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Big and thin; two Diola-Fogny meta-linguistic terms¹

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ABSTRACT

The Diola-Fogny of Sénégal, West Africa, socially intuit with the meta-linguistic terms 'big' and 'thin' the tense/lax vowel contrast that is basic to their phonology. The two terms are primarily used to identify speech variation among individuals and groups. Examination revealed that speakers who made relatively greater use of vowel harmony were characterized as 'big' in contrast to others who were thought of as 'thin' speakers. The 'big'/'thin' distinction provides the Fogny with one means by which they place the speech of an individual. In addition, this meta-linguistic device either is used to express indirectly the social place of an alter *vis-à-vis* an ego in terms of simple sameness or difference, or, when more than two people are involved, in terms of some form of segmentary opposition. (Sénégal, meta-linguistics, social interaction, phonology.)

INTRODUCTION

The topic to be explored in this paper came up by accident. While reviewing my Diola-Fogny lexical files with a jury of three, one of the informants pronounced the negative infinitive of the root *-baj* 'to have' as *kabajati* rather than the expected *kəbajəti*. When I showed surprise at this pronunciation, AB, the informant, laughed, assuring me that 'we talk thin' (*uli nusanken mis*). The other two jury members (AK, KB) agreed, saying that they in contrast talk 'big' (*-kələ*). The distinction was not idiosyncratic to AB, for his exclusive 'we', *uli* (cf. the inclusive *wala(l)*), referred to the people of Bignona, AB's home town and the local administrative center, as well as to the people of several adjacent villages from which the original inhabitants of Bignona had come some seventy years ago. In contrast AK and KB came from outlying villages some 25 km. respectively to

[1] Material for this paper was gathered during my 1970 field trip to Sénégal and was supported by a grant awarded by the Joint Committee on African Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies. Early versions of this paper were presented at different times and places most particularly at the 1973 meetings of the American Anthropological Association and at a faculty luncheon (Spring, 1972) of the Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania. Generous comments offered at the latter function by Profs. John Fought, Henry Hiž, Henry Hoenigswald, Dell Hymes, William Labov, and Leigh Lisker were of great help in focusing my argument. I remain deeply appreciative of their interest.

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the NW and NNE of Bignona. Somewhat later it became apparent that KB, though considered by all a 'big' speaker, was in fact less of one than AK. We will have more to say about this as we go along.

The task was to find out exactly what my jury meant when they differentiated each other's regional accents by the meta-terms 'big' and 'thin'. Do the terms characterize clusters of features vaguely defined though accurately perceived or do they identify something more precise? The latter turned out to be the case, for the distinction *big/thin* referred directly, accurately and exclusively to an important and anything but vague contrast in Fogny vowel phonology. As such, it seems something of a novelty among ethnic meta-linguistic terms such as our Southern 'drawl', New England 'twang' and Scottish 'burr', or the Frenchman's characterization of Méridional speech as talking 'avec de l'ail' (with garlic).

Diola-Fogny is the northernmost dialect of Diola, a language spoken in the lower Casamance region of Southern Sénégal (West Africa). The Diola dialect cluster joins with several isolated languages to make up the Diola group, one out of three groups (Manjaku and Balant are the others) that form the Bak sub-group of West Atlantic, the westernmost branch of Greenberg's Niger-Congo super-stock (Sapir 1971; Greenberg 1963). Of all the dialects Fogny (called *Kujamaat* by the speakers themselves) is the most important in that it boasts over 80,000 speakers or one third of all the Diola, and along with the Kasa dialect of the Ziguinchor area, has something of the status of 'standard' Diola.

What is of interest here is variation within Fogny itself. This variation is most conspicuous in vocabulary, less so in 'pronunciation' and rather negligible in morphology and syntax. At no time does the variation impede mutual intelligibility, though communication between speakers from opposite ends of the Fogny area requires command of a fairly large passive (decoding) vocabulary. Not only is there variation in specialized words, for example *-fandanden*, *-fararen*, *-sararen*, *-yandanden* all glossing as 'winnow above the head, as with peanuts', but also high frequency words as 'room' which is *kajam* or *kalimbis*, and even with one of the personal pronouns, the disjunctive third person singular which can be *ɔ*, *akila*, or *umu*.

PHONOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE DEVICE

As noted, the distinction between 'big' and 'thin' talk has to do with accent or pronunciation, specifically with vowel phonology. Fogny has ten distinctive vowel phonemes (twenty if length is taken into account) which divide into two equal sets; one set, following Jakobson & Halle (1962), I have called 'tense' and the other 'lax' (Sapir 1965). Whether or not the tense/lax label is appropriate is an unresolved question. For a similar type of distinction found in the vowel systems of the Kwa languages, John Stewart (1967) came to the conclusion that the articulatory feature separating the two sets of vowels has to do with the position

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of the tongue root, where an 'advanced tongue root' produces tense vowels, and an 'unadvanced tongue root' produces lax. Stewart's analysis corroborated Ladefoged (1964), who had previously observed for Igbo (an isolated Kwa language) that, following X-ray tracings, the body of the tongue was always more retracted in the lax set. More recently Painter (1973), with respect to the Kwa language of Twi, also confirms Ladefoged in reporting from cineradiographic data that the tense set is characterized by a widening of the pharynx.²

What is obvious for all the West African languages so far observed is that the contrast in each case is different from what is described as tense or lax for European languages, where tense vowels have been shown to be peripheral, while lax vowels are always central with /ə/ being the laxest of all. This is not true for the African languages. Here a particular tense vowel is always relatively higher or closer than a corresponding lax vowel, with the difference between respective high vowels being small and difficult to hear, but considerable and immediately apparent for the lower vowels. Thus Fogny has:

tense	lax
i	i
e	ε
ə	ɔ
o	u
ʉ	a

Coupled with the tense/lax distinction is a general harmony rule that marks the tense vowel such that in contact with tense vowels, lax vowels become tense, i.e. L > T/T. For Fogny harmony operates retrogressively in verb and generally in noun inflection and in verbal and nominal root derivation. Thus:

- panalaan* 'he will return'; *pənələənɪy* 'he will return from'
- nabajebaj* 'he always has'; *nəbajeobaj* 'he always has from'
- kasinsɪnək* 'the basket' (*ka* (class marker) + *sinsɪn* + *ək* (determiner))
- lɔk* 'to cork, stop up'; *-lookɪl* 'to uncork, unstop'
- bajən* 'cause to have'; *-puren* 'cause to leave' (*-pur* + *ən*)
- lib* 'to slice'; *bylibum* 'cuts, slices' (*bu* + *lib* + *um*)
- ateba* 'builder'; *afəənə* 'joker' (*a* + *fəən* + *a*).

Of the various assimilation rules operating in Fogny morphophonemics it is harmony that is the most 'superficial' in that it is always the last to be applied. A short example will make this clear. The verb *-jɔl*, 'to come' is derived from *-jaw*, 'to go' plus the suffix *-ɪl*, 'towards the speaker' and takes its form because of the assimilation rule: *-aw* + back vowel + (C) > ɔ(C). Now if the harmony rule operated first we would have had **-jɔl* rather than *-jɔl*: *-jaw* + *ɪl* would harmonize to *-jəwɪl* and then reduce to **-jɔl*. This is never the case though since the assimilation is optional we can have *-jəwɪl* as an alternate to *-jɔl*.

[2] Mr. Steven Greenberg of the University of California is currently making a preliminary acoustic analysis of the Fogny vowel system and plans to publish an account of his findings in the near future.

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It became immediately obvious that the distinction made by my informants between 'big' and 'thin' referred directly to the tense/lax contrast in Fogny phonology. First, note that 'thin' is *mis* with lax /i/ and 'big' is *kələ* with tense /ə/. Alternate terms have the same *i/ə* contrast: *tiiti* 'small' / *əmək* 'large'. But more important: to illustrate and further elaborate what they meant by *mis* and *kələ*, the informants pointed to a system of sound symbolism that operates in Fogny. Like many other African languages, Fogny has a large vocabulary of qualifiers, called *ideophones* by many Africanists (e.g. Williamson 1965; Samarin 1967), that are often onomatopoeic and that serve to modify in particularistic ways both nouns and verbs. Frequently these ideophones come in sets, most often pairs, with one considered as being 'more of', 'larger than', 'bigger than' the other. Of the pairs many are distinguished by way of the tense/lax contrast with the 'bigger', etc., always taking tense vowel. A good example, and the one volunteered by my informants, is: *jiker jelelel* versus *jiker jelelel*. The verb *-jiker* glosses as 'look out, at; regard' and the ideophones refer to the glow or reflection in the eyes moving back and forth when they are caught in a beam of light. Thus *ebe ejiker jelelel*, 'a cow looks with glowing eyes', but *ejamen ejiker jelelel*, 'a goat looks with glowing eyes' (also a cat, monkey).³ Some other examples:

- sanken paj paj/pəj paj*, 'to speak with high loud voice/deep loud voice'
- baak jakab/jəkəb* 'be very tall/very tall and large as well'
- tiger jarak/jərək* 'break off sth. with a snap/with a crack'.

QUANTITATIVE BASIS OF CATEGORIZATION

If reference to their language's ideophones permitted my informants to indicate what they meant by 'big' and 'thin' sounds, it by no means allowed them to state

[3] This kind of sound symbolism might come as a surprise in that the tense and relatively high and close sound is associated with largeness rather than smallness and is thus in sharp contrast to the extremely frequent and so called natural symbolism that has things the other way around: small and proximal taking close vowels, big and distal taking opening vowels. Actually Fogny makes use of this latter type of symbolism in the demonstratives *taate/taata* 'here'/'there' (etc.) as well as in the ideophones themselves where it is frequently used in combination with the tense/lax distinction. When the two combine they never contradict each other. One always has relatively close and lax vowels going with smallness, etc., and relatively open and tense vowels going with largeness. Thus:

water flows *sililil/sələləl* 'in a narrow stream/in a gush'; noise of a crowd that is *wənjor/wəjor* 'thin noise of women and children/big, thick noise of hunters, warriors, of men'

And the three term series:

pəkəs/pakəs/təkəs referring respectively to the breaking of a small/medium/large sized clay pot.

At no time do we find the big/small contrast being represented by such hypothetical forms as **bin*/**ban* or **ban*/**bīn* (+ tense, - open / - tense, + open or the reverse), only *bin/bən* as with *mis/kələ* (+ tense, + open / - tense, - open).

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how they identify one person as speaking 'big' and another as speaking 'thin'. All Fogny speakers make systematic use of the tense/lax contrast in their speech and at no time will we find a speaker who pronounces all words with only tense vowels, nor will we find someone else who does the reverse. The situation is subtler. What permits a Fogny speaker to classify someone's speech as 'thin' or as 'big' has to do, not with any absolute either/or criteria, but rather with a *quantitative tendency* of a speaker to favor lax or tense pronunciation. Investigation revealed three tendencies. In order of increasing importance they are:

(1) *Vocabulary*. As I mentioned, there is a considerable amount of sub-dialect or regional variation in Fogny vocabulary. In most cases the variant forms are distinct from each other such as the forms cited for 'room', *kalimbi* and *kajim*. However, cases that involve slight variation are not infrequent, as *-gənor* and *gəlor*, 'act slowly (where speed is necessary)'; *kaleja* and *kalega*, 'wing'. In those instances where variation is slight and where the variation is determined by vowel quality that makes use of the tense/lax distinction, it was always observed that the thin speaker (AB) used the lax while the big speaker (AK) used the tense variant. The variants used by KB who was intermediate in his pronunciation (thin *vis-à-vis* AK, big *vis-à-vis* AB) were sometimes tense, sometimes lax:

AB, thin	KB, intermediate	AK, big	
-kuuk	-kook	-kook	'take big handfuls of food'
-kuntajən	-kuntejen	-kuntejen	'to kneel'
bəgəri	bəgəri	bəgəri	'money'
-məp	-məp	-məp	'shinny up a tree'
jifaruba	jifaruba	jifarubə	'storm, refers to tree movement'

Interesting as this kind of variation is, it is hardly sufficient as a diagnostic trait. The relevant vocabulary consists of a limited number of generally low frequency words and one can easily imagine huge segments of speech where not one of the critical words would be used.

(2) *Suffixes*. Of much greater frequency are three suffixes that have regional alternates defined in part by the tense/lax contrast. Paralleling the variation in vocabulary the thin speaker used the lax alternates while the big speaker used tense variants for two of the suffixes and for the third had two alternants, apparently in free variation, of which one was tense the other lax. As with the vocabulary the intermediate speaker fell in between using one tense and two lax variants:

AB, thin	KB, intermediate	AK, big	
-ati	-ət̪i	-ət̪i	negative infinitive
-ɛrit	-ɛrit	-yrit	'never'
-uli	-uli	-ol̪i ~ -ɔli	1st person plural exclusive

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As we saw at the start it was the negative infinitive, *ati/oti*, that set off this investigation in the first place.

(3) *Harmony*. Although the three suffixes are high frequency morphemes, they do not in themselves provide sufficient criteria, even when coupled with vocabulary variation. My informants were able to place someone as being either a big or a thin speaker immediately and without waiting for a diagnostic morpheme or lexical item. Something more pervasive was at play, and this was vowel harmony.

Careful attention to actual speech reveals considerable variation between speakers in the application of harmony. The general rules outlined above are in a sense ideal and mainly reflect the speech of big speakers with whom I did the bulk of my grammatical research. Variation in harmony responds to two intertwined factors. First, the extent of harmony: a tense morpheme affixed to a lax form may or may not affect all of the latter's vowels. Some speakers tense the entire form, others only the adjacent vowel; *pənəkəndo* or *panəkəndo* > *pan* + *a* + *kan* + *do* ('he will put it within'). Secondly, the degree of harmony: lax vowels may only partially tense, that is, they may become tainted with tenseness, not completely tense. This latter factor is of course irritating to someone who takes seriously the absolute nature of segmental phonemes. Granted that the tense/lax distinction is fully operative in the underlying phonology, the harmony of actual speech belies its validity on the purely phonetic level. Is [*d*] in *pānkāndo* tense or lax, or is it somewhere in between? What this seems to indicate is that harmony is not rooted in the phonology per se but is instead something apart and akin to supersegmental features. To make a vague metaphor: a tense vowel does not convert a lax vowel to tenseness, it rather casts its own tense shadow across it. With some speakers the shadow is long and dark, with others it is short and light.

Taking the distinction between *a/ə*, which is the easiest contrast to hear, along with the intermediate *d* (a slightly raised and partly tense *a*) the following points of variation were observed:

(a) *Nouns*. Nouns are always pronounced with a class prefix and optionally with a determiner or a possessive suffix: *a* + *sek* + (*aw*), '(the)woman', *ku* + *sek* + (*ə*), '(his) wives', etc. All speakers will harmonize both prefix and suffix to match a tense root: *ka* + *cim* + *ak* > *kəcimək*, 'the song'. However, when pronouncing very slowly, syllable by syllable, AB, the thin speaker, would often forego harmony altogether: *ka sɪnsɪj ak*, 'the basket'. This is in striking contrast to 'normal' slow speech, where harmony for all speakers is greater in degree and extent.

(b) *Derived noun and verb stems*. When formed from a root plus one or more derivative suffixes, these forms always inflect as a unit exactly as a simple root. When the derivative suffix is tense and the root is lax, the derived form becomes

tense for all speakers: *-baj*, 'have', *-elĭ* 'early, immediately' > *-bajelĭ*, 'have early'. There is one interesting variation (the only one observed) and it concerns the thin (AB) speaker. In verb emphasis inflection the root or root plus derivative suffix is reduplicated: *nakankan* 'he made (it)', *nakanenkanen*, 'he caused (it) to be made'. For the derived *-kanelĭ*, 'do, make early' (*-kan + elĭ*) AB had two variants, the expected *nəkanelĭkanelĭ* (the construction shared with the other speakers) as well as a reduced form where the initial *elĭ* becomes *e* and harmony is weakened so that the bound subject *na-* 'he' remains lax: *nəkənekanelĭ*. AB goes further. When he infixes the object pronoun *uli*, the *e* detenses becoming ϵ (thus *elĭ* > e > ϵ) leaving only the reduplicated base form as tense: *nakanεulikanelĭ*, 'he did (it) for us immediately'. The two other informants always gave the expected *nəkanelĭy-ĭkanelĭ*.

(c) *Tensed inflectional suffix -y ~ -yl and the postclitic do*. Following the general harmony rules established for big speakers the addition of the tense suffix *-y* (or *-yl*), 'hither, towards the speaker, at a place other than here' or the postclitic *udo*, 'in a place' (cf. *tɔ*, 'at, on a place')⁴ will tense the entire verb construction to which they are affixed. Take the future construction *pan* + subj + verb as in *panalaañ*, 'he will return to', and *panakan* 'he will do, put', and the verb emphasis *nakankan*, 'he did (it)' and the big speaker gives us:

<i>pənələñy</i>	'he will return from'
<i>pənəkəndo</i>	'he will put (it) in' (cf. <i>panakantɔ</i> 'he will put (it) there')
<i>nəkənkəndo</i>	'he put (it) in' (cf. <i>nakankantɔ</i> 'he put (it) there')

Tensing will also apply to the connective prefix *man-* 'and, so that', as in *manaboñ*, 'and he sends (s.o.)', which becomes:

mənəboñy 'and he sends (s.o.) from'

When a verb construction has a long base verb (three syllables for example) the harmony engendered by a tense suffix does not manage to tense the entire construction, even with the big speaker. In the future construction it applies after initial stress, with what precedes only becoming tainted. Take *-kankanɔr* 'shift for oneself, se débrouiller':

pānkū'kənkənory 'they will take care of themselves there' (where *ū* is intermediate between *u* and *y*)

The thin speaker never applies the blanket tensing rule but instead uses harmony that is reduced both in extent and degree. At most the *-yl* suffixed to a future or connective (*man-*) construction will tense the adjacent root and taint

[4] The syntax of *do*, *tɔ*, *bɔ* etc. is such that they cannot be thought of as inflectional suffixes (Sapir 1965: 8off).

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the prefixes. At times it will only tense the root. The connective *man* apparently is less affected by tensing than the future *pan*. In future constructions built with a long base verb the *-yl* suffix will affect only the preceding vowel. The postclitic *do* has less of an effect than the *-yl*. Sometimes, especially in slow speech, it will match the *-yl*, otherwise it will only taint the verb root and perhaps the subject prefix.

pánáləñyl

manaləñyl

pánəkəndo in slow speech, otherwise *panəkəndo* or even *panəkəndo*

pankukənkənoryl

The intermediate speaker falls in between. Like the big speaker his *-y* suffix tenses the future *pan* and the connective *man* prefixes. However when the base verb is long the *-y* suffix tenses the verb but not the prefixes. The case is the same for *do* in future constructions. *Do* used in verb emphasis will either tense or just taint the reduplicated verb, having no effect on the initial part of the construction:

pənələñy

mənələñy

panəkəndo

nakənkəndo, nakəkəndo

pankukənkənory

(d) *Infixes o*. The ‘hither’ marker (seen already as *-y* or *-yl* in future or *man* constructions) takes the form *-ul-* in verb reduplication: *nabajulɔbaj*, ‘he had from there’. In this construction when *-ul-* combines with the habitual *ɛ* it reduces to tense *o* (mistakenly described in my grammar as *-y-*, 1965:53). The effect on harmony of *o* varies. The big speaker retrogressively tenses what precedes and taints or even in slow speech tenses what follows. The intermediate speaker will generally only tense the initial base verb, though in slow speech he will tense the subject prefix as well. The thin speaker retrogressively tenses the *ɛ* and taints what precedes.

Thin *nábəjeobaj* ‘he always has from’

Inter. *nabəjeobaj*; in slow speech, however: *nəbəjeobaj*

Big *nəbəjeobáj*; in slow speech, however: *nəbəjeobáj*

(e) *Cross word harmony*. An inspection of sample texts reveals the big speaker retrogressively extending harmony across word boundaries:

mən kəgungytək kal (man > mən), ‘so that the k. fruit will ripen’

... *kən kəcimək (kan > kən)*, ‘... did a song’

... *nən ənɪnəw (nan > nən)* ‘... when the man’

... *bacoty bəndo (bacotu > bacoty)* ‘... weaverbirds were in there’

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Neither the intermediate nor the thin speakers appear to do this, although in one recorded instance the former started to extend harmony progressively but then stopped and corrected himself:

pənələñny də . . . dakar, 'he will return from Də . . . Dakar'

These examples (a–e) hardly exhaust the possible types of harmony pattern that exist with my informants, nor do they permit the formulation of anything like usable variable rules. To achieve such precision and generality would necessitate the careful analysis of extensive corpora obtained from a variety of different speakers. Nevertheless what has been presented here amply demonstrates the point I wish to make: variation in harmony, in contrast to lexical or allomorphic variation, represents the principle criterion by which Fogny are able to place speakers as being thin or big. Harmony is a pervasive aspect of speech where in all cases the thin speaker makes less of it than someone designated as big.

CULTURAL USES OF THE CATEGORIZATION

'Big' and 'thin' (*kələ* and *mis*) identify both sufficiently and exclusively a basic distinction in Fogny vowel phonology. Of itself and especially in comparison to other meta-linguistic terms encountered in native vocabularies, this precision is indeed notable. In my grammar I made the remark that 'when tense and lax vowels are compared one against the other the contrast is so great that one's immediate impression is that they represent the sound systems of two unrelated languages' (1965:4). Setting aside my inter-lingual exaggeration, it appears that Fogny speakers themselves share this impression. With reference to ideophones founded on the tense/lax contrast and indicating larger versus smaller qualities this 'native intuition' about phonology has been socialized to the extent of being lexically defined. But the Fogny do not use their terms *kələ* and *mis* to talk about phonological competence per se, but rather to entitle the speech performance of specific speakers or groups of speakers. They take from underlying phonology a discrete distinction and apply it to the non-discrete continuum of variation that runs from one end of the Fogny speech community to the other. They manage the transfer from 'discrete competence' to 'relative performance' by way of comparison. Someone's speech is 'thin' only when it contrasts to the 'big' speech of someone else. It is never absolutely 'thin' nor absolutely 'big', for as mentioned already, to say that would imply the absence of either tense or lax vowels in a particular person's speech.

The ability to designate an accent as being relatively thinner or bigger represents one criterion (vocabulary variation being another) permitting a Fogny to place another's speech. In turn placing someone's speech is itself one of many ways by which an alter can be socially placed *vis-à-vis* an ego. And as with so

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many acephalous and egalitarian societies, the closer alter is to ego the more reliable and trustworthy, or at least predictable, that alter will be.

Trustworthiness and predictability of speech is defined in terms of clarity, goodness and by implication purity. To the Fogny a 'good' speaker will always be first and foremost a home body and then secondarily someone who uses the resources of the language to its fullest. Home speech is prestige speech and is to be exalted over non-home speech, and it is rare that anyone will accommodate himself to another's accent or way of speaking.⁵

Although it will lead us momentarily from our discussion of 'big' and 'thin', let me give some brief illustrations of loyalty to home speech. A personal anecdote: I started, first in Dakar and then *in situ*, to learn the Fogny of Sindian (KB's village). There the words for 'room', the disjunctive 3rd person singular, and the disjunctive 2nd person possessive are respectively *kalimbis*, *akila*, and *-iya*. I dutifully learned these forms and carried them with me when I moved to set up permanent residence in AK's village of Jipalom (a pseudonym). After a short stay polite pressure to correct my speech was brought to bear as when I'd say something like *kalimbisak kiya kɔkɛ* ('your room is here') whereupon someone would interject *nane*, *kacimak kɔli kɔkɛ* ('he said, your room is here'). My obstinate loyalty to Sindian speech (are we talking about universals?!) continued until a woman openly complained to me that I always insisted on Sindian forms. 'Say *umu*, not *akila*; *kacimak*, not *kalimbisak*; *kɔli*, not *kiya*.' She went on, 'the speech of Sindian is "heavy" (*-lebi*), hard to understand (sic) and we of Jipalom don't talk that way'. But heaviness and the ability to understand was very much a relative matter. Truly, for to my knowledge no one from Jipalom ever has the slightest difficulty in fully understanding Sindian speech, nor the reverse. At this level 'hard to understand', meant simply that it was different, not 'our way'. The conversation continued. Although Sindian speech was heavy it was not nearly so heavy as Kasa, a different dialect where there are some real difficulties. In turn Kasa was not as heavy as Wolof, the dominant language of Sénégal, nor was Wolof as heavy as French. English, my speech and the official language of the neighboring ex-colony of Gambia, was to this woman unquestionably the heaviest speech imaginable, just *kakakakaka* like so many pied crows.

Loyalty to one's own speech came up during the course of my lexical research. I had purposely chosen my jury from different areas of the Fogny region in order to gain a better perspective on the dialect as a whole. Usually different forms with the same meaning, or different meanings for the same form were simply noted as such. However, arguments would occasionally develop especially

[5] This refers to intra-dialect accommodation. In contrast when speakers of different Diola dialects come in contact an effort will usually be made to accommodate their respective speech. When KB accompanied me during an extended period in the Kasa dialect area he quickly picked up and actively used the vocabulary of our hosts and even went so far as to make the $p > f$ and $f > h$ sound shifts that separate the two dialects.

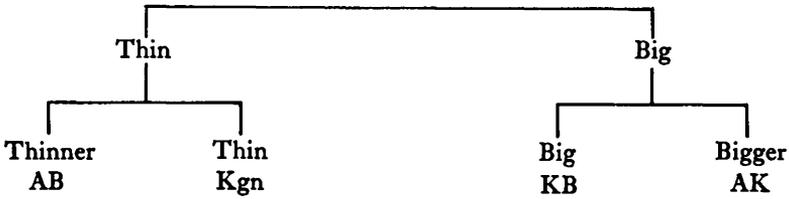
over shades of meaning for the same form. I recall one particularly violent argument that centred on the word *balanjɔr*. According to AK and AB it meant 'to step off the path in order to defecate'. KB thought differently, for to him it meant more generally 'to step off the path to do something in private', which might be to defecate, but could also be to do something else. KB explained further that *balanjɔr* was often used as a euphemism for the general word *basan*, 'to defecate'. In the ensuing argument that lasted a good half hour AK insisted without deviation or compromise that KB was wrong. *Balanjɔr* meant precisely and only one thing, 'to step off the path in order to defecate', and nothing else. Further it was never used as a euphemism for *basan* . . . 'who needs to hide the word? If you have to defecate you say so, it's as simple as that'. The upshot of the argument was that Sindian speakers made fuller use of euphemisms and euphemistic phrases than did other Fogny who felt compelled to avoid only one word, and that only in cross-sex or cross-generation contexts. The word was *esak*, 'to copulate'.

The ultimate motivation prompting the argument in the first place lay quite beyond the realm of linguistic correctness and had to do with the conflicting personalities of the parties involved (AB kept scrupulously out of the fracas) and need not concern us here. What is of interest, however, is that regional loyalty to a particular definition of a word provided a fine pretext and vehicle for a dispute.

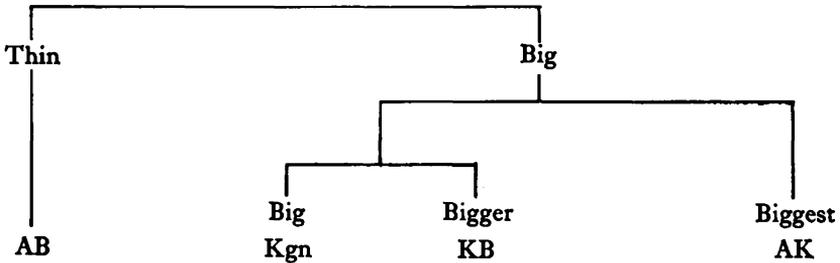
When a third party is involved, linguistic placement becomes more complex, for it brings into play the process known to social anthropologists as segmentary opposition. Briefly, A and B are of different groups that are structurally opposed, say by membership in two segments of the same clan; with the Diola, who do not have corporate clans, they might each represent different wards of the same village. Their complementary and opposing positions permit disputes between the parties (A and B). However, when one or the other confront a third party, C, who is of a different clan or village, the two disputants, A and B, align together in opposition to C. That is, two who are opposed in some contexts come together in others to face the common enemy (cf. Bohannan, 1958 for some striking examples).

Two instances from my work with big and thin accents provide examples of this kind of segmentation, though here it involved only alignment and had nothing to do with actual disputes. Recall that at the beginning AB said he spoke 'thin', while AK and KB said they spoke 'big'. But it turned out that rather than being 'big', KB was somewhere between AB's thinness and AK's bigness, and nothing in the linguistic material suggested that KB was nearer to AK than to AB in speech. Nevertheless KB chose to call himself a 'big' speaker and the others agreed. The reasons for the choice were not linguistic, but social and entirely obvious. AB was a Catholic, from the administrative centre, older and a relative stranger to the project. In contrast both AK and KB were Muslims, from the

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AB saw things differently. Although he admitted that Kagnaru might speak 'thinner' than Sindian they were both 'bigger' speakers than himself and he saw no reason why he should be grouped with them. And socially, didn't the Kagnaru people intermarry with Sindian and quarrel with villages connected to his own family? And weren't they for the most part Muslims? To AB therefore the social segmentation was rather more like:



Thus there is always the possibility of variation in social placement. It is essential to know the grounds for differentiation. Are they based on religious, age, sex, kin, geographic, linguistic differences? Further the grounds will vary with the immediate context. Is it expedient at this nonce to align myself with *X* rather than with *Y*? If it is and if *Y* is a Muslim like myself, while *X* is not, then something other than religion must be appealed to . . . perhaps kin links or geographic propinquity. From my experience with the Fogny to talk about speech differences is almost always an indirect way to talk about other, primarily social, differences. Conversation about speech is seldom just about speech. Even in the context of my lexical project, where meta-talk was the order of business, speech variation very frequently if not always, became a means for expressing social placement. AB was a 'thin' speaker, while KB and AK were 'big' speakers even though there was no linguistic reason for saying KB was 'big' rather than 'thin'. The reasons, as I argued, were social. Of course to use speech to talk about social differences necessitates an objective correlation between the two codes or levels of discourse. The big/thin distinction permitted the alignment of KB with AK because KB was the intermediate speaker. If, however, KB had been the 'thinner' speaker, the two codes (linguistic and social) would have been out of

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phase and I doubt very much that it would have ever occurred to my jury to point out the contrast in the first place. It would not have been socially relevant.

CONCLUSION

A meta-linguistic novelty, accurate identification of the tense-lax contrast by native speakers of Fogny, has been shown to be a phonological intuition with social value. To be able to identify a speaker as 'thin' or as 'big' provides the Fogny with one of many means for linguistic, hence social, placement.

The Fogny material can benefit from further investigation, both linguistic and sociolinguistic. Further study of vowel harmony variation would permit formulation of accurate variable rules and allow investigation of a related, albeit diachronic, topic: to what extent is harmony variation associated with the tendency toward vowel reduction, the merger of ε with e , ɔ with o , and the reduction of ə to allophonic status, all of which are evidenced in the southern dialect of Huluf and probably other dialects as well (Wilson, 1963)?⁶ As for social placement, it would be valuable to have a fuller ethnographic statement of the exact conditions and contexts that bring the big/thin device into play. This would allow more precise comparison with analogous meta-linguistic devices in other speech communities,⁷ as part of the effort to understand better the entitlement of speech differences ('accents'), and the use of such entitlements in everyday interaction. I hope to be able to pursue these matters during a future tour in the field.

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[6] Cf. Stewart 1971; for a discussion of similar changes in the Kwa languages, though there it is the $i/\text{ɨ}$ and u/u that merge rather than ε/e and $\text{ɔ}/o$.

[7] For a different use of the metaphor 'thick', cf. Harrington (1974:8): 'The Indians say *čaštípil'salhaš* "thick the [sic] he talks". It is felt as a thickening or hardening of verb stems by prefixing ʔ . Although not frequent in the language, it permeates the whole structure and lexicology and enriches or subtilizes the available means of expression. It is a purely mechanical change affecting as many of the sounds as the speaker may deem fit to "thicken" and conveying a diminutive, derogatory, or depreciative sense. It is used preferably with nouns.'

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