Messages from my father-in-law: Indexing membership and proximity in long-distance voicemails

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Abstract

This is a linguistic anthropological analysis of 18 voicemails left by the author’s father-in-law on her telephone over 11 months. Semiotic analysis shows that the speaker incorporates his communications into his daily personal and religious rituals, evidencing a mode of discursively constructing and performing kinship relations and eliciting responses in imagined, or perhaps just slowed, talk-in-interaction. The speaker brings membership licensing, religious fluency, and social proximity necessitated by the bond of marriage. He leaves, with his voicemails, the self-renewing possibility of the strongest of future kin relations, despite being separated by a physical distance of over 2300 miles.

1. Introduction

What is my father-in-law thinking when he leaves voice messages on my phone on Sunday mornings? What is he doing with those voice messages? More importantly, what does he think he is doing with those voice messages? This paper borrows from the work of Michael Silverstein on indexical order and the link between the “macro-sociological” and micro “talk-in-interaction” (2003). I use this frame of semiotic analysis to replay 18 voicemails left over a period of 11 months on my cell phone in Arizona and Virginia by my father-in-law who lives in southeastern Virginia and whom I will call Jim.1

These messages, with durations ranging from 22 s to 1 min, 37 s, show that Jim incorporates his communications with me into his daily personal and religious rituals, which themselves do not cohere into distinctive or mutually exclusive categories. These communications are Jim’s attempts to participate in and affect me and my husband’s lives. Overlapping indices pervade the voicemails, showing that Jim is, perhaps in shorter increments than sociolinguists are used to, attempting to discursively construct and perform kinship relations and ritual practices, while also eliciting responses in a type of imagined—or perhaps just slowed—talk-in-interaction. These practices play out in a number of discursive devices visible in the transcripts, ultimately evidencing a tendency for Jim to elicit interaction and effectivity through relations sustained by his communicatory acts, which stretch to condense the 2300 miles that separate us.

Each voicemail follows a general pattern. There exist a number of discursive strategies and practices that voice a range of indices serving to connect the three of us (me, Landon, and Jim) to each other and to our relevant, shared kin network. Of the 18 messages, 17 were placed from Jim’s home landline and one from the landline at his church; 10 were placed on Sunday mornings, and most occurred between the hours of 4 a.m. and 10 a.m. his time. Message 13 seems to be one of the most

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1 I provide Jim a pseudonym to the extent I am able. I do not provide my husband, Landon, with a pseudonym. Since it is easily accessible knowledge that I am married to Landon, who is also in anthropology, it would be unfeasible for me to attempt to hide his identity.
representative, containing eight of the 13 discursive constructions I have combed out for analytic purposes (to be discussed further in Section 3).

Message 13

Date: Sunday

His time: 7:44 a.m.

1 Good morning Jonna Yarrington. This is Jim Yarrington, Landon
2 Yarrington’s dad. Just callin to: to be sure you- to remember to wish
3 God a happy birth- a happy father’s day. And to call your dad too. But
4 anyway uh you guys get up and go to church on father’s day. That’d be
5 a gift to me. I already talked to Landon’s answerin machine. So uh
6 anyway watch the mailbox and uh see ya in church. I’m prayin that the
7 “hounds of heaven”- that’s C.S. Lewis instead of he’d call it the Holy
8 Spirit he’d call it the “hounds of heaven”. I’m calling for the hounds
9 of heaven to keep buggin yall til yall give in to church. Alright.
10 Call me. Buhbye.

Though Message 13 was left on Father’s Day and all messages are not left only on marked days, it is still fair to characterize it as the most representative of all the messages for three reasons. First, it contains the introductory cluster (“Good morning Jonna Yarrington. This is Jim Yarrington, Landon Yarrington’s dad”) that is repeated, at least in part, in 17 of the 18 messages. This, after having known Jim for over five years, and after having been married to his son more than 10 months before this particular message was recorded. Second, Message 13 offers a glimpse of the religious language Jim wields in many of his voicemails, reinforced with quotations from pastoral messages, devotional, or the Bible (in this case, it was C.S. Lewis). Third, Jim is heard in Message 13 using “yall” as a second person address, with latent ambiguity in number. This is a common occurrence in the voicemails, along with “you guys,” a construct that I will argue covers the fusion of his two silent interlocutors, me and Landon. In this way, the meaning of marriage in terms of kinship relations translates into Jim’s discursive and symbolic practices.

Silverstein (2003) provides a position from which we may mine an ontological point that is transferrable to my analysis of my father-in-law’s messages. He argues for the key role of ritualization in propping up indexicality. “Guarantor” may be the most appropriate word for what Silverstein theorizes is the role of ritual in connecting the macro (i.e., ideological) to the micro (i.e., practices in, or instantiations of, interaction). In fact, for Silverstein, authority stemming from ritualization is the fundamental value that “appears to achieve self-grounding” and licenses indices by a “recurrent stipulative or ‘baptismal’ essentialization” (2003, 203).

In this paper, I argue that the three common characteristics of Jim’s voicemails—commenting on our shared name, using religious language, and discursively marrying his interlocutors as co-addresses—evidence that the voicemails are multi-layered in indexical meaning, but ultimately grounded in Jim’s ritualization of kin relations. First, I feel it is imperative for me to address the pragmatics of voicemail messages. Second, I present transcript data to illustrate Jim’s ritual sealing and resealing of our kin connection through emphasis on our shared name, religiously inclusive discursive strategies, and use of yall, you guys, and other modes of turning an addressee into a heterogeneous singular. Finally, I turn to Silverstein’s (2003) ontological point about indexical order to draw a broader conclusion about what my father-in-law is doing—or what we are doing together—when he leaves voicemails on my telephone.

2. The pragmatics of a voicemail

To analyze the 18 voicemails, it is necessary first to address the pragmatics of the voicemail message as a medium for communication and interaction. Some literature exists addressing voicemails linguistically and sociologically. Most recently, Mishler (2008) writes about the structure of voicemails, detailing what he argues is a recurring format of open-body-close. He notes the increasing use of voicemails for cell phone users, though the strict correlation he suggests previously existed between voicemails and service interactions is not immediately clear. “Voicemail [on cell phones] no longer serves just as a medium for service transactions; it is an important social channel through which relationships are maintained” (Mishler, 2008, 168). Hobbs (2003) looks at voicemail as a medium through which strategies of politeness are enacted; for her analysis, Hobbs draws data from voicemails left at a law firm.

2 Transcript Conventions: (.) = pause; , = lower pitch; ´´ = higher pitch; dash within a word (“talk-ing”) = emphasized syllables; bold = emphasis; repeated consonant (“annd”) = lengthened consonant; colon within a word (“annd”) = lengthened vowel; I = punctuated but not lower or higher pitch; underline = articulated separate words; ≃ ≃ = creaking; comment in brackets (“[swallow]”) = transcriber comment; ellipsis in brackets (“[…]”) = transcriber has excerpted a section.

3 It is outside the scope of this paper to delve into detail on the historical or present characteristics of my relationship with Jim which constitute “kinship.” Thus, in the interest of focusing on a linguistic anthropological analysis, I avoid detailing much about anthropological kinship (see Peletz, 1995).
Academic analyses were done in the 1990s on voicemails, when cell phones began to come into vogue. Often cited, it seems, is the work of Gold (1991), who writes of discursive devices that mitigate a situation where one converses without an interlocutor. Álvarez-Cáccamo and Knoblauch (1992, 474) wrote of the message as a “one-sided social action,” a moment in which “the course of action does not depend on coordination and synchronization of reciprocal action.” Dingwall (1992) writes of a preference for politeness displayed in voicemails, attributing the feature to the lack of opportunity for correction or repair inherent in the medium. Liddicoat (1994) points to similar strategies as compensatory for the lack of an interlocutor, as well.

Cultural anthropologists have been confronted with recordings and recorded messages as transmissions of behavior with socio-cultural causes and effects across long distances and/or spans of time. Notably, Karen Richman (2005) writes about cassette tapes sent transnationally from Haiti northward to locations in the U.S., which connect practitioners of Haitian voodoo to priests or priestesses (houngan or manbo) and other ritual experts in Haiti. On the flip side of being the recorder, Charles Hirschkind (2001) is notable for writing about ethical practices of listeners, who receive cassette sermons taped and exchanged in Egypt.

Is it accurate to analyze voicemails as communications or even discourse? Should these “turns” of discourse, if that is how we want to conceptualize them, be considered imaginary conversations or actual turns? Manning (2008) analyzes rants written by Starbucks baristas on the internet; he calls these rants “imaginary conversations.” Like Manning’s data, Jim’s voicemails fall somewhere between “imaginary” and “real,” since as talk-in-interaction they are really something more like a prolonged turn, or like turns broken by lengthened pauses.

A full analysis of voicemails may actually help to undermine such a dichotomy as between the real and the imaginary, which is in this case analytically rather useless. Pragmatically, the line between the real and the imaginary is non-existent because they are both recognized as moments of turn-taking by interactants or witnesses, as Manning notes for his rants (2008, 103) and as I will show in the metapragmatic maneuvering Jim and I depend on to organize our calls and messages. For all practical purposes, “imaginings [of talk] have real consequences for the empirical object [of talk]” (Manning, 2008, 102). For this reason, I use the terms “addressee” and “interlocutor” interchangeably. I also use Silverstein’s “interactant,” which facilitates semiotic description. While Jim is the speaker and the voicemail is his turn, it seems a clear and reasonable claim to also say that for all intents and purposes, Landon and I are each—and together—addressees, interactors, and interactants for Jim’s voicemails.

Goffman gives a foundational overview of “the management of turn-taking” in interactions (1983, 130; see also Goffman 1997). The turn has since been used as a unit for analysis. In Silverstein (2003), we see the extension of the unit of a turn into a unit of an “interval-instant” (2003, 195), which is ideal for the voicemail, itself both an interval-instant of sorts and a turn. By definition, because of the absence and immediate silence of the addressee, the voicemail cannot offer a response to itself. Only through the transparent actions of the speaker could any sort of response of an alter be devised in real time, without a return call or further interference (i.e., further interaction simultaneously with the voicemail, such as receiving an e-mail or text message, or a face-to-face encounter). In this way, the “mediated interactional discourse” of a voicemail (Mishler, 2008, 168) may be ideal for looking at strategies of identity formed in interaction.

Viewing a message as a turn, we may also consider that the message-receiver is perhaps the original initiator of the voicemail by not picking up the call, refusing the turn which answering would entail. This is George Costanza’s tactic in Seinfeld (Episode 4, Season 2), when he refuses to answer a call from his girlfriend and sets up a voicemail greeting meant to make him sound believably absent, though he is sitting next to the machine and can hear her message, thereby eliciting information from her, in a sense, without the obligation of interaction in real time. George listens as his voice sings on the machine: “Believe it or not, George isn’t at home. Please leave a message at the beep. I must be out or I’d pick up the phone. Where could I be? Believe it or not, I’m not home” (David and Seinfeld, 1991). Interestingly, this greeting voices a dilemma everyone imaginably could experience when setting up their voice mailbox—how, when forced with no particular addressee, to refer to oneself? Naming oneself implies a third-person stance but also necessitates a distance that may come across as stodgy or false.

In Jim’s and my case, I do not remember intentionally trying to miss his calls. Rather, my missing calls is more a function of the distance between Virginia and Arizona and the times we were each free to call. For 15 of the messages, I was in Arizona, between two and three hours behind Virginia time.4 Merely because of the time difference, Jim, Landon, and I have established a certain turn-taking mode that accounts for the difficulties of timing our calls. He calls early our time and leaves messages; we try not to call him back too late his time. His schedule is somewhat less flexible than ours because of the hours he works. This is our mode of operating not only with him, but with other friends and family members in Virginia as well.

Though we may categorize voicemail as turn-taking interactions, we should acknowledge the communicative constraints of the medium, since it is not face-to-face interaction. Practical constraints of communication exist in any context. As Manning notes, Goffman sees conversation analysis in general as isolating a series of universal “systemic constraints,” derived from “sheer physical requirements and constraints of any communication system” (Goffman, 1976, 265 quoted in Manning, 2008, 112). As such, Manning continues, “conversation is in this sense a ‘craft,’ a techne, a kind of ‘work,’ in the sense of being a technical set of procedural solutions to a set of natural problems of communication” (Manning, 2008, 113).

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4 Virginia observes daylight savings time changes and Arizona does not. Three messages were in the two-hour difference; all others were in the three-hour difference. This means, for example, that when Jim called at 4 a.m. his time, it was actually either 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. my time. See Appendix A for metadata on all calls.
What are the limiting conditions of voicemails? What is required of a message for it to “work”? These questions are particularly persistent in transcription and analysis of my father-in-law’s voicemails. I would like to make two notes about the conditions with which Jim is working. First, he does not use a cell phone but uses a landline that has caller identification. So when he leaves his home phone number (in three of the 18 messages) it is reasonable to think he may think I might not be able to remember, see, or save his number. In the language of semiotics, the presuppositions and entailments he operates with are shaped by the pragmatics of his turn and the facilitation of the next turn—more so than in “normal,” non-voicemail interaction.

My final point about limitations of voicemails is that the medium itself may be a looming intervening variable, in that my greeting may work to prime Jim to respond to it or prime him to otherwise use the words I have used. The greeting he hears when he calls may affect how he leaves his message, including priming for style, voicing, stance, footing, etc., keeping in mind the variety of indices these effects may impact.

My Voicemail Greeting

1. Hi you’ve reached Jonna Yarrington. Please leave me a message and
2. I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Thank you.

Not only might this suggest that Jim is primed to say my name, but most importantly it suggests that it cements his turn as a response to my greeting and my identity as a Yarrington, as one of his own family, with all that that entails. With this intervening variable in mind, the medium itself, we can give consideration to the other content of the messages which demonstrate that Jim brings considerable and interesting discursive devices and content to the messages.5

3. Jim’s kinship rituals

From Jim’s 18 messages, I found 13 discursive constructions. What I call discursive constructions are segments of messages (or chunks of discourse) that seem to get repeated in Jim’s various messages in particular combinations. Fig. 1 displays the type of construction with exemplar tokens of that type of the actual messages. It is clear that Jim’s messages generally consist in references to Yarringtons (me or him) or to other kin; instructions on practices, like getting up, going to church, and praying; religious speech that is generally summoning God either indirectly (through quoted speech) or directly (through access granted by prayer); content mostly consisting of news from home; and metapragmatic work referencing the call or message itself. It is important to note that I have included construction type L, reference to Landon’s mom who is Jim’s ex-wife, of which there is no token. I note it in the list to mark the conspicuous absence of this particular referent.

I will focus on three commonly occurring construction sets which provide linguistic evidence for the ritualization of kin relations. First, to demonstrate Jim’s use of naming and focus on “Yarrington,” I will pull evidence of construction types A, D, and E. Second, to discuss his use of religious language, data comes from construction types C, H, I, and J. Third, the evidence for Jim’s discursive marriage of his interlocutors, Landon and me, who are also married in real life, comes from construction types B, C, G, J, and M. See Fig. 2 for a visualization of the sets. In the meantime, in the transcripts I provide, there appears some of the other constructions and considerable overlap between the analytic units I have made (i.e., the construction types themselves) and overlap in sets of construction types. This multiplicity, I hope, will not undermine my analysis, but might further entrench the idea of multiple indices moving in multiple directions simultaneously by the behavior of one animator.

Jim makes it clear in nearly every message that I am a Yarrington, thereby binding our relationship as in-laws. In some instances, it is clear he considers himself to be reacting to the greeting that he has just heard.

Good mornin Jonna Yarrington. Still sounds good. (from Message 2)
Hey Jonna this is Jim Yarrington Landon Yarrington’s dad (.) your (.) father in law. (.) yeah father in law. (from Message 3)
Good mornin Jonna this is Jim Yarrington Landon Yarrington’s dad. It’s a joy to hear that (.) Jonna Yarrington on the answerin machine. (from Message 4)
Good mornin Jonna Yarrington. Every time I hear that I get excited. (from Message 6)
Good mornin Jonna Yarrington. That sounds good. (from Message 8)
Good mornin Jonna. This is- answering machine sounds good uh- Jonna Yarrington. (from Message 9)
Good morning Jonna Yarrington. This is Jim Yarrington, Landon Yarrington’s dad. (from Message 13)
Good mornin Jonna. That sure does sound good Jonna Yarrington by the way. (from Message 16)
Hello my favorite mwost favorite daughter in law. Hey! Jonna this is jim. (from Message 18)

5 It is also important to note that, although I am not entirely sure, it seems that Jim calls Landon’s cell phone before he calls mine. He leaves messages there too, which I have not asked Landon to listen to or analyze. Further fruitful analysis should be made in comparing and contextualizing a set of voicemails left for Landon with the set I analyze here.
The simple fact that Jim’s Yarrington sequence is at the opening of his messages would indicate either or both the possibilities of being primed by my greeting or the importance he feels or places on emphasizing our relationship from the outset. Apart from the priming, this may be the clearest evidence in the 18 voicemails that Jim literally ritually classifies me as his kin, both noting and enacting the borrowing of names that happened for me when I married into his family.

"Ritual" seems to be an ideal word to describe the overall use and tone of Jim’s voicemails. The line between personal ritual and group ritual becomes blurred, not only by the general pragmatics of the voicemail as an interaction, as noted, but also by Jim’s use of religious language. In previous work in anthropological linguistics, the study of religious language has grappled over the unstable dichotomy of personal and yet communal religious discourse (Keane, 1997). It is clear that Jim’s voicemails may be personal rituals, left at roughly the same times of the day, on the same days of the week. But they are connected to his attendance at church and often he, himself, connects his call to attendance at church by asking us to "get up, go to church." He voices the Bible and sometimes devotionals, in effect making some of my voicemails mini-Bible studies or moments of serious religious reflection. Messages 14 and 17 evidence these processes of interaction, bringing personal religious experience to a family-interaction level (viz., between us Yarringtons), and to a community-interaction level (viz., among members of a church community).

Message 14

Date: Sunday

His time: 7:03 a.m.
Jim draws us into his kinship network by weaving Landon’s aunt (Message 14, Line 17) and Jim’s brother (Message 17, Line 5) into religious content that requires membership and fluency in a community for comprehension and participation. In a Durkheimian sense, in which the spirit of the religious community transcends the presence of the community itself (Durkheim, 1912), the communities that Jim makes present are organized both in terms of kinship and religious affiliation.

The Oswald Chambers devotional from which Jim gets his Bible quotes for Messages 14 and 17 is arguably the material bridge that links the personal to the communal rituals. Jim is also known to use (and pass on to me and Landon) a devotional called “The Upper Room” (the title is a reference to the room in which Jesus held the last supper). When we receive care packages from Jim, there is always at least one page excerpted from an Upper Room devotional booklet. Each day in an Upper Room booklet has a title, a Bible verse, and one to two paragraphs of testimony by a person whose name appears at the bottom. There are various places in the booklet which refer to a website, where one can go to see pictures of the person who is testifying or of the particular story they are telling. (For example, if one reads a short story written by a husband about a sick wife, the link will update readers on the woman’s progress, show a picture of her and her husband, and give readers the
opportunity to comment.) Devotionals are useful for the purpose of bringing religious feeling, arguably a spirit of pure community (again, following Durkheim), into one’s own personal daily, often singular, rituals.

If Jim is enacting a marriage of personal ritual and community ritual in his Sunday-morning communications, he is also enacting another symbolic marriage, between Landon and me. He does this most obviously by the use of *yall* or *you guys*, but also in more subtle ways, sometimes by mistake (and repair), and on occasion with recourse to explicit metapragmatic talk about calls and messages. I offer samples from five messages, in each of which are construction types that instruct us two as a unit (B, C); make explicit the addressee/addressee combination (G); connect religiously to a dual-but-singular alter (J); or maneuver metapragmatically for a specific two-in-one alter (M).

In the segments, in various ways, it is clear that although Jim knows he is talking most likely just to me, he is also communicating through me to Landon and possibly with Landon at the same time. Treating us as a joint addressee allows for the completion of the symbolic marriage that had originally been a rite of passage and a change in our shared kin network.

**Message 4** (lines 11–13) is particularly interesting in that the content is not something I ever discussed with Jim, myself. Landon occasionally has the opportunity to talk with his dad about NASCAR races. The added content (“Got a car race tonight. . . . But that’s the little boys. The big boys are tomorra~”) occurs during and after the official closing moves (“Alright.” and “Talk to ya later. Buhbye.”). This out-of-place placement of this out-of-place content suggests that Jim is inserting it for Landon’s benefit, perhaps as a final thought he would have liked to leave on Landon’s voicemail.

The repair in Message 12 offers further strength to the idea that Jim marries Landon and me ritually and discursively in these voicemails. His *dude er- honey* may indicate that he is talking to us both, but does not come up with a direct plural addressee to use in place of what he might normally use, either *dude* or *honey*. He may have momentarily forgotten which voicemail he was leaving. Or, in a universe of multiple and ordered indices, the reality may actually be all of the above.

As Jim’s “most favorite daughter-in-law,” also his only daughter-in-law, in his messages, I am interchangeable and combined with his son. Jim might strategically use me as another way to get to Landon (“tell him to call” in Message 2, line 3; “he calls and says he’s gon call back but he doesn’t” in Message 3, lines 5–6; “can’t never get him to answer” in Message 4, line 2; etc.). Or he might decide to send us a joint message (“yall get up” in Message 2, line 1; “you guys aren’t in this flood” in Message 4, line 3; etc.). More than once, Jim changes a *dude* into a *honey* (Message 12, lines 4–5; also in Message 17 not excerpted here). This discursive marriage further cements my daughter-in-law status, which in turn re-justifies Jim’s messages anew.
4. Conclusions about long-distance speech

To bring Jim’s messages back into analytic focus, we must mine Silverstein (2003) to add texture and depth to our analytic concepts. Silverstein posits that indexicality requires foundational belief in essential characteristics. He asks where the authority in this belief comes from, in the search for the key to a truly dialectical understanding of interaction between sharing and contesting individuals. Silverstein suggests that,

It is, of course, the nature of what we recognize to be ritual, or at least relatively ritualized tropic invocation of essentializations (naturalizations) to make believers of us all. . . . Every macro-social framework in which micro-contextual indexicality is locatable seems to be centered on certain relatively ritualized manifestations of the indexical signs in organized configurations that license or warrant their occurrence elsewhere.” (Silverstein, 2003, 203)

The essentializations that are, at base, tautological and self-grounding are rituals in the sense that humans essentialize interaction. It is Durkheim’s project in another light—to question what it is that holds social interaction together.7

The sort of ritualization Silverstein refers to is a different type of ritualization than iterative or recurrent practices in some sociolinguistic phenomena, such as that described by Tannen (1994, 43) when she writes that conversation is a ritual, during which people expect ritual expressions at certain points of transition. Silverstein’s indexicality-grounding ritual is different because it is ritual in the sense of the roots of human basis for the indexicalities being summoned. This strong sense of “ritual” is not about the ritual of a conversation, as a habit or a routine (cf. Williams James on habit, James, 1896, 1975). Rather, it is the more fundamental, encompassing, and self-justifying ritual which might have more in common conceptually with the idea of Bourdieu’s (1979) “habitus” than of James’ “habit.”

By virtue of analyzing the semiotics of communication, necessarily built on signs from the foundations developed following Peirce and others, Silverstein uses the concepts of presupposition and entailment, which he writes are the two aspects that constitute indexical meaning. Presupposition is the aspect of “indexical ‘appropriateness-to’ at-that-point autonomously known or constituted contextual parameters: what is already established between interacting sign-users, at least implicitly, as ‘context,'” thus a sort of moveable a priori. Entailment, on the other hand, is the aspect of “indexical ‘effectiveness-in’ context: how contextual parameters seem to be brought into being—i.e., causally and hence existentially entailed—by the fact of usage of the indexical (Sin)sign [=token] itself” (Silverstein, 2003, 195). We might shorten these explanations to presuppositions as prior sharedness and entailments to effectivity in interaction. The question remains as to how it is human ritualization can ensure the prior and the effectuated.

With ritualization and the couplet of presupposition and entailment established theoretically, how might we find these in the data I have been provided by my father-in-law? Ritualization, simultaneously in both the weak and strong senses, of routine and naturalization, respectively, is played out by Jim as he cements and re-cements his and my identities in inter-action through leaving voicemails. For him, calling my phone and saying my name (often along with his and his son’s) as I have shown, is a routine and ritual for him, a way in which he passes his Sunday morning time and in which he re-establishes the use of daughters-in-law and fathers-in-law, with me and him standing as particulars. The same can be said of the inclusive religious language Jim uses. By involving me in his religious life, he invites me to participate in his family of both his kin network and his church network, which overlap. By interaction, he asks for participation, which would further naturalize our relationship; thus, the voicemails are self-grounding. Finally, Jim’s addressee strategies belie the authority he rests on my marriage to his son. Either addressing us jointly as yall or you guys, making a mistake and repairing it from buddy or dude to honey, or speaking directly to my husband through me, he marries us both ritualistically and routinely.

With presuppositions and entailments, it is useful to note what it is that Jim brings to these moments of interaction and what he leaves. By cementing kinship relations that are, at this point, presupposed, he brings a certain Yarrington membership licensing, a presupposed religious fluency, and an assumption of the closeness in communication that is necessitated by the social bond of marriage. It reminds me of my wedding. Upon entering the reception hall, three women approached me. Interestingly, one of these women was Landon’s ex-wife, whose conspicuous absence from all of Jim’s voicemail messages was noted above. Jim witnessed this event and has, perhaps, decided to continue the tradition of onomastic metapragmatic discourse.

So, what does Jim leave when he leaves me voicemails? As I have attempted to show in this paper, Jim leaves the possibility for the strongest of future kin relations. With every message he reignites the possibility of knowing me and my husband and affecting our future lives as a family. He leaves explicit invitations, “call me,” and instructions, “get up go to church,” and lets the justification for the voicemail imply further justification for a presence in our social space. Jim ritualizes (and routinizes) our kin relations to discursively participate in and affect the lives of me and my husband from over 2300 miles away.

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7 In his classic textbook on anthropological theory, Marvin Harris (1968, 467) writes, “While radical social science followed Marx into a consideration of what it would take to make the social organism fly apart, the conservatives, such as Spencer, Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski, busied themselves with calculations of the reasons for its holding together.” While Silverstein offers an ontology of non-requisite sharedness (and thus a sort of original position of possible contestation), I would still argue that his project within the scope of finding ways in which social life coheres, rather than fractures, The most apt theoretical comparisons may be Bourdieu (1977) on misconception and Gramsci (1975) on the terrain of struggle (that which it is agreed upon to contest). In linguistic anthropology, the concept that cries out for comparison is genre (cf. Hanks, 1987) or possibly ideas of “bivalency” strategies (Woolard, 1999).

8 Jim is demonstrating a process of making kinship present. Cf. Miller 1998, 35, who discusses consumerism and shopping in regard to the kin relations that are present in the consumer’s mind. I thank Landon Yarrington for bringing this similarity to my attention.
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Appendix A. Chart of Jim’s voicemail metadata

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message #</th>
<th>Jim’s location</th>
<th>Date (2013)</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Jim’s real time10</th>
<th>My real time11</th>
<th>My location</th>
<th>Message duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>17 Nov</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>6:44AM</td>
<td>4:44AM</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3 Nov</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>7:55AM</td>
<td>5:55AM</td>
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Appendix B. Incidence of discursive constructions in Jim’s voicemails

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References


9 All phones used by Jim are land lines with caller ID. Receiving phone is a cell phone.

10 To calculate respective times, I had to take two factors into account, our respective locations and daylight savings time changes in Virginia. Here are the details:
   • Virginia daylight savings: between Sunday 3/10/2013 at 2 a.m. and Sunday 11/3/2013 at 2 a.m.: Arizona is behind Virginia 3 h; before Sunday 3/10/2013 at 2 a.m.: Arizona is behind Virginia 2 h; after Sunday 11/3/2013 at 2 a.m.: Arizona is behind Virginia 2 h.
   • Daylight savings means: Call #1, Call #2, and Call #18 are in the 2-h difference range; the rest of the calls #3–17 are in the 3-h range.
   • However, from the dates 7/25/2013 (5 p.m.) to 8/24/2013 (4 p.m.), I was in Virginia, meaning the recorded time was Virginia time for calls #5–7, thus no real time difference.

11 Same as previous note (for his real time).