

# Book Review

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## Registers of Communication

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### Review

*Registers of Communication*, edited by Asif Agha and Frog, as part of the series of the Studia Fennica volumes, is nothing less than one would expect of a scholar of Agha's caliber. The series itself is divided into six subseries: *Ethnologica*, *Folkloristica*, *Linguistica*, *Historica*, *Litteraria*, and *Anthropologica*.

The chapters all explore the significance of language registers, and their application in language and communication. The volume begins with a concise introduction describing work on registers, followed by sections and their respective chapters, all organized in systematic, approachable, and exploratory fashion. As such, this volume explores languages and their varieties as distinct registers, combining work in anthropology, folklore, linguistics, and other areas. Throughout, the authors elaborate on and analyze communicative conduct, in order to explore and further our understandings of language register.

Section 1, *Approaching Register Phenomena*, presents the chapters *Enregisterment and Communication in Social History* (Asif Agha), *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (Susanna Shore), and *Registers of Oral Poetry* (Frog). The first chapter, *Enregisterment and Communication in Social History*, succinctly frames the project as central to Linguistic Anthropology. The chapter delineates the historical development of the notion of language register, its emic and etic properties, that is, the fluidity of enregistered language within larger frameworks, and the evolution of ideologies toward

and conceptions of the field, generally throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agha tactfully explores ‘enregisterment’ as a process reflexive towards the speaker, and then counter reflexive toward other interlocutors, where interlocutors differentiate registers in their own emerging communities, so as to unbind these registers from their historical restrictions. The chapter presents that the dynamic and complex uses and intersections of languages and genres of language contribute to the semiotic creation of register, as an act differentiable from speech. Here, Agha seems to be approaching a discussion of the ‘meta-enregisterment’ of language. In Chapter 2, Shore explores and expands on the importance of the language register in work expounded by Halliday (and Firth), evidencing the centrality of language register to Linguistic Anthropology, as is Systemic Functional Linguistics. To this, Shore describes register formations and language systems as bounded intuitions, to unbind these intuitions by expanding on the discussion in Asif’s Chapter 1, that is, that semiotic practices draw these intuitions away from their restricted position within particular languages and identities. In the final chapter of the first section, Frog sheds light on registers in oral poetry. Through the context of the poetic register, the author introduces that poetic register comprises indexically significant units of varying size and complexity, illustrating the indexical significance of poetic register bounded within its respective normative genre(s) of practice. At one level, language and convention constitute a register with significant meaning, but at higher levels (metasemiotically), such as in the poetic, these registers of communication restylize and hence specifically enregister a text.

Section 2, *Between Language and Register*, presents four chapters, *The Enregisterment of Minority Languages in a Danish Classroom* (Janus Spindler Møller), *Investigating a Register Label: Integrated Speech in Copenhagen* (Lian Malai Madsen), *Foreigner Talk: A Register or Registers?* (Kapitolina Federova), and *Stranger Sociality in the Home: Israeli Hebrew as Register in Latino Domestic Interaction* (Alejandro Paz). In Chapter 4, Spindler Møller discusses ‘linguaging’ (c.f. Jørgensen’s work) to describe ways in which speakers draw on languages as competing facets of registers in multilingual school classrooms, and in socialization processes. In Chapter 5, Malai Madsen continues to discuss the metasemiotics and metapragmatics of enregisterment in multilingual contexts, by observing how these communities distinctly recalibrate their registers, a process which mediates societal and linguistic adaptation. In Chapter 6, Federova contrasts the tourism industry in Russia with that of the Chinese-Russian front, locating junctures between societal convention and language ideology.

Section 3, *Registers in Transition*, effectively forms a bridge between previous chapters and the upcoming. The articles in the third section, *The Registers and Persuasive Powers of an Indonesian Village Chronicle* (Timo Kaartinen), *Mourning and Honor Register in Karelian Lament* (James Wilce and Janina Fenigsen), and *Inimitable Examples School Texts and the Classical Register in Contemporary French Politics* (Dorothy Noyes) provide diachronic insights on the evolution of

registers and the mediation of these registers with cultural heritage. Chapter 8, *The Registers and Persuasive Powers of an Indonesian Village Chronicle*, presents a discussion of complex politically-shaped registers in Indonesia. Much like other texts such as shadow puppetry in modern larger Southeast Asia, these texts intend to limit societal ability to recognize political agenda. Chapter 9, *Mourning and Honor: Register in Karelian Lament*, also discusses heritage and traditional registers in Karelia and their intersection with lament rituals in the current era. Chapter 10, *Inimitable Examples: School Texts and the Classical Register in Contemporary French Politics*, returns to the issue of semiotics in the French political sector, and the ways in which politics may draw on heritage texts to develop register for political sway.

While earlier chapters attend to ethnographical and qualitative appraisals of register, or register-mediated social processes, Section 4 begins to approach register through discussions of corpus. Chapter 11, *Verbal Formulas in Gaelic Traditional Narrative Some Aspects of Their Form and Function*, discusses markedness created by an oral tradition through which speakers convey the story-telling register and its specific formulae. Chapter 12, *Margaret Bender's Shifting Linguistic Registers and the Nature of the Sacred in Cherokee*, observes and expands on patterns in three Cherokee texts and the diachronic shifts in the accompanying conceptions of deities and the surrounding world. Finally in this section, by observing individual, social and situational variation, Chapter 13 complements similar work in Section 3 on the Karelian lament, yet discusses the ways in which the specific register indexes gender.

Section 5, the final section in the volume, presents how registers become evident in the stylization of language, aptly entitled *Performance and Poetics*. This section, both implicitly and explicitly, continues to address the corpus element in respective registers. Chapter 14, *On Traditional Register in Oral Poetry*, discusses conceptions of 'word' in oral poetry, which Foley frames as and hence labels the demonitonal metonymic 'integer' in the text. In Chapter 15, *Register in Oral Traditional Phraseology*, Lauri Harvilahti extends on work in the previous chapter by elaborating on the cognitive implications of poetic forms. Harvilahti provides insights into how poetically and non-poetically channelled registers intersect in style and formation, or rather, the ways in which they exhibit similarities. The final chapter in the book, Chapter 16, *Kati Kallio's Multimodal Register and Performance Arena in Ingrian Oral Poetry*, then moves to focus on the register within singing traditions and their periodic emergence.

In both their structure and relative arrangement, the articles in this volume divert from an image of language as a unified system to language as a plurality of registers and of course signs. This transition of work, both within each chapter and across chapters offers an arrangement through which readers can progressively take in approaches to studying register in various and diverse contexts, that is, historically, ideologically, in corpus based contexts, in poetics, and in multicultural environs. Here, the authors consider both multimodal signs emerging from respective registers in

communication, as they draw from various disciplines. This diversity of topics, contexts, and approaches will ground and extrapolate to further work in the field.