

Picking up the Thread: Recasting Dogon Ideas of Speech in the Work of Geneviève

Calame-Griaule

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Introduction

Few bodies of ethnographic work have achieved the striking literary prose of Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*. Griaule's volume took the form of 33 conversations through which the Dogon elder, Ogotemmêli, was said to have revealed the esoteric features of Dogon cosmology to him in 1947, the trophy of his doggedness in the face of prolonged attempts by elders to shroud Dogon deep knowledge in secrecy. Through this poetic rendering of Dogon cosmology, the French ethnologist Griaule endeavored to demonstrate the potential for philosophic thought in African societies, a point that was to become the subject of intense debate.¹ Griaule's important text, and his larger *oeuvre*, came under scrutiny as early as 1967 when Jack Goody wrote that "the reader is uncertain where the conversation ends and the commentary begins" (1967:240). Mary Douglas remarked that it was difficult to distinguish "the voice of the theologian from that of the sacristan" (1968:17). Goody, and later James Clifford (1988), cast a critical eye on the politics and ethics of Griaule's theoretical findings and ethnographic methods highlighting the slippage between the literary style of Griaule and the written and spoken word of his primary interlocutor, Ogotemmêli. On this latter point Goody, Clifford and more recently Luc de Heusch (1991:436) specifically questioned Griaule's method of formal interviewing through an interpreter, St. Kogem, a Dogon army sergeant, leading Clifford to charge him of having "perceived fieldwork as a military operation" (Clifford qtd. in van Beek 1991:153). In addition to the critique mounted by Goody, Douglas, Clifford and de Heusch concerning Griaule's fieldwork methods and literary style, Walter van Beek (1991) went

to the very heart of the Dogon material to question the validity of the data itself. Van Beek claimed that he could not verify Griaule's findings in his own fieldwork in an area adjacent to Sanga in present day Mali, where Griaule conducted field research. He pointed to contradictions internal to the early corpus produced by Griaule, namely *Conversations*, and later work published posthumously in 1965 by Griaule's colleague Germaine Dieterlen, *Le renard pâle*. Though de Heusch called it "an enigmatic, problematic, troublesome book" (1991:436), and Goody referred to it as "rich and indigestible fare" (1967:69), the ethnologist Geneviève Calame-Griaule, a member of the Dogon team and Griaule's daughter, refuted the claim that the *oeuvre* was more fiction than ethnography: "I believe that I have since confirmed the revelations of Ogotemmêli in approaching the study of the "word" from a different viewpoint, that of man and society, and demonstrated the incredible logic of the whole system." (1991:576). Calame-Griaule argued that though the deeply disputed *Conversations* was pivotal, it was but one part of an extensive ethnographic corpus produced by Griaule and *l'équipe Dogon* beginning in 1931 and continuing after the death of Griaule in 1956. Yet the controversy surrounding this volume prevail over key insights produced by those associated with what has been called the Griaule school.² I became interested in Calame-Griaule's work because of its focus on ethnographic fieldwork, its key contribution towards moving language to the center of ethnological inquiry (see for example Apter 2005), and my own personal, long term engagement with the pleasures and the problems associated with "doing ethnography" to quote Geertz (1973) in Francophone West Africa. Though the political questions surrounding the Dogon corpus are significant, I do not want to lose site of the value of ethnographic approaches to language and what they can reveal about speaking and power. Moreover, my appreciation of Calame-Griaule's work is motivated by my concern that, however fraught and fractured, long term, intensive ethnography

remains the central method of understanding and conveying, however incomplete, our interlocutors' worlds, whether they be Dogon mystics, factory workers or health care practitioners.

Calame-Griaule's major ethnolinguistic work, *Ethnologie et langage: la parole chez les Dogon* (1965), was called a "pioneering effort" by Paul Riesman (1979:381) and Douglas (1975:126) contended that *Ethnologie et langage* rendered social context relevant to linguistic studies, a position articulated by the anthropologist and early advocate of the ethnographic method, Bronislaw Malinowski, but of little interest to linguists across the Atlantic at the time that *Ethnologie et langage* was published in France in 1965. *Ethnologie et langage* can be thought of as shifting emphasis from structuralist approaches to language, (*la langue*), to speech, (*la parole*), in a social context that can only be arrived at through field based ethnographic research. I am interested also in the relationship between her particular subjectivity, as a figure who was both a researcher and a daughter, the latter of which perhaps rendered her more human among her Dogon interlocutors, and her theoretical insights into dialogicality. Though Calame-Griaule extended the work of Griaule through her inquiry into Dogon ideas about speech, her particular subjectivity contributed in important ways to an emphasis on collaboration with her interlocutors, which led to her view that Dogon speech rather than representing a fixed cosmological order is political. With respect to her emphasis on collaboration, she can be thought of as less of a Durkheimian and more like Edward Sapir, who also cast his interlocutors as contributors to rather than as objects of research (Buckley 1987:15).

Ethnologie et langage is not a standard example of colonial linguistics, (see for example Errington 2001) its power relations are far more subtle and complex. In an early review of *Le renard pâle*, James Fernandez posited that, "there is always the tendency for the ethnographic

situation to produce its own culture. But can one dismiss this work or the works of the Griaule school on such a procrustean note?" (1967:528). I do not mean to discount the considerable concerns raised with respect to Griaule's method and person, but to suggest deeper inquiry into the "culture" of the Griaule school itself for two reasons. First, there appear to be, in the vast literature surrounding the Dogon corpus, instances of dissent from Griaule's model. For example, in his piece on *la parole claire* (deep knowledge), Apter suggests that Michele Leiris referred to the fieldwork of Deborah Lifchitz, Denise Paulme and André Schaeffner as "Mission Lifchitz-Paulme" to distinguish themselves from Griaule (2005:104). Second, a deeper inquiry into the particular "culture" of the Griaule school would reveal the degree to which the individual subjectivity of its members contributed to their respective theoretical insights. Griaule was uniquely interested in militaristic tactics like aerial photography and the criticisms of his literary account of his encounter with Ogotemmêli hinge on his position as a white male, a colonial figure, and a father—figuratively and literally. While all members of the Dogon research team were associated with the French colonial power, they were not all in the same way; they had their particular differences with Griaule and with events in France that I argue might have mattered in their interactions with their interlocutors on some level, either in their own perception of what their project consisted of or in the ways in which their Dogon interlocutors understood them.

Though Calame-Griaule remained a loyal defender of the Griaule school, Clifford distinguished *Ethnologie et langage* as "an inescapably collaborative work" (1983:153). Calame-Griaule's emphasis on collaboration may have emerged from her position within Dogon society and within the *équipe Dogon*. Calame-Griaule was not a "big man," to use a West African expression. She was a junior researcher and perhaps more significantly among her Dogon

interlocutors, a junior woman and a daughter. One of the most admirable aspects of her research was not merely her long-term engagement with Dogon speakers in Mali and France. She had come to the field through the aegis of her father, a factor that must have garnered her great respect among Dogon speakers as a social person, and as a member of a family, and she also took her son and daughter with her during later field visits. Thus her relations with her Dogon interlocutors were not merely academic, but highly personal and multigenerational. Many anthropologists have understood the contributions of their subjectivity, particularly in relation to their status as a daughter among their interlocutors (see for example Abu-Lughod 2000, McHugh 2001, and of women more generally Weiner 1976), to their theoretical engagements. Because she was a junior woman and a junior researcher, her Dogon interlocutors were not to be the big men among the Dogon, only one made it onto the list of informants approved by Griaule as possessing practically all knowledge, but ordinary members of society. Her insight into the positioning of speech in social life acknowledged exactly these kinds of hierarchies and thus led to her insight into the politics of Dogon ideas about speech.

While Marcel Griaule worked firmly within the structuralist tradition laid out by his antecedents Saussure, Durkheim, and Mauss, Calame-Griaule developed her father's insights into Dogon thought and practice through the rubric of language and the creation of social and moral worlds, a project that we will see is inherently political for Dogon speakers and researchers alike. In *Ethnologie et langage* Calame-Griaule brought speech (*la parole*) to bear on French ethnology and structuralist approaches in social theory more generally. In this way, the publication of *Ethnologie et langage* established the field of ethnolinguistics in France (Chiche 1989:424). Though one could argue that the contributions of Sapir and Boas led to the development of an ethnolinguistic tradition in American Anthropology in the early part of the

twentieth century, Calame-Griaule's ethnography was the first published in France that gave theoretical weight to the study of speech (*la parole* as opposed to Saussure's focus on *la langue*) in French ethnological research.

Though Calame-Griaule's ethnolinguistic work might be read by some as exemplifying the structuralism of her teacher, Claude Levi Strauss, this achievement of exquisite ethnographic narrative and linguistic analysis, emphasized dialogicality, the production of language and of knowledge between speakers within a given context. In this latter respect *Ethnologie et langage* stands apart not only from the Dogon corpus, from other works in French ethnology and American Anthropology where language was yet to be the substantive focus of ethnographic research, and from work in linguistics, which was largely interested in Saussure's *la langue*. Furthermore, it is in relation to the work of Calame-Griaule, and to a greater extent Michel Leiris that Apter honed in on the connections drawn between language and the body to rethink Griaule's concept of *la parole claire* (or deep knowledge), to argue that deep knowledge is not fixed and stable, an assumption underlying van Beek's (1991) criticism, but dynamic, transformative and powerful (2005:98-100). For Calame-Griaule speech is not fixed; it resides in a context that can only be elicited through ethnographic research. From these encounters Calame-Griaule became keenly aware of the significance of social context for Dogon evaluations of speech and of the "pragmatic dimensions of Dogon ritual language" (Apter 2005:97). In this respect, *Ethnologie et langage* is more than an exemplar of the coupling of ethnographic method and linguistic inquiry, of looking at language in society. Calame-Griaule's work can be thought of as constituting an approach to language that is particular to contemporary approaches in linguistic anthropology in American Anthropology that give attention to how language mediates social and cultural processes (Duranti 2001).

Calame-Griaule's dialogic encounter with her interlocutors can also be read in connection with later, and important, developments in the ethnography of speaking and in the field of linguistic anthropology, still emergent in American anthropology in the 1960s. In the introduction to Le Pin's 1986 English translation of *Ethnologie et langage, Words and the Dogon World*, Dell Hymes called Calame-Griaule's volume the "first and perhaps still fullest ethnography of speaking" (1986:vi) that American sociolinguists have vastly under-cited (1986:v). Calame-Griaule's contributions included attention to the full range of communicative practices, giving theoretical weight to her interlocutors embodied linguistic practices, emphasizing the Dogon positioning of speech in the physical and social body, and stressing the importance of analyzing how context renders speech both meaningful and efficacious. She wrote of Dogon theories of speech for example, "The word spoken sitting down is truthful speech; the words spoken while walking are speech without position (and therefore forgotten)" (1986:63-64). In a contemporary re-reading, one finds that Calame-Griaule's work reveals a conception of the types of linkages possible between sign relations and language and materiality. Although she does not explicitly call these relations semiotic, a development that was to emerge later in linguistic anthropology, her work reveals the types of linkages possible between language and the material world. And thus her work in some ways exceeds the ethnography of speaking, with its focus on neutrality, and can also be considered important reading in the field of language ideologies through its focus on ideas about language as political (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:59).

While *Ethnologie et langage* is cited as Hymes suggests, by contemporary sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, if only by an occasional footnote, in the theory laden field of contemporary American anthropology, ethnography is the missing subject. Calame-Griaule's

dialogic encounter with her interlocutors provides a possible alternative for producing a powerful ethnography, a genre essential to the production of anthropological knowledge, which need not be embedded in the techniques of power exercised by Marcel Griaule. First I will consider Calame-Griaule's position within the Griaule school and how *Ethnologie et langage* fits within the wider Dogon corpus. Here I suggest that her work made a significant departure from the Dogon camp by focusing not on language and cosmology but rather on language in context that is everyday talk. Second, I consider Calame-Griaule's work in relation to the emergent field of linguistic anthropology. I suspect that early ethnographers of communication—as suggested by Hymes—made only passing reference to her work because it was not published in English until 1985 despite shared influences across the Atlantic.³ But more significantly, her work may have been rarely cited in sociolinguistics because linguists remained primarily interested in speech internally, a point I return to below. Thirdly, I take up the subject of cultural and theoretical migrations between the French ethnographic imagination and American anthropology at the end of the paper.

Calame-Griaule and the Équipe Dogon

Much has been written to date concerning questions of power and ethnographic authority raised by the Dogon corpus (Clifford 1988) and I do not intend to rehearse that debate here. Yet little attention has been paid to what those associated with the Dogon school did contribute to the development of ethnology in France. Through a series of missions to sub-Saharan Africa, Marcel Griaule grounded French ethnology in fieldwork and strengthened its Africanist orientation. As early as 1928 under the aegis of Marcel Mauss and Marcel Cohen (a linguist), Marcel Griaule conducted research in Ethiopia (Clifford 1988:55). However widespread support, and thus funding, for further ethnographic missions was not secured until after the *1931 Exposition*

Coloniale in France, which fostered a fashion for things African in France. Funds were also raised for Griaule's next mission, from Dakar to Djibouti, through the Al Brown match, an international boxing match (Jamin 1991:90). The Dakar - Djibouti Mission lasted for 21 months, from 1931 to 1933. It was during this time that Griaule met the Dogon of Sanga (in present day Mali). Subsequent missions included: Sahara - Sudan (1935), Sahara - Cameroon (1936-1937), and Niger - Lake Iro (1938-1939). Griaule organized multidisciplinary teams of ethnologists, linguists, musicologists, archaeologists, naturalists and technicians to conduct extensive surveys collecting objects and ethnographic data from diverse societies over a vast geographic region in order to provide artifacts for museums and data for comparative research. Many of the objects, photographs, film and manuscripts were archived in the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro organized by George-Henri Rivière, and these missions came to constitute the basis of French ethnology (Clifford 1988:56). Griaule's Mission Dakar - Djibouti included nine researchers among whom were Deborah Lifchitz, Denise Paulme, Germaine Dieterlen, Michel Leiris, Solange de Ganay, André Schaeffner and Dominique Zahan (Clifford 1988:55). Though Griaule had many students and colleagues working in the region, Clifford distinguished the "core" of the Dogon School as consisting of Griaule, Dieterlen and de Ganay from other participants—Paulme, Leiris and Schaeffner—who were not persuaded of Griaule's totalizing vision of Dogon thought. Moreover, Jean Rouch and Luc de Heusch were at times complicit and at others critical of the Griaule tradition (Clifford 1988:57 footnote 1). In addition to promulgating the tradition of intensive field study, Griaule organized the *Société des Africanistes*, and the publication of their review, the *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*.

Calame-Griaule was born in Paris in 1924 (Chiche 1989:421) and first arrived in the field in 1946 at the age of 22 prior to completing her *licence* in Arabic at l'Ecole des Langues

Orientales at the Sorbonne. She entered an ethnographic and theoretical field that had not only been shaped by team Griaule but also by many colonial ethnographers and Arabists, most notably by Charles Monteil and Paul Marty, and linguists who had preceded her. While purportedly non-Muslim practicing societies became the domain of French ethnologists, simultaneous research had been conducted in the French Soudan by Arabists interested in both colonial administration and Muslim practices. In addition, colonial linguists had been working on the coast in present day Senegal as early as 1818; however, their work did not contribute to the Africanist tradition in France. The work of Jean Dard, David Boilat, Alois Kobès and Jaques-Françoise led rather to the development of the field of linguistics. As Judith Irvine remarked, these linguistic studies were essential to the ethnic identification and subsequent administration of the region (1993:27-8). And thus clearly, Calame-Griaule departed significantly from these early developments in France in her multidisciplinary interests in Arabic, linguistics and ethnology. Moreover, Irvine remarked that although French linguists such as Meillet, Vendryès, Cohen, Benveniste and Haudricourt, and ethnographers such as Mauss, Granet, Leenhardt, and Griaule, recognized the interpenetration of linguistics and ethnographic method, the two disciplines did not cross over until the 70s when ethnolinguistics in France emerged in contradistinction to sociolinguistics (1986a:556).

Calame-Griaule's first trip to the French Soudan followed the close of World War II in 1946 and lasted three months. She accompanied Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen and Solange de Ganay. It was during this trip that she met her primary interlocutor, Amadigné Dolo, with whom she would work for many years (Chiche 1989:421). It was during this trip as well that Marcel Griaule met the Dogon sage Ogotemmêli and it was upon these conversations that he based his analysis of speech in Dogon cosmology, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* (ibid:422).

Griaule urged Calame-Griaule to pursue a semantic analysis of key words underpinning the system of Dogon thought (ibid). Following her first foray into the field of Dogon speech, Calame-Griaule returned to her studies at Collège de France where she was influenced by the work of Benveniste, Freud, Mauss, Leenhart and contemporaries Dumézil and Levi-Strauss (ibid). Though she worked with a Dogon interlocutor while in Paris, Calame-Griaule returned to the field in 1954 to complete her doctoral research accompanied by her father. She returned again in 1956 and 1958, this time without Marcel Griaule, who had died in 1956 (ibid:423).⁴

Ethnologie et langage

Anthropologists have since continued to be fascinated by the Dogon corpus, which is both beautiful and impenetrable. Whereas Griaule was reticent to recognize that language was anything more than a reflection of a fixed, deep cosmological knowledge played out on the individual and social body, Calame-Griaule acknowledged that Dogon cosmological knowledge was culturally informed and revised through the operations of language. Further, Calame-Griaule worked to undo Griaule's assumption—that esoteric knowledge held by the elite members of Dogon society was the key to understanding Dogon theories of speech. In fact, she was far more interested in analyzing the speech situations that she encountered everyday in the Dogon context. Because both Calame-Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen consulted with society at large, Griaule may have de-emphasized this aspect of their work because the social position of their Dogon interlocutors did not merit anthropological attention.

Calame-Griaule eschewed the interrogative methods of her father. Rather, she moved toward a more dialogic engagement with her Dogon interlocutors reflecting Dogon thought, which depended on dialectics for its expression: “on this exchange of queries and replies that intermingle and weave together in a manner characteristic of traditional education” (Calame-

Griaule 1986:xvii). Calame-Griaule's theoretical comprehension of language in context emerged from ideas that the Dogon themselves relayed to her, that speech operated in a context of quotidian practice and its efficacy was dependant on the social position of the speaker and the institution. In this respect, Calame-Griaule's approach was more akin to the emergent shift in American Anthropology from a linguistic approach to speech that was concerned with the internal qualities of speech to a sociolinguistic perspective in which speech resides in a context that can be elicited through ethnographic research.

In her volume, *Ethnologie et langage*, Calame-Griaule gave theoretical weight to her residence with the Dolo family of the Dyon tribe in the Sanga region of Mali. She named four primary interlocutors: Yébéné, a totem priest, Ambara, an aristocratic intellectual, Amadigné, a younger individual who provided her with linguistic and literary material, and Manda, a theologian. She explained that only Yébéné appeared on Griaule's list of approved informants "possessing practically all knowledge" (1986b:31). Calame-Griaule added that in addition to regularly convening with these four interlocutors, she drew on chance speech encounters with Dogon speakers at large. Her method differed from Griaule in less obvious ways as well. She employed adaptations of her interlocutors' drawings in *Ethnologie et langage* and she also understood Dogon and was able to follow speech situations independently of her interlocutors and interpreters. Unlike Griaule, she quoted Dogon text to distinguish her analytical voice from the voice of her interlocutors.

Social position and the context of speech became an essential aspect of Calame-Griaule's ethnographic compendium of Dogon speech theories. She remarked herself that the theory of speech that emerged was not one that can be abstractly "found" among the Dogon; that in fact, it was a product of a series of questions and answers, of conversations back and forth which

emerged as the final text. Her work was well ahead of its time, if not in method, then certainly in its theoretical understanding of how cultural processes unfold and of language as a process. Although Griaule's work on Dogon speech broke new ground by achieving a deep level of knowledge, the knowledge that he obtained was expressed in his work only on a referential level. Griaule viewed language as a reflection of a fixed Dogon cosmology. Dogon esoteric knowledge remained the "native key" to understanding Dogon culture. Calame-Griaule, however, like Germaine Dieterlen, did not situate herself among the "experts," the bearers of this deep level of esoteric knowledge such as Ogotemmêli. Calame-Griaule was far more interested in documenting speech across society, in rituals and in quotidian practice: "I have taken little account of my informants' knowledge about myth, religion, or ritual except where the table of correspondences was concerned, or of their comments on the symbolic relations between things...one may speak of an implicit understanding of these diffuse notions that radiates through all levels of society" (Calame-Griaule 1986b:xv). By situating Dogon texts in their social contexts, Calame-Griaule's work broke new linguistic ground. Her work, in the Griaule tradition, conveyed the referential realm and its logic, but also reached toward the pragmatic realm, to argue that the meaning of the text could only be elicited from its social context. *Ethnologie et langage* can be recast at the level of pragmatics with particular attention to semiotic relationships of indexicality, the ability of language to point to the social world while simultaneously constituting it.

When *Ethnologie et langage* was initially published in 1965, linguists such as Roman Jakobson remained steadfastly interested in the efficacy of speech but only internally so. Few linguists were interested in speaking much less in the shaping of speech in cultural contexts (Hymes1986:vi). It was not until Dell Hymes published *The Ethnography of Communication*

(1964) in response to the Whorfian nomenclature, taxonomies and theories of linguistic relativity that dominated the work of linguists working in anthropology departments for the first half of the 20th century that anthropologists became interested in speaking in social contexts. The volume was more programmatic than ethnographic. In this signal volume Hymes sought to expand the study of language in anthropology (Duranti 2001:4). Rather than a narrow focus on grammatical structures, Hymes emphasized speaking thus claiming the study of language, the domain of linguistics, for anthropology and privileging the role of ethnography with its focus on context and communication between and among social actors. Moreover, for Hymes, the ethnography of speaking emphasized the diversity of speakers within a community, “a theory of speech as a system of cultural behavior; a system not necessarily exotic, but necessarily concerned with the organization of diversity” (Hymes 1971:51). Like Hymes, Calame-Griaule was not merely interested in Dogon grammatical structures; she showed the ways in which language can be culturally mediated in particular contexts and she emphasized the polyvalent quality of speech (Keane 1997:52). Her ethnographic material further extended beyond the mere consideration of speech to a discussion of the embodied aspects of speech and the dialogic nature of knowledge as it is conveyed through speech. Hymes remarked that Calame-Griaule’s work on how “cultural worlds” shape speech (1986:v) warranted further consideration as her ethnographic data represented a “standard of thoroughness” (Hymes 1986:v) in which language and speech acts are deeply contextualized in a social world.

Though Calame-Griaule did not define herself as a linguistic anthropologist or a sociolinguist; neither did many contributors to Hymes’s edited volume on the ethnography of speaking—among them Claude Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss (Duranti 2001:1)—as linguistic anthropology was yet an emergent field in American Anthropology. While Hymes was

publishing his call for an ethnography of speaking, Calame-Griaule was already in the field engaged in eliciting a Dogon theory of speech from particular social contexts. Her interest in a Dogon theory of speech in terms of the interrelations between speech and the person led her to claim that she could not elicit a Dogon theory of language at any single moment. Dogon themselves viewed their linguistic practices as developing through mutual exchange and thus shifting with each new encounter. In fact, *Ethnologie et langage* is striking for capturing the degree to which Dogon consider speech to be an exchange. Calame-Griaule attended to the ethno-metapragmatics of exchange by focusing on how “the individual creates words within his own body and psyche, how, by externalizing speech, he acts upon other bodies and psyches and so establishes the uninterrupted cycle of verbal exchanges which is at the root of all communication” (1986:xi).

Though Douglas argued that *Ethnologie et langage* did not fully consider the role of practice and failed to distinguish between the “ideal and the actual,” and thus provided a static account of Dogon speech theories (1968:23), Calame-Griaule’s work relates to later developments in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology in several important ways. First, as I have discussed above, she arrived at a theory of language that was highly dependent upon context for understanding meaning. A related point is the manner in which she understood the efficacy of speech to be related to the interactions between speaker, receiver and audience. Second, while linguists writing at the time that *Ethnologie et langage* was published assumed that social cooperation was the basis of speech and of speaking, Calame-Griaule’s ethnography made evident the degree to which Dogon were concerned with the dangerousness of speech (Hymes 1986:vi). Thus while linguists took cooperation as a given, Calame-Griaule’s analysis revealed that cooperation is an achieved state. Third, Calame-Griaule elucidated the role that

language plays in political economy; how different ways of speaking and differing levels of knowledge index social groups in a social division of labor, and how linguistic goods may become objects of exchange. Thus, it might be productive to read *Ethnologie et langage* in comparison to subsequent ethnographic and theoretical material concerning language and political economy in a West African context, notably that of Judith T. Irvine (1989) and also the more theoretical piece by Susan Gal on language and political economy (1989).

Calame-Griaule began *Ethnologie et langage* with a consideration of Dogon theories of speech, and then considered how speech figured in various social contexts. On this point there is extensive analysis by Calame-Griaule of the social contexts of language including speech and gender relations, speech in social life (greetings, emotions, social value of silence, aggression authority, accommodation, justice, teaching and secret language), speech and religion, the spoken arts (prose and poetry) and speech and nonverbal expression (speech and weaving and speech and music). Of note is the attention that Calame-Griaule gave to speech and social hierarchy. For example, in the section entitled, "Speech in Social Life," Calame-Griaule showed how speech reflected hierarchical relations in Dogon society, "at all levels of speech we find a multiplicity of precautions and rules to ensure that it continues to flow in the 'right' direction." (Calame-Griaule 1986b:683). She showed how speech and speaking produced hierarchies of age, caste and class. For Dogon speakers, she argued, the efficacy of speech was judged to be a function of the efficacy of a particular institution from which it emanated.

With respect to religious speech, Calame-Griaule departed from the perspective of most linguists who focused on social cooperation as the intuitive basis of speech. Calame-Griaule argued that dangerous aspects of Dogon speech resided in Dogon religious practice. In analyzing the ancestor cult, Calame-Griaule focused on its four dominant figures: Amma, Nommo, Lebe

and Yurugu (1986b:501). The cult of the ancestors, the relationship of those in Dogon society to their dead, was one of necessary homage as well as fear. As an example of dangerous speech, Calame-Griaule took up Amma, the God of creation: "Amma is the best word a person can utter" according to the Dogon, whose name is derived from the verb *ama* meaning, "to hold in his two hands." Amma's finger showed creation and his body blended with the universe (Calame-Griaule 1986b:498). In Dogon religious thought, Amma created life and Amma could extinguish life. Calame-Griaule stated that upon death the Dogon spoke of forgiving Amma, or resigning themselves to their fate. Although it may seem that Amma could be capable of error, Dogon speakers claimed that it was often the case that the fox was responsible for disorder. Moreover, disorder, Dogon suggested according to Calame-Griaule, was in the divine plan because it is essential to order (1986b:499).

Although there is a wealth of further examples of dangerous speech in *Ethnologie et langage*, the case of the taboo against uttering certain names for Calame-Griaule pointed to the dangerous quality of speech and its material consequences. Thus, she noted a taboo against speaking the ancestors' names. Dogon speakers conceded that while the dead should be respected for their contributions to Dogon civilization, they should also be feared as they are dangerous to the living, and thus they must be placated. For Calame-Griaule, the ancestor cult was the source of social production in Dogon society: "living are weighed down by generations of the dead," but that rather than give in to this force, they drew on its life force such that she viewed the fight against regression as driving social progression (1986b:502). In addition to Amma, who was the dominant figure in Dogon narrations of their cosmology, Nommo, the son of Amma, was an ever-present figure. Nommo appeared in tales of metamorphosis. In these tales Nommo could take the form of a horse, a ram, a calabash or a human being, especially a girl.

The image of Nommo caused fear because he lured people into the water “and at the call of the totem priest or the blacksmith their cadaver rises, nose and navel cut off” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:499). Additionally, the rainy season was the time of Nommo’s expansion. Nommo was often used in the plural in reference to a water hole—“the Nommos of this or that water hole”—and Dogon also spoke of rivalry between Nommo. However, according to Calame-Griaule, at higher levels of knowledge, Nommo was a singular entity. Nommo was dangerous not only because his power lie in providing water, but also because he had the ability to “drink” living beings. Calame-Griaule pointed to the duality of the name Nommo that constituted this dual ability of providing drink and drinking: “*nōmo* is the causative form of *nō*, to drink and means make drink or give [men] to drink, but it can also be understood as an offer of oneself for drinking” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:500). This last point became the basis upon which uttering the name of Nommo was taboo. Thus Dogon, according to Calame-Griaule would say the “master of the waters” (*dī: ba á*) rather than his name. Only the priest uttered his name. Nommo was viewed as powerful for other reasons as well: he was thought to be fertility and life itself, he symbolized the power to speak, and because he was sacrificed, the world was reorganized and thus Dogon men and women were indebted to him. Nommo was thought to be present in everyone—the ideal and dynamic part of the human nature in contrast to the fox that was thought to represent the regressive tendencies of human nature. Every human being thus had in them the Nommo and the fox. According to the Dogon, the cult of Nommo ensured rain and the provided water to the region while at the same time protecting the population from the danger of drowning. The priest of the cult was called “*bínu*’s fellow traveler” and served as the connection between Nommo and the ancestor *bínu*.

In addition to bringing the dangerous qualities of speech to the fore, Calame-Griaule's ethnography further elucidated the role that language played in political economy: how different ways of speaking and differing levels of knowledge indexed social groups in a social division of labor and how linguistic goods became objects of exchange. Much of the early linguistic work, drawing on Saussure, tended to see language in terms of structure, pursuing only its referential qualities (Irvine 1989:248). Calame-Griaule's ethnography revealed that language was not merely structural; it was embodied and produced in a certain context that was significant to understanding its referential qualities. She also showed that there was more to speech than reference. Calame-Griaule showed that if prayer was met with blessings, the Dogon judged that speech to be efficacious. However, in fact, the speech itself was merely a recitation; it was the institution of the speaker that indexed, pointed to and constituted the efficacy of the speech.

In particular Calame-Griaule showed how religious speech opened a cycle of exchanges (1986b:653). In a section entitled "Speech and Religion," she provided a rich analysis not only of the danger inherent in speech, with its indexical properties, but also how speech could become an object of exchange. Here Calame-Griaule was particularly interested in this category of social action because religious practice revealed the "role that speech plays as an active agent in the world of the sacred" (Calame-Griaule 1986b:504). The value of prayer was found in the efficacy of speech. If the prayer was met with blessings, such as rain or prosperity, Dogon judged the speech to be efficacious, or to be of value. Although prayers consisted of recitations, the power in the sacred speech derived from the position of the person uttering the recitation, such as the totem priest praying to Nommo and the Hogon praying to Lebe, another ancestor. As was mentioned above, this is an example of the important role that speech played in relation to social context. Recitations were inherited words and comprised a significant part of the knowledge

transmitted in the Dogon social world. In addition, the prayers were offered with food: “it seems that words and offerings have equal importance and mutually reinforce one another, their aim being to feed and water spiritual powers with contributions of oil, water, and seeds which the Dogon believe to exist in speech as well as in food substances” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:505).

Calame-Griaule suggested that among her Dogon informants prayer was thought of as an agent, as much as speech was thought of as an agent, that acts on the powers towards which it is directed (1986b:505). Calame-Griaule described the form of prayers made by the Dogon as establishing communication by uttering the name of the ancestor towards which the prayer was directed. Then the prayer could take on a particular theme, such as the survival of a new home, adding a new link to the chain of generations that has survived since the founding of the village. Calame-Griaule showed how Dogon mentioned the chain of ancestors to prevent the prayer from regressing, as well as future ancestors; for example the priest may say “give the man a wife and a child.” Finally, Dogon prayers took on a poetic quality because the style of the prayer was seen as essential to the efficacy of speech: “its aim [prayer] is to act upon the supernatural listeners in the way that a bard acts upon his human audience” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:507).

Calame-Griaule suggested that the phenomena of the exchange of linguistic objects in a market intended to produce results was not unique to the Dogon priests, nor was this linguistic phenomena unique to the Dogon. Further she suggested that Dogon themselves made comparisons between linguistic objects of exchange in various fields: “it is not we, but our informants who have drawn this parallel” (1986b:505) between the priest and the griot. She contended that Dogon considered the services received as a result of prayer comparable to the gifts the griot would receive for his “honeyed words.” Calame-Griaule maintained that the poetic quality of the words compelled the gifts.

Calame-Griaule then explained how the Dogon viewed prayer reaching its intended audience. Dogon claimed that their prayer reached Lebe first because “the earth is near to men,” followed by the ancestors because they were in the earth and then *bínu* and *Nommo*. Finally the prayer was to be transmitted by these figures to *Amma*. The words acted “on the ‘clavicle seeds’ of the supernatural listeners...their ‘seeds’ sprout, flourish and grow, a bit more at each new step. Only in *Amma* does the symbolic ‘millet’ reach maturity. *Amma* ‘harvests the ears’ and returns them to humans as favors in ‘response’ to the prayer. Yet this ‘response’ must pass down through the same intermediate steps, this time in descending order” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:508). The Dogon received the millet from each of these figures. However, the symbolic millet was transformed into actual millet. Millet was thought of by the Dogon as a sign of the divine favors that prayer bestows. Millet was the metaphor through which Dogon explained various social processes such as survival and childhood. Thus the cultivation, transformation, exchange and distribution of millet formed the basis of social relations in Dogon society: “Prayer, then, opens up a cycle of exchange between the human and the divine, an exchange which is structurally identical to the two terms of the message, that is, to the oration and the power invoked” (Calame-Griaule 1986b:509). The Dogon, Calame-Griaule maintained, said that the poetic quality of prayer, like that of the griot, induced and compelled its audience to donate gifts to the speaker. Thus the compelling quality of the speech produced the gifts and speech, in having produced material wealth, was efficacious. However, this process of exchange, Calame-Griaule argued, did not unfold by tapping into a pre-existing form of power. Rather, it was the very quality of this process that produced this power.

Here I suggest a re-framing Calame-Griaule’s work in terms of semiotic processes. How did the poetic quality of the words ensure efficacy and why were the gifts given in return

significant? In a chapter on poetics, Calame-Griaule explored the linguistic devices employed by Dogon speakers to render prayer efficacious. Her approach can be compared to that of Irvine (1989) who provides significant, semiotically complex ways of furthering Calame-Griaule's work through a focus on language and political economy and language ideologies. For example, Irvine not only pointed to the linguistic objects of exchange in the Wolof economy, in Northern Senegal where she conducted her fieldwork in the 1970s, but she also examined the linguistic devices through which those objects attained their value. Irvine argued that linguistic signs are not only a means of thinking about political economy, but that they are constitutive of it.

Calame-Griaule's analysis of the exchange of money for the efficacy of the priest's speech is an exemplar of this approach to language. As Irvine argued in her analysis of Wolof griots, this is only one example of language and political economy and the type of relationship that may be found.

To be properly understood it needs to be compared with others (1989:249). And it is here perhaps that we can productively read these two texts together, not so much because they have documented corresponding ethnographic patterns across Muslim Sahelian societies, (because I am not sure such widespread patterning can be proven), but rather because they share a common theoretical concern. Further, the productive comparisons that emerge from a sampling of these two bodies of ethnographic work reveal the possible material that may be gleaned from reading Calame-Griaule's work within this tradition.

The absence of Calame-Griaule from genealogies of linguistic anthropology is due in part to American Anthropology's own structural amnesia. She remains important for her work on myth, but not for her foundational work on language and culture. What is the history of language as it developed in American Anthropology whereby Calame-Griaule's work became but a footnote, usually in Annual Review articles? Unlike further developments in American

sociolinguistics as introduced by Labov in the 1960s, which employed the statistical analysis of data collected through interviews, Calame-Griaule relied on ethnographic methods that questioned “the cultural construction of sociological categories” (Gal 1992, 1995 cited by Duranti 2001:7), focused on “the definition of context as a constantly changing frame that needs reference to speech itself as one of its constitutive elements” (Duranti and Goodwin 1992, cited by Duranti 2001:7) and most significantly, unlike her father, Marcel Griaule, Calame-Griaule relied on interaction. She viewed language as the product of multiple numbers of speakers in a context that could not be elicited solely through interviewing. In contrast, *Conversations* relied almost exclusively on the interview method. Calame-Griaule diverged significantly in arguing as does Duranti (2001:7) that texts are often co-constructions, they have multiple authors though they may be presented monologically.

Conclusion

In this paper I sought to go beyond the critiques of Clifford and van Beek to reconcile a decade of critique driven anthropology in the late twentieth-century with the theoretical contributions of the early twentieth century ethnographic mission. Thus, this paper tries to balance anthropology’s earlier, colonial concern with the mandate of documentation and collection with its later concern with power and authority exercised in doing so under the guise of an impartial science. For the Dogon, the unbroken word is the form in which tradition is transmitted to the coming generations: “from mouth to ear knowledge unravels like a single unbroken thread across the whole length of human generations” (Calame-Griaule 1986:8). For the anthropologist the form in which its tradition is transmitted to the coming generations is not a single unbroken thread, but rather it is fraught with political concerns for the particular class, gender or beliefs of the practitioner. Though frequently this process leads to the censure of and

our distancing from certain forbearers in the field, there are times when we are bound to rediscover examples of anthropology to claim as our tradition.

The Dogon say, according to Calame-Griaule, that “stories are like a something they have no end [sic]. When one person has no more to tell, another takes it up. This is like the running of the world, whose end no one knows” (1986:viii). As Calame-Griaule took up the story line where Griaule left off, I have taken up the story that Clifford and van Beek began to weave concerning the construction of ethnographic authority and knowledge. However, I have taken this telling in a different direction. I have shown that not only does Calame-Griaule’s work relate to the movement towards the ethnography of speaking, but that further; it stands as a basis for comparative analytical work concerning speech. Calame-Griaule’s *Ethnologie et langage* merits placement on the list of essential twentieth century ethnographies of language. But this work is only a shift in the direction of a semiotic approach to language and society; it is not a work that is completely without flaws. *Ethnologie et langage* still lacks a historical dynamism. Although Calame-Griaule’s work is less amorphous than the great achievements of the Dogon corpus such as *Le renard pâle*, it still presents a picture of the Dogon social world that is too well ordered.

We do not want to discard the Griaule school because the “key assumptions, roles and systems of metaphors that empowered ethnography during the thirties and forties” (Clifford 1988:60) were tainted by colonial power. The elements that empower *Ethnologie et langage* today are not its authority to speak for or to represent its ethnographic subjects, but rather its semiotic perspective on language and the social world. Calame-Griaule tells us that the Dogon say that “fertility depends on the quality of the emotional relationship between the partners, thus ultimately on the nature of the words they exchange” (1986:680). Accordingly this ethnography reflects the quality of the relation between Calame-Griaule and her Dogon interlocutors and the

words they exchanged, which may perhaps provide a tenable solution to Clifford's conundrum of ethnographic authority.

Notes

Acknowledgements. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in 1998 as part of a panel “Beyond Predicaments: Cultural and Theoretical Migrations in the French Ethnographic Imagination.” I am indebted to readers of a much earlier draft of this paper including Andrew Apter, Emily McEwan-Fujita, and Rachel Reynolds. I would also like to thank my students in *Language and Culture*, a spring 2004 seminar at the University of Rochester, for their thoughtful reading of Calame-Griaule’s ethnography. I am grateful as well to the careful reading by the anonymous reviewers of *Anthropology and Humanism*. All errors and omissions are my own

1. See Apter 1992.
2. Apter (1991:213 note 2) cites key works of the Dogon school as Calame-Griaule (1965), Dieterlen (1941, 1951), Griaule (1938, 1948), Griaule and Dieterlen (1951, 1965), Leiris (1948) and Rouche (1960).
3. Interestingly, Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Keane (1997) cite *Words and the Dogon World* and not *Ethnologie et langage*.
4. Calame-Griaule was accompanied by her husband, Blaise Calame, a violinist with whom she compiled material on Dogon music, upon which one of her dissertation chapters is based.

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