

OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Edward Finegan, *General Editor*

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Douglas Biber            Suzanne Romaine  
Alessandro Duranti      Deborah Tannen  
John R. Rickford

*Locating Dialect in Discourse: The Language of Honest Men and Bonnie Lasses in Ayr*  
Ronald K. S. Macaulay

*English in Its Social Contexts: Essays in Historical Sociolinguistics*  
Edited by Tim W. Machan and Charles T. Scott

*Coherence in Psychotic Discourse*  
Branca Telles Ribeiro

*Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*  
Edited by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan

*Gender and Conversational Interaction*  
Edited by Deborah Tannen

*Therapeutic Ways with Words*  
Kathleen Warden Ferrara

*Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society, 1959–1994*  
Charles Ferguson; edited by Thom Huebner

*The Linguistic Individual: Self-Expression in Language and Linguistics*  
Barbara Johnstone

*The Discourse of Classified Advertising: Exploring the Nature of Linguistic Simplicity*  
Paul Bruthiaux

*Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*  
Edited by Anna Livia and Kira Hall

*Kids Talk: Strategic Language Use in Later Childhood*  
Edited by Susan Hoyle and Carolyn Adger

*Talking about Treatment: Recommendations for Breast Cancer Adjuvant Treatment*  
Felicia D. Roberts

*Language in Time: The Rhythm and Tempo of Spoken Interaction*  
Peter Auer, Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, and Frank Müller

*Whales, Candlelight, and Stuff Like That: General Extenders in English Discourse*  
Maryann Overstreet

*The Language of Turn and Sequence*  
Edited by Cecilia E. Ford, Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson

*The Language of  
Turn and Sequence*

*Edited by*  
Cecilia E. Ford  
Barbara A. Fox  
Sandra A. Thompson

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2002

- Schiffrin, Deborah. 1987. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Selting, Margret. 1996. On the interplay of syntax and prosody in the constitution of turn-constructional units and turns in conversation. *Pragmatics* 6(3): 371-388.
- Tanaka, Hiroko. 1999. *Turn-Taking in Japanese: A Study in Grammar and Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Tao, Hongyin. 1996. *Units in Mandarin Conversation: Prosody, Discourse, and Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Terasaki, A. 1976. *Pre-announcement Sequences in Conversation*. Social Sciences Working Papers No. 99. Irvine: University of California.

## 3

## Cultivating Prayer

LISA CAPPS &amp; ELINOR OCHS

A central function of language is to establish and maintain a sense of continuity and well-being throughout the life course. Language provides a medium for making sense out of past events and coping with the unpredictability of the future. This endeavor involves sorting out temporal-causal orderings of events (i.e., what did/did not or will/will not happen) and imbuing them with moral castings (i.e., what should/should not have happened or should/should not happen). All levels of language are recruited to this end, including genre (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). Every community has a repertoire of genres that organize particular events and trajectories in terms of conventional structurings, understandings, and sentiments. These communally sanctioned templates can be soothing to those who are working through disarming events. Beyond offering structural containment, genres facilitate collective involvement in grappling with events remembered and anticipated.

Distinct from other genres, public prayer offers a template for recruiting support from the Divine as well as from community members. Prayer is a form of communication in which there is a conscious and active attempt to enter into dialogue with higher powers. In its ideal form, "prayer is religion in act . . . no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power" (James 1902/1982:361). While in that quote William James emphasizes the personal relation of contact, communities the world over attend

closely to the conventional form and content of prayer. In particular, prayer is expected to be inflected as sacred communication, thus differentiating it from more mundane interactions. Further, especially in public settings, adherence to prayer formats is often considered a requirement for collective participation.

This research examines children's entry into the genre of prayer. While the focus is prayer, it offers a more general perspective on genre: First, we consider genre as encompassing a *range* of semiotic expression, not only language but also bodily comportment. We illuminate how spirituality is conventionally actualized through assumption of bodily postures, gestures, linguistic forms, and regulation of voice. Second, in keeping with Schegloff (1995), we consider genre to be an *interactional* achievement. As demonstrated here in relation to prayer, this achievement includes transitioning into prayer, maintaining the requirements of the genre, and transitioning out of prayer into other forms of communication. The interactional underpinnings of prayer are particularly salient in instances of collective prayer that involve children praying, because of the demonstrated need to corral their attention and monitor their conduct. Third, genre is not a type of interactionally achieved linguistic and kinesic text but rather a *perspective* on a text. That is, any single stretch of spoken (or written) text may contain features of more than one genre, given that the co-producers of such texts may be engaged in more than one activity, for example, giving thanks, petitioning, confessing, and/or telling a story (Ochs 1994).

The focus of this analysis is the cultivation of a *prayerful attitude* in children. Again according to James (1902/1982:463): "Prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, for it helps us to cultivate the appropriate attitudes toward the world around us. The prayerful attitude cultivates the continuous sense of our connection with the power that made things as they are, so that we are tempered more towardly for their reception." In this perspective, the adopting of a "prayerful attitude" enables one to communicate with God and be in a position to receive Grace. Attitude is a frame of heart and mind, which itself requires work to achieve. In many communities, this attitude is facilitated by assuming a conventional demeanor, for example, postures, words, and voices that display reverence, openness, and humility.

Children's participation in prayer underscores the centrality of the body in accomplishing prayerful attitude. In the material presented here, socialization into prayer concentrates upon the positioning of children's hands, arms, legs, heads, eye gaze, and torso as a means of positioning their minds and souls. Socialization into this kinesic footing is integrated with attention to reverent voice quality, honorific titles for deities, archaic and formal lexicon, formulaic expressions, and conventional predicates for petitioning, interceding, praising, giving thanks, and confessing sins, among other prayerful acts.

Children's participation in prayer also demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining a consistently inflected genre over interactional time. The children observed in this study were constantly breaking out of language and conduct inflected for the sacred into mundane modes of communicating. We argue that such interpenetration of sacred and mundane is grounded in both developmental and situational

considerations. Attention span and competence in the register of prayer create discontinuities; however, praying can touch off rememberings and anticipations, in which the child orients to parents, teachers, or classmates at hand as well as to the Divine.

### Database

This analysis draws upon three principal corpora of prayerful activity that involve children from Euro-American Christian families: (1) family dinner graces; (2) petitions, blessings, and prayers of thanksgiving offered in an Episcopal Sunday school class for three-to-five-year-old children; and (3) bedtime prayers of a child two years and nine months old.

### Socialization into Prayer: Readiness

Praying involves assuming a psychological position of readiness. That is, prayer requires transitioning out of daily life activity into a state of spiritual receptivity (Cavalletti 1992; Scheff 1977; Duranti 1991; James 1902/1982). This state is marked by the display of a distinct set of bodily postures and practices. Here we consider how children's transition to prayerful readiness is interactionally accomplished at the family dinner table and in Sunday school.

### Family Grace

In the family dinner graces observed, a state of readiness was signaled through the following body positionings:

- being seated
- heads bowed
- eyes closed
- hands either clasped together or extended to others around the table
- sign of the cross

The overall criterion for collective grace is that *everyone* present display this stance of readiness for prayer. The following dinnertime interaction, for example, evidences the expectation that all family members be seated before anyone invokes God's presence. In this excerpt, Laurie (5;7 years) makes a bid to say grace, displays her own readiness by folding her hands, then summons Jesus:

Laurie: I wanna pray  
 ((clasps hands))  
 ...  
 Jesus?

Laurie, however, fails to recognize that her mother is not yet seated at the dinner table, a point her mother makes clear:

Mother: [Wait a minute Laurie  
 Laurie: | ((*irritated, throwing arms up in semi-despair*))  
 Mother: I'm not sitting down  
 ((*sits down*))  
 please - um - help us to love  
 and .hh um - Thank you for letting it be a nice day  
 ...

At another dinner, a Catholic family (Mother, Father, and children Dick, 8;7 years; Janie 5;11 years; and Evan, 3;7 years) is seated, but this kinesic posture alone is not considered a sufficient display of prayerful readiness. Rather, family members are prompted to cross themselves, fold their hands, and be silent:

Mother: Are we gonna (say grace)?  
 Janie: Yes =  
 → Father: =I:s everybody ready?  
 Dick: (finally)  
 (1.0)  
 ((*Dick vaguely crosses himself; Janie folds hands in prayer; Father and Dick interlace hands and rest them in front of their foreheads; sudden quiet.*))  
 Father: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
 (0.6) ...

Here Mother's initial query signals that it is time to say grace. Although Janie responds, "Yes," Father does not begin. Rather, he produces a follow-up query, "I:s everybody ready?," which serves to prompt kinesic and vocal displays of readiness. Only when Dick produces a verbal acknowledgment and the children cross themselves and assume the requisite body alignment does Father invoke the presence of the three deities in the Trinity ("In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit").

Evidence that small children have knowledge of the signals of prayerful readiness and the necessity of displaying them comes from a dinnertime interaction that involves a three-and-a-half-year-old, Brandon. In Brandon's family, each child gets a turn at saying grace:

Brandon: ((*arms outstretched*))  
 HOLD HA::NDS -  
 (I'M MAKING MY TU::R{N -  
 HOLD HA::NDS  
 ((*waves hands*))  
 I'M [MAKING MY TU:RN  
 Mom: [( ? ) - SSSHHH!  
 ((*Brandon's nine-year-old sister, Joanne, takes his hand, and then the entire family instantaneously holds hands in one large circle around table.*))

Here Brandon is able to initiate the round of grace turns through a variety of strategies for securing prayerful readiness: He displays the family's conventional body comportment, namely, stretching his arms in a move to hold hands; he issues a readiness directive in the form of an imperative to hold hands; and he announces that he is "making" his turn. These strategies receive the desired uptake in that the other family members join Brandon in a collective positioning of bodies for praying.

In some families, a state of readiness for grace can be achieved through *alternative* practices. For example, in the following interaction three-and-a-half-year-old David is presented with two kinesic options, "hold hands or fold hands," before beginning grace, which in this case takes the form of a song family members refer to as "Johnny Appleseed":

Mom: David, ready to say our prayer↑  
 Dad: Hold hands or fold hands?  
 David: Fold hands.  
 ((*folds hands in prayer position*))  
 I mean hold hands.  
 ((*grabs Mom's and Dad's hands; Mom and Dad hold each other's hands*))  
 Dad: ↑O:: ↓kay  
 David: OH↑, OH↑, OH↓ [OH::: OH ((*singing*))  
 Dad: [OH::: the Lord is good to me  
 ((*singing*))  
 Mom: [OH::: [the Lord ((*singing*))  
 David: [NOT YET! ((*frees hand*))  
 Dad: You're not ready for Johnny Appleseed, David?  
 David: No, I mean fold hands.  
 ((*folds hands in prayer position*))  
 [Now I'm ready.  
 ((*Mom and Dad fold hands in prayer position.*))  
 Mom: Okay, you start.

In this rather jocular interaction, the option leads to prayerful mayhem rather than a smooth transition into readiness for grace. David first chooses "fold hands" and actually positions his hands accordingly. But then he changes his mind to "hold hands" and proceeds to link hands with his parents. Dad takes this as a sign of readiness and prompts David to start grace ("↑O:: ↓kay"). David then launches the grace song, and his parents chime in. But all is not well, for David halts the incipient grace, bellowing out, "NOT YET!" and frees his hands. He has decided to return to the option to fold hands: "No, I mean fold hands." He folds his hands and only then declares his readiness. His parents follow suit and bid him to begin again.

In addition to the management of body orientation, children display that they have assumed a prayerful attitude through their language and tone of voice. A common violation committed by younger children is failure to modulate the loudness of their voice. This is the case in the interaction excerpted earlier in which Brandon's mother admonished him for shouting by saying, "SSSHHH!" In addition, young children may start the vocal prayer with an inappropriate phrase or routine. In the family dinner with little David, for example, after he changes his

mind about folding hands and holding hands, he appears to begin singing the words and tune of the usual Johnny Appleseed grace song. Indeed, he reiterates the opening frame he produced a minute earlier:

- Dad: You're not ready for Johnny Appleseed, David?  
 David: No, I mean fold hands.  
 ((folds hands in prayer position))  
 [Now I'm ready.  
 (((Mom and Dad fold hands in prayer position.))  
 Mom: Okay, you start.  
 → David: OH↑, OH↑, OH↓

However, rather than continue with the grace, David transitions straight into another favorite Beatles song:

- David: Bang, Bang, Maxwell's sil↑ver↓ hammer  
 ((singing, then laughs, unfolding hands))

That David laughs after singing about Maxwell's silver hammer and unfolds his hands suggests that mischief rather than development is at the bottom of this shifting of "footing" (Goffman 1979) from the sacred to the profane. David's parents then attempt to derail this shift and return to the opening of the prayer:

- Dad: ↑Da::: ↓vid, are we singing our prayer  
 or are we singing Maxwell?  
 David: But I LIKE Maxwell AND I like JOHNNY!  
 → Mom: How about first prayer singing, and then Maxwell.  
 → Dad: Fold your hands, David.  
 David: Okay. ((folds hands, closes eyes))  
 OH, OH, OH! [OH::: the Lord is good to me:::]

Mom and Dad endeavor to realign David's demeanor first by pointing out the discrepancy between singing prayers and singing songs, then by proposing that David sing about Maxwell *after* praying, and finally by instructing him to resume the language and bodily comportment of grace. David acquiesces verbally ("Okay"), assumes the appropriate kinesic alignment (folds hands, closes eyes), and begins to sing the proper grace.

#### *Sunday School Prayers*

In the Sunday school setting, readiness for a range of prayers (e.g., petitions, thanksgivings, praises) is displayed by:

- either kneeling at the "prayer table" or sitting on a blue mat
- folding hands
- closing eyes
- using "Atrium voices," that is, hushed, slow-paced speech

In the following excerpt, the Sunday school class has just entered the room using "Atrium walking," a quiet, deliberate walk they routinely practice. The students are seated on blue mats, which are arranged in a circle on the floor when Terry, the teacher, invites them to pray:

- Terry: Let's pray together.  
 Remember our praying hands and Atrium voices?  
 ((exhales loudly, raises her folded hands, and extends them toward the center of the circle, eyes closed))

As illustrated earlier, in the Sunday school classroom the teacher socializes readiness for prayer by verbally reminding the children to fold their hands and speak in a reverent tone of voice ("Remember our praying hands and Atrium voices?") and by modeling the appropriate position: she closes her eyes, exhales loudly to mark what on other occasions she refers to as "a quiet way of being," and raises and extends her folded hands for all to see. In addition, teachers and more expert members of the class scaffold kinesic markers of prayerful readiness by physically molding children's bodies into appropriate prayer posture. Following Terry's invitation to pray and exaggerated demonstration of a ready stance, Sophie, the youngest in the group, looks on as the rest of the children bow their heads and fold their hands and close their eyes. Lynn, a parent volunteer, provides general support by seating herself on the floor behind Sophie. But Dana, one of the oldest children in the class, who is sitting next to Sophie, opens her eyes and offers a more direct intervention:

- Dana: ((whispering)) Close your eyes, Sophie.  
 ((Dana presses Sophie's hands together and, raising her own clasped hands, models how to fold them.))  
 Like this.  
 Sophie: ((closes eyes and folds hands tightly))  
 Terry: Dear Jesus, thank you for watching over us and our mommies and daddies during the week, and for bringing us back together this Sunday.

In this exceptionally explicit example of peer socialization, one preschool child cultivates prayerful attitude through multiple channels. First, Dana uses a whisper voice. Second, she issues an unmitigated directive to Sophie to close her eyes. Then Dana tackles the matter of praying hands by (1) actually molding Sophie's hands into the correct position and (2) drawing Sophie's attention to her (Dana's) clasped hands visually and verbally. Dana's apprenticeship techniques are effective in that Sophie then assumes the conventional prayerful demeanor.

#### *Socialization into Prayer: Maintenance*

Once children's bodies, voices, and language are organized in a state of prayerful readiness, the praying proceeds. However, children do not always maintain the expected kinesic and linguistic inflections of prayer. In many of these cases, par-

ents and teachers react to children's forays by reining them back into a focus on prayer.

### Family Grace

While some family grace conventions require only that children assume the appropriate body position and be silent, others expect children to participate in collective or individual recitations of the grace. In the latter cases, sometimes the younger children often appear inattentive or even begin an alternative activity. We saw the beginning of such a disjuncture in the excerpt earlier when David shifted from the Johnny Appleseed grace into a song about Maxwell's silver hammer. After his diversion is squelched and he sings the appropriate grace, however, David rebels once again. He sings the whole first line of the grace along with his parents:

David: OH, OH, OH! [OH::: the Lord is good to me:::]  
 Dad: [OH the Lord is good to me, and so I  
 Mom: [Oh the Lord is good to me, and so I

At this point David shifts his comportment and his language:

David: {{{opens eyes, hurls fork to the floor}}}  
 [BANG! BANG! Maxwell's silver fork!  
 Dad: [thank the Lo::rd↑  
 → Mom: ((softly)) Throwing hands aren't praying hands  
 David: [TIME FOR MAXWELL! ((laughing))  
 Dad: [for GIVING ME::: the things I need,

When David still does not comply, Mom manipulates his hands back into prayerful frame, while joining Dad in grace:

Dad: the sun and the rain and [the apple see:::d.  
 → Mom: {{{takes  
 David's hands, presses them together in prayer position}}}  
 [the apple seed.  
 Dad: [The Lo::rd is good to me. AMEN!  
 Mom: [The Lo::rd is good to me. Amen.  
 David: AMEN! [AMEN, AMEN, AMEN!  
 Dad: [AMEN! [AMEN! AMEN!  
 Mom: [Amen, Amen.

While Mom's corralling is not fully successful, David does manage to display his participation in the closing down of the grace with a boisterous round of "AMEN!"s.

Children's prayer often diverges from the constraints of the genre in ways that are more subtle than David's capricious shifts. For instance, children also display difficulty maintaining the explicit performative purpose of particular subgenres of prayer, as when the message content bifurcates from the ostensible function of the prayer under way. As noted (see also Hendry 1972), there are a number of func-

tional varieties of prayer, for example, petitions, intercessions, praise and thanksgiving, and confessions. These functions are often codified through predicates as in: *Help me/us, I/We pray for . . . , Thank you, and Forgive me/us*. Among more expert members, the content of prayer is typically consonant with these functions. Thus, petitions and intercessions solicit support for a desired circumstance (e.g., *Help us to eternal life*); prayers of praise and thanksgiving appreciate the source of a desirable circumstance (e.g., *we thank you for the beautiful creations*); and confessions admit transgressions. In this way, the requirements of the genre filter which experiences are put into words. Conformity to the requirements of the genre appears especially difficult for young children, as becomes evident when their prayers stray from highly formulaic discourse to recount particular, personal situations.

Such inconsistency between ostensible function and content characterizes young Laurie's grace, the opening to which was excerpted earlier. At first, Laurie adheres to conventional expectations concerning grace:

Laurie: Jesus? -  
 please - um - help us to love  
 and .hh um - Thank you for letting it be a nice day,  
 and for taking a fun nap?

This portion of the grace displays generic features of prayer: invocation of God ("Jesus?"), petition for assistance ("please - um - help us to love") and thanksgiving ("Thank you for letting it be a nice day, and for taking a fun nap?"). However, Laurie's prayer then diverges from the thanksgiving format:

Laurie: .hh - a:nd - for (letting) Mommy go bye  
 and I'm glad that I cwied to[day?  
 cuz I [like cwying .hh and  
 Annie: {{{snicker}}}  
 Roger: {{{snicker}}}  
 Laurie: I'm glad (that anything/everything) happened today in Jesus' name  
 ((claps hands)) A:-MEN!  
 Roger: [amen ((clapping lightly))  
 Mother: [amen  
 Jimmy: [A:MEN

While Laurie continues to frame her experience as positive ("I'm glad"), the recounted events themselves ("Mommy go bye," "I cwied today") appear to clash with these sentiments. Indeed, the utterances "I'm glad that I cwied today" and "I like cwying" seem emotional oxymorons, in that crying that follows departure of a loved one usually signals distress. Whereas Laurie's earlier account of pleasant events fits well with the design features of thanksgiving, the evolving problem-centered narrative is dramatically discrepant. A more practiced grace sayer would likely have (1) formulated this experience within the format of a petition for assistance in avoiding or handling future instances of separation, (2) selected an unambiguously pleasing circumstance for which to give thanks, or (3) emphasized positive aspects of the distressing event (e.g., "Thank for helping me to be strong and letting me

say good-bye to Mommy," or, "I'm glad that I cried today, because afterward I felt better".<sup>1</sup> Finally, it is likely that the discrepancy between the message content of Laurie's grace and the performative functions that evokes snickering between her older siblings, Annie and Roger, at this point in the prayer. Although far subtler than the socialization strategies delineated thus far, laughter is a potent, widespread resource for marking norm violations (Coser 1959; Goffman 1967).

### Sunday School Prayers

Breaking prayer frame is also a routine occurrence among the children in Sunday school, leading their teacher, Terry, to remind them of what they should be doing. In the interaction that follows, the children do not bounce back and forth between activities as did David. Rather, they drift gradually from a focus on the sacred to more profane matters. The students are seated on blue mats when Terry begins reciting a thanksgiving prayer, which elicits a contribution from young Maggie:

- Terry: Dear Jesus, thank you for watching over us and our mommies and daddies during the week, and for bringing us back together this Sunday.  
 Maggie: And thank you for watching our dogs.  
 Terry: Yes, and thank you for watching our dogs and our cats.

At this point, however, Maggie begins a shift in footing, both kinesically and verbally, which is taken up by her classmate Joe:

- Maggie: ((opens her eyes)) Jesus sees everything. He can see you all the time.  
 Joe: ((opens his eyes, unfolds his hands)) How can he see everything? Does he have a microscope? ((laughs))

Several children then open their eyes; some unfold their hands, while a few remain in praying position. The children begin to discuss the topic raised by Maggie and challenged by Joe:

- Susan: No, probably a telescope, right Terry?  
 → Terry: (((exhales loudly))  
 Sophie: [Or maybe glasses.  
 Joe: ((turns to Sophie)) NO!!! You can't see everything just because you have glasses. YOU can't see everything with your glasses, Sophie.

Terry and the parent volunteer, Lynn, then begin to urge them back into prayer:

- Terry: (((raises her folded hands and extends them toward the center of the circle, eyes closed)) Help us to remember that we're praying now.  
 Sophie: (((closes eyes and folds hands))  
 Susan: (((closes eyes and folds hands))  
 Joe: (((folds hands))  
 → Terry: [God, we thank you for our Atrium voices, and for our eyes, so that we can see your beautiful creation, and for glasses that help us see if we need them.

- Joe: And help them not to fall in the bathtub.  
 ((laughs))  
 → Lynn: ((positions self behind Joe, wraps her hands around his, pushing them together in prayer position))  
 Terry: Amen.  
 Joe: [AMEN!  
 Children: [Amen!

In this passage, Terry repeats her exaggerated display of appropriate behavior by exhaling, closing her eyes, and raising her praying hands for perusal. She also adds a verbal reminder/admonition ("Help us to remember that we're praying now"; "thank you for our Atrium voices"), which conveys the message that the slips in comportment and verbal content constitute a departure from the activity of praying. And she attempts to maintain the continuity of the prayer discourse by incorporating a key element of discussion (glasses) into her prayer of thanksgiving ("thank you . . . for glasses that help us see if we need them"). When these strategies fail to corral Joe, Lynn tries a more direct approach: she physically shapes his hands into the desired position.

### Bedtime Prayer

The Sunday school prayer of thanksgiving indicates how topics brought up in prayer may touch off other language activities, for example, an argument about God's ability to see everyone on earth. Children's bedtime prayers also lapse into secular discussions. Moreover, prayer and other forms of discourse may interpenetrate, as was the case when Laurie tucked a compressed narrative about her day at kindergarten into a prayer of thanksgiving. In the following example, David, at two years, nine months of age, interlaces prayer and narrative while saying a bedtime prayer with his father:

- Dad: Should we say our prayers?  
 David: Ummm: Okay. ((folds hands))  
 Dad: De::ar God.  
 Bless Mo::mmy↑  
 David: and Daddy↑  
 Dad: and David.  
 David: and Gra::nny↑ and Veronica and Kira↑ and Sonya↑  
 (.4 pause)  
 and O::H don't forget RU↑BY↓  
 (.3 pause)  
 and Raymond=and Ellie:: ↑ and Sandro and crazy Ma::r↑co↓ and my BIG truck and my little trucks and  
 (.2 pause)  
 → OH do you? Do you? Do you remember when Sandro said, when Sandro said, "Hello David?  
 You bring my little trucks over there."  
 And I DID↑  
 Can we play that game? Can we?

- Dad: and God Bless Bop and Nanna↑  
 David: and Uncle Todd↑  
 → and do you know what Uncle Pete's  
 other name is?  
 "MY FRIEND UNCLE PETE!"  
 'Member when Uncle Pete came to my home?  
 But I don't think Spike and Nate are coming,  
no. No I don't think so.  
 Dad: God bless Spike and Nate.  
 → David: But I play basketball  
 and I say, "Spike and Nate, YOU DON'T PLAY!  
YOU STAY THERE."  
 How about we put Spike and Nate in the basement.  
 Dad: Yea:h, I remember that.  
 Spike and Nate are big dogs aren't they.  
 David: But I think↑ they're not coming.  
 Dad: When Uncle Pete comes on Saturday?  
 Yeah he probably won't bring Spike and Nate.  
 Yeah.  
 David: Yeah.

As David petitions blessings on numerous persons and objects in his life, he bursts into associated narratives. It is as if each of the blessed entities holds for him a store of memories and emotions that he is compelled to air. His petition to bless "Sandro and crazy Ma:r↑co↓ and my BIG truck and my little trucks," for example, touches off an invitation to "... remember ... when Sandro said, 'Hello David? You bring my little trucks over there.' And I DID↑." These pride-infused remembered events then touch off a desired projection of these events in the future: "Can we play that game? Can we?" Similarly, David's petition to bless "Uncle Pete↑" inspires his recollection that "Uncle Pete's other name is ... 'MY FRIEND UNCLE PETE'" and the events that transpired "when Uncle Pete came to my home" with his dogs, Spike and Nate. In David's rendering, happy and worrisome past events intermingle with projected events ("But I don't think Spike and Nate are coming," "How about we put Spike and Nate in the basement"), and he seems to use prayer to sort out what the past holds for his future.

In this bedtime interaction, David's dad extensively scaffolds the activity of praying: He launches the activity by inviting David to "say our prayers," provides the opening prayer frame ("De::ar God. Bless Mo::mmy↑"), supplements the list of persons to bless ("and David," "and Uncle Todd↑"), and models intonation and voice quality. Moreover, he attempts to maintain the practice of praying by redirecting David's forays into conversational narrative back to prayer-inflected discourse. When David interjects a bid for permission to play the truck game, his dad responds by continuing to solicit blessings on friends and family using intonation inflected for prayer. In addition, akin to Sunday school teacher Terry's incorporation of a source of divergence into message content of her prayer, when David digresses into recollections about Uncle Pete's visit with the dogs, his dad attempts to rein him in and maintain continuity by invoking God's blessing on the animals ("God bless Spike and Nate"). In these ways, David's father socializes David into

conventional practices for transitioning into and maintaining the discourse of praying.

### *Socialization into Prayer: Ending*

The transition out of prayer-inflected discourse into other daily life activities is also an interactional achievement, such that socialization into prayer involves mastering conventionalized practices for marking the ending of a prayer and reentry into other communicative practices. Consistent with their difficulties maintaining prayer postures, gestures, and language practices over the course of the activity, children often shift out of prayer and into other forms of discourse without signaling whether or not the activity of praying has come to a close.

After the preceding excerpt from David and his dad's bedtime prayer, for example, and after contemplating the likelihood that Uncle Pete will bring Spike and Nate to his house, David requests that his dad "tell the story of David's day":

David: Daddy, can you tell a story about what David did today?

David's dad agrees to do so, but before launching into the story, he asks David whether they are finished praying. David's dad's remark both draws David's attention to the fact that he has segued out of prayer into a new discourse activity and conveys the need to mark the close of the prayer before doing so. In response, David recruits a fundamental resource to this end: "Amen."

Dad: Okay, are we done with our prayer?

David: AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!

Indeed, in the interactions analyzed here, *amen* is the most commonly recruited resource for bringing a prayer to completion. Moreover, use of the ritual closing *amen*, which literally means "it shall be so!/so be it!," allows those present to verbally affirm the sentiments expressed in the prayer and thus to reinforce their roles as co-participants, further establishing the collective nature of the activity.

### *Family Grace*

Analysis of prayer interactions suggests that children acquire a sense of the importance of marking the shift from assumption of a prayerful attitude to more mundane daily life activities and that they learn that this transition must be accomplished in specific ways. In particular, the prayer must be closed down in a manner that reflects the spirit of the practice, manifest in maintenance of prayer-inflected body postures, gestures, and tone of voice in addition to lexical content. This is evident in the following excerpt from a dinner grace that involves Father (F), Mother (M), and their daughters, Holly (H), who is six and a half years old, and Shelly (S), who is almost five years old:



- F, M, S, H: God is great, goo:d  
 - a:nd we thank him for our foo:d  
 creatures A:LL↑ - great and SMA:LL↑ -  
praise him with thanksgi: ↑-ving
- M, S: {A:men ((Mother unclasps hands and starts reaching for food.))  
 Holly: {A:men ben ((singsong, mock southern accent))  
 Father: A:men  
 Holly: A:me[n ben ((Holly looks away from Father.))  
 Father: [you str:aighten up((to Holly with his hand beside her))

In this interaction, Holly voices the requisite lexicon for finishing grace in a playful manner. Her father's reprimand, "You str:aighten up," indicates that this rendition of "Amen" is not an acceptable means of expressing the sentiments behind the word or of ending the activity and points to the necessity of displaying a "straight" (i.e., reverent) demeanor until the closing is complete.

Similarly, as grace is brought to a close at another family dinner, Father's (F) and Mother's (M) responses to four-year-old Kimberly's (K) behavior illuminate the importance of achieving a complete closing before jumping into the next activity, which in this case is dinner:

- F, M, K: Come Lord Jesus be our guest,  
 [and let these gifts to us be blessed.  
 (((Kimberly reaches for a roll, takes a bite.))
- F, M, K: Amen.  
 Father: Kimberly, no eating before Amens.  
 Mother: You know that, sweetie.

This interaction demonstrates the requirement that the closing of the prayer and associated shift out of a prayerful attitude be achieved *prior* to, not simultaneous with, entry into a subsequent activity.

### Sunday School Prayers

Sunday school teachers also endeavor to facilitate clear demarcation of boundaries between ending prayer and beginning other activities. In the following excerpt, for example, five-year-old Carly offers a prayer of thanksgiving while kneeling at the "prayer table":

- Carly: ((kneels at table, folds hands, closes eyes))  
 Dear Heavenly Father, Jesus is beautiful.  
 Thank you for beautiful Jesus,  
 and for my beautiful dress,  
 and for all the flowers.  
 ((unfolds hands, looks up, remains in kneeling position at prayer table))

Although Carly does not provide the expected, though not mandatory, "Amen," Terry, who is standing nearby, seems to interpret Carly's unclasped hands and

open eyes as a signal that she is finished praying. Terry compliments Carly on her prayer and engages her in conversation, seemingly accomplishing a transition out of prayer:

- Terry: That was a lovely thank-you prayer, Carly.  
 We have a lot to be thankful for.  
 Carly: Umhm. Yesterday was Travis' birthday,  
 and he got a lot of presents.  
 And I had to keep reminding him to say thank you.  
 Terry: It's important that we remind each other to say thank you.  
 Carly: Even if you don't like what you got.

At this point Carly, who is still kneeling at the prayer table, addresses Jesus with a prayer of thanksgiving. Yet her comportment violates the vocal, gestural, and content requirements of the genre: she uses a raucous, singsong voice, she does not close her eyes or fold her hands, and she gives thanks for objects she deems "yucky":

- Carly: ((singsong voice))  
 Thank you Jesus for the yucky truck! ((laughs))  
 Thank you Jesus for the yucky crackers! ((laughs))

Terry responds by endeavoring to prompt Carly to close down the prayer. Like David's dad, she attempts to do so by asking Carly if she is through praying (i.e., suggesting that she is not praying), citing her unclasped hands as evidence that this is the case:

- Terry: Are you through at the prayer table, Carly?  
 I don't see your praying hands.

Yet rather than expediently terminating the prayer, for instance, by offering a ritual "Amen," Carly denies that she is finished praying and begins anew, this time with a prayer of thanksgiving that is appropriate to the content domain of the subgenre and displays prayer-inflected body comportment, voice tone, and language:

- Carly: No::: ((bows head, folds hands, closes eyes))  
 Dear Jesus, Thank you for the crackers that I do: like.  
 I love you Jesus.  
 Amen.  
 Terry: Amen.

Here Carly's transition out of prayer is complete: she says, "Amen," opens her eyes, unclasps her hands, and rises from her position at the prayer table. Terry's "Amen" further contributes to the successful closing of the prayer and the construction of an opening for collective entry into another communicative activity.

### Conclusion

These analyses illuminate the social, kinesic, and linguistic underpinnings of the achievement of a prayerful attitude. Distinct from other genres, prayer offers a template for reach beyond oneself to enter into the presence of the Divine—whether it be nature or a deity. Many experience a profound sense of unification (James 1902/1982:395): “I felt that I prayed as I had never prayed before and knew now what prayer really is: to return from the solitude of individuation into the consciousness of unity with all that is.” Prayer thus helps to bring about a sense that one is not alone, that one has accessed a higher power, and that one’s voice is being heard. This model of prayer presumes a dialogic relation between the individual who prays and the higher power to whom the prayer is directed. Yet such a model does not account for the social nature of many prayers. As we have seen, people often pray in the company of others. In these situations, the interaction is multi-party rather than strictly dyadic. Further, the activity of praying unites participants with each other and with the Divine, as well as with the presence of entities invoked in the prayer.

Examination of children’s socialization into the practice of praying underscores the centrality of the body in accomplishing prayerful attitude. It also demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining a consistently inflected genre over interactional time. Yet rather than viewing these difficulties as imperfections to be overcome, we can perhaps best understand children’s forays out of language and conduct inflected for the sacred into mundane modes of communicating as evidence of the routine interpenetration of genres in everyday life. That is, the endeavor to formulate and publicly instantiate understandings of self-in-the-world, which relies on the recruitment of conventional moral frameworks, is *likely* to contain features of multiple genres. Further, while we do not suggest that when people initiate a conversational narrative or formulate a plan they enter directly into dialogue with the Divine, the interweaving of genres manifest here may also point to the human proclivity to orient toward a higher good in attempting to make sense of life events (Taylor 1989).

### NOTES

The authors gratefully acknowledge support for this project from the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research through a predoctoral grant to L. Capps.

1. As previously noted (Ochs and Capps 2001), such paraphrases are more semantically cogent and contextually appropriate than Laurie’s prayer but may undercut emotional authenticity.

### REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1986. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. V. W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cavalletti, Sofia. 1992. *The Religious Potential of the Child*. Trans. P. M. Coulter and J. M. Coulter. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications.

- Coser, Rose L. 1959. Some social functions of laughter *Human Relations* 12:171–182.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 1991. On the organization of collective activities: Saying grace in a Samoan village. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, IL, December 1991.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor.
- Goffman, Erving. 1979. Footing. *Semiotica* 25:1–29.
- Hendry, George. 1972. The lifeline of theology. *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 65:22–30.
- James, William. 1902/1982. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Penguin.
- Ochs, Elinor. 1994. Stories that step into the future. In E. Finegan and D. F. Biber (eds.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*, 106–135. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps. 2001. *Living Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Scheff, Thomas. 1977. Distancing emotion in ritual. *Current Anthropology* 18(3): 483–490.
- Schegloff, Emanuel J. 1995. Discourse as an interactional achievement III: The omnirelevance of action. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 28(3): 185–211.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.