pleasing. When people defend the
King James Version of the Bible, for example, they frequently cite its
‘majestic rhythm’. Since there is no inherent rhythm to this 17th-century
translation, these traditionalists are really defending the style of
reading with which they have become familiar. Obviously, any version,
even the one in Basic English, could have its own majestic style. What is
ture of Christian Scriptures is probably true of others.

But linguistic adaptation to religious needs is not limited to the
selection of linguistic resources for the creation of special varieties of
language. It also leads to special kinds of discourse. The ‘language’ of
religion—the means whereby religion expresses itself—therefore consists
of genres like song, recitations, prayer, and magical or divinational formula. It is here perhaps more clearly than anywhere else that the domain specificity of religious language may be seen. One does not address or petition the gods in the same way that one addresses chiefs and kings (unless the chiefs and kings are theocratic figures!). Linguists are concerned with the structures of these genres insofar as they are the product of 'grammatical' discourse rules and sociolinguists are concerned with their function in speech events.

The linguistic means of religion, whether extemporaneous or traditional are expressed in either oral or written form. It makes a difference for religious behavior if the society is a literate or preliterate one and, in the latter case, if it is in contact with literacy. Of particular interest to sociolinguistics is the way in which the language of the sacred writings affects later forms of language. In the case of the Church of the Lord, an 'independent' Christian movement in West Africa, foreign orthographies may be responsible for the spelling of 'holy words'; for example, what is pronounced something like Kokamula is written Kieokkammullal, for there is a predilection for extra letters and long words.

Social processes

The realization of speech ends is a social process, and the linguistic products that effect this realization are social phenomena. We have not ignored this fact in the foregoing discussion. Here we want to turn our attention to some facets of the social nature of the interrelationship between ends and means.
Sociolinguistic competence. This refers to one's ability to use language—the language product is constructed according to the rules, and it meets the requirements of the setting. The identification of genres of discourse presupposes a structure that is characteristic for each. In a given community it is therefore possible for a person to fail in his linguistic performance, if only by not achieving the ideal. We must therefore study the rule-governed nature of the speaker's task, if we want to know for each religion—or some given part of it—what it means to be sociolinguistically competent in it.

However, in our eagerness to describe rules, we must not ignore the fact that people force rules to yield. Both form and function are involved. Although prayers in many religions are set by tradition and are added to or varied with great conservatism, the Protestant 'free' prayer, being extemporary, is susceptible to great variation and exploitation. It is indeed possible for a prayer to approach the nature of a sermon. (This is a personal impression supported by casual observations of many Protestants.) And on one occasion I heard a preacher admit that in the morning service the congregation had already heard one announcement that was included in the prayer, since he forgot to make it with the other announcements! He made his point more explicit by saying that the announcement had bounced back from heaven like something from a satellite. In each of these examples, it should be evident, the intended purpose of a speech act is also affected. A change only in function may be that of using a body of scripture for oracular or magical purposes.
What kinds of rules are more subject to strain and what are the social phenomena that accompany particular changes or periods of change? These are questions fundamental to sociolinguistics in general, but we do not now have good answers. Yet it should be observed, for example, that the Reformation seems to have led to only a few innovations in language use. On the other hand, dream interpretation as part of religious behavior in the Jamaa movement (mentioned above) is probably an innovation when seen in the context of African Roman Catholicism where this movement is found.

The domain of religion reminds us that we must study the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence for all domains in a given society. And adult who 'becomes religious' after a lifetime of irreligiosity or one who leaves one religious community for another has to learn a new kind of behavior, and language—as we have already seen—is often a very important part of this process. In any case, there are drastic differences between what adherents of different religions are required to know and how—and at what age—they go about acquiring this knowledge. (See, for example, Christian 1971). Judaism places very great value on a knowledge of religious writings; memorization is important in Eastern religions; but Christian clerics at least in our day usually read the liturgy. In most fundamentalist churches one is supposed to bring his Bible to church and follow the sermon by looking up all the text citations, of which there can be quite a few. In some churches, generally lower-class ones, the preacher makes it a practice to let volunteers in the congregation read as soon as they find the place. One can well imagine the contribution this practice makes to group cohesion, but also the opportunities
it provides for competition.

The last example, as many others like it, illustrates the way the ability to behave in an appropriate manner can be used to symbolize what it means to be an adherent of a given religious community and to regulate behavior within it. In some Protestant groups one learns to pray aloud in public—something that every 'good Christian' is supposed to be able to do—so as to express solidarity with the group. With this function it can be described as a ritual act, equivalent to attending church, but speaking with greater forcefulness and clarity.

**Metalinguistics**. This, for our present purposes, refers to beliefs and attitudes about language. Religion may be the source or determinant of a society's metalinguistic notions, but in any case the expression of religion—sometimes its very conceptualization—is influenced by the way people think about language.

If language is viewed as having a supernatural origin or in some way being part of the divine essence, everyday speech or speech on certain occasions is affected. Both among the Dogon of West Africa (Calame-Grasule 1965) and in Hinduism language figured in the creation of the world. We all know about the *logos* of St. John's gospel, but we have no information about how this concept was related to social behavior. Well documented ethnographic observations would lead us to be careful about assuming certain kinds of behavior on the basis of certain kinds of beliefs. Evangelical Protestants assert as part of their creed that the Bible in the original languages was wholly and verbally inspired by God: that every word is precisely the one God wanted. (And they are not alone among all of those who have inspired
texts.) Yet the linguistic and philosophical implications have never been adequately worked out by these Protestants. And in Evangelicalism's fundamentalist sector there is a strain of antirationalism: human language is but an imperfect instrument that God over-rides in his power; for Pentecostals human language is even carnal whereas glossolalia is spiritual. This became quite clear in my study of the phenomenon. A similar attitude appeared among early Quakers (Bauman 1970).

It is perhaps in religion where one finds the most explicit expression of belief in the power of language as a force in its own right. Among the Chamula 'heated words' during a ritual are like incense; in Spiritualist churches certain words 'do' what they 'say', so one avoids words like sickness and death; in Hinduism certain verses are repeated for their efficacy, African Muslims wear verbal charms and Tibetans use prayer wheels for the same purpose. Ethnographic literature provides abundant documentation of this aspect of linguistic belief and practice.

The study of sacred texts has led to extensive grammatical and lexicographical work, and linguistic science is indebted to religion for this legacy. But the linguistic history of religion is, as one might expect, uneven in quality. The grammar of Sanskrit attributed to Panini is acclaimed by modern linguists for the quality of its generalizations and the elegance of its economy. No such genius graces the history of Biblical Greek and Hebrew. Although the prejudicial effect of naive linguistic notions
on Christian Biblical studies has now been adequately demonstrated (Barr 1961), the source of these notions (now known by the rubric of 'linguistic determinism') is yet to be accounted for. It is ancient Jewish attitudes towards grammatical studies that explain in part the present state of Hebrew: the Sephardi had a great respect for the study of grammar, but the Ashkenazi frowned on it.

Linguistic notions, on the other hand, can be used to explicate or defend belief and to provide a model for the belief system. The history of theological argumentation is replete with illustrations of linguistic use, like the one where the repetition of χαί 'and' in Matthew 28:9 ('in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit') is said to prove that baptism must consist of three separate immersions in sequence. Much more sophisticated is Augustine's use of the relationship between the form of a sentence and its meaning in explaining eternity (Burke 1970:142).

Since language attitudes can affect any aspect of a community's linguistic resource, its use of different languages will also be affected. But this use is not necessarily uniform throughout the community or in the whole domain of religion. Religion is a domain that either inhibits or elicits the use of another language. The Telugu, like Indians generally, borrow extensively from Sanskrit, but some styles more than others (Christian). Molokans now living in the United States speak Russian or English with a great admixture of the other in settings that might be called casual or intimate,
but in religious settings only Russian is used and that in a form that is free of English loans except for an occasional culture-specific item. On the other hand, Haitian Protestants require a great deal of Standard French in their Creole on formal religious occasions, and they might even be happier with a sermon entirely in French even if it were incomprehensible (Orjala 1970).

Another way of looking at the process of language selection is in terms of the event rather than text. Thus, in the synagogue sabbath service conducted for the most part in English, certain parts are restricted to Hebrew. And different parts of a Ceylonese healing rite take different languages or mixtures of languages, reflecting the hierarchical positions of gods and demons.

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