

Secular Inclusion and Catholic Love: Communicative Dimensions, Genre, and Emotion in the
Language of James Martin, SJ

It isn't particularly controversial to assert that language, and, indeed, communication, emerge not in a vacuum, but from social context, from the particular formulation of speaker, receiver, and the broader culture that surrounds them. This framework is a profoundly meaningful one for understanding communicative events and their performative *constitution* of social roles—all in all, a culturally sensitive understanding of language is a pretty wonderful thing. And yet, there remains, I think, something of a liminal space, a somewhat underdeveloped region, for anthropological theories of language, broadly speaking: the space for religiousness. This is not to say that linguistic anthropology avoids religion entirely (there are certainly many anthropologists who study religious cultural practices)—nor is this absence an unreasonable one (after all, it isn't particularly easy to speak with argumentative certainty about the non-falsifiable realities that religion understands). Yet, I would argue that there is still space to investigate the way in which metaphysical truths may be incarnated, and, indeed, performed in language; there is still space to craft linguistic anthropological models to capture the profound and basic truthfulness of religion *for those who believe*.

To that end, this paper will employ the linguistic anthropological work of Ochs, Baumann and Briggs, and Lutz to examine a communicative event that entwines secular communicative devices in a distinctly religious setting: a speech by James Martin SJ, a Catholic Jesuit priest who has served as a major advocate for the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in the Catholic Church. Over the course of the speech, Martin's language served to constitute distinct communicative dimensions, genres, and emotions, doing so in a context that was distinctly, Catholic; in his examining his speech in this paper, I will argue that this Catholic framework and its metaphysical propositions are inextricable from the emotional content and communicative impact of the speech, and are only fully comprehensible when giving a good faith (or, at the very

least, affirmative) reading to these propositions. Specifically, I will draw on the Ochs', Bauman and Briggs', and Lutz's work in order to highlight both the strengths and shortcomings of conventional linguistic anthropology in effectively understanding Martin's speech. Ochs' work, in particular, may serve as a meaningful site for expansion. While her framework is a useful one, effectively capturing the multiple communicative dimensions at play within a given interaction we may also use Martin's speech to make a meaningful expansion upon it: applying Bauman and Briggs' work on intertextuality and genre, as well as Lutz's work on the social constitution of emotion, we may find that Martin's language layers several different emotional and social registers at once, and refers to a kind of overarching metaphysical dimension that undergirds the speech. In this way, returning to Ochs, we may find that Martin's speech calls for the expansion of Ochs' paradigm, particularly its epistemic dimension, to include the potential metaphysical dimensions constituted by the communicative event.

Ochs and the Communicative Dimensions of Martin's Speech

Though I'm setting out, here, to speak on the ways in which Ochs' model of communication can be expanded, it is relevant to note the ways in which her model sheds light on Martin's speech. In particular, Ochs' situational dimensions of communication may reveal a number of key social roles, identities, and functions at play in Martin's speech, particularly the identities of those involved, Martin's role in relation to the Catholic political structure, and the relation of the speech to Martin's efforts toward LGBT+ inclusion.

In her "Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity," Ochs establishes a paradigm that includes five significant social "dimensions" of language, which entwine with the indexical creation of social customs. In particular, she defines the categories of:

1. *Social identity*, “all dimensions of social personae,” (Ochs 1996: 410) including both the local relations of speaker and audience but also the broader relations of identity, class, gender, occupation, authority, etc. that come into being during the interaction
2. *Social Act*, a “socially recognized goal-directed behavior” (410), which might include one given technique or act in a communicative utterance
3. *Activity*, a sequence of at least two social acts, which might be said to encompass a larger chunk or the whole of the communicative utterance
4. *Affective stance*, encompassing the mood, feeling, and emotional content called into being by the social act, and
5. *Epistemic stance*, the relation of the utterance to particular knowledge, belief, and the certainty of those pieces of knowledge or belief.

Ochs’ model, moreover, is distinctly indexical in its orientation (Ochs 1996: 410), calling attention to the way in which these five dimensions are both *drawn upon* and *created* in the communicative act—the communicative act not only launches from a particular social dynamic, but actively reproduces and recreates that social dynamic over the course of the event. In turn, both Ochs’ dimensions and her attention to indexicality, in turn, may be extremely useful in studying the nuanced social dynamics of Martin’s speech, including several that were unexpected and contradictory.

One such dynamic, for example, was that of Martin, as a Jesuit, with the Jesuit parish: over the course of his speech (*activity*), he made a number of specific references to his prior appearances at Holy Trinity, as well as self-deprecating jokes about Jesuit practice and theology (*social act*), engaging the audience in a warm and intimate rapport (*affective stance*) while also

affirming and recapitulating the significance of this Jesuit identity in the first place (*epistemic stance*).

Another, more complex social dynamic was Martin's status as a priest in good standing with the Church, which inflected his relationship both to the audience and to the subject of LGBT+ inclusion efforts. In the surface-level text of his speech, Martin was quite explicit (and emphatic) about his accordance with Church teaching, noting several times that his calls for LGBT+ inclusion were in complete accord with the official Church stance on homosexuality (*social act, activity*), which only forbids homosexual sexual activity. Thus, it might have been possible to categorize Martin as a moderate, at most (*social identity*). Simultaneously, however, it is (and was, as an audience member) impossible to avoid the fact that Martin's intense attention to empathy and love, his emotional and physical call for tolerance (*affective stance*) is quite different from the ambivalence or hostility that frequently characterizes the Church hierarchy's rhetoric on homosexuality. Indeed, coupled with Martin's explicit references (*social act*) to the subtle nuances in which the Vatican communicates its stance on theological issues, one could just as easily understand that, while Martin is a nominally orthodox priest, he is a relatively radical voice *within* the hierarchy on the issue of LGBT+ rights and inclusion (*social identity, epistemic stance*). Here, we find that Martin's social dynamics are complex and contradictory, not only (in Ochs' words) "reproduc[ing] social forms and meanings" but also "produc[ing] novel ones" (Ochs 1996: 416)—and Ochs' layered model helps us to evince this fact.

Furthermore, Martin's speech also functioned to perform (and project) a number of social dynamics in the *audience*. Notably, while Martin's speech was directed toward the topic of LGBT+ inclusion, Martin was more ambivalent in addressing any one audience. While his topic

was on the topic of LGBT+ people, he spoke more *about* Catholic LGBT+ people and the imperative to include them in the Church (*social act, activity*), occasionally directing his rhetoric toward LGBT+ people in the audience but more frequently speaking to a “neutral” (or presumed-straight) audience. Simultaneously, however, during the question-and-answer session that followed the speech (which entailed Martin selecting questions that audience members had written, rather than answering verbal questions), Martin selected questions from both LGBT+ individuals and the parents of LGBT+ individuals, thus incorporating both into his presumed audience. Thus, Martin performed particular sorts of social identities *into* the audience, constituting them both as a straight Catholic audience motivated by feelings of empathy and inclusion *and* as LGBT+ Catholics in need of inclusion, acceptance, and affirmation (two different *affective* and *epistemic stances* maintained at the same time). Indeed, the indexed identity that bridged the gap, including the entire audience, might simply be described as individuals in support of LGBT+ inclusion in the Catholic Church—and, importantly, though this identity might not have been universally true of everyone in the crowd, the particular nuances of Martin’s speech were such that it indexed this identity *for* the crowd. Again, we find that Ochs’ paradigm, and her broader attention to the indexical constitution of identity, may serve a valuable role in unpacking the complex web of social dynamics at play in Martin’s speech.

And yet.

As robust as Ochs’ framework is in its analysis of the indexicals of Martin’s speech, there is still, think, a significant blind spot in this analysis of Martin’s speech. Namely: given that the speech was given by a Catholic priest, in a Catholic Church, to an audience constituted as Catholic—what role does *Catholicism* play in the communicative event? How does Catholicism

shape the communicative event, map its affect, fundamentally contour the nature of Martin's message? How is this Catholic sensibility indexed by the semiotic layering that we've discussed, here?

To investigate this question, I turn now to Bauman and Briggs.

Bauman and Briggs and Intertextuality

As Ochs has allowed us to see and partially articulate, Martin's speech is comprised of a number of contradictory frames and indexical meanings, all layered over one another. In examining this contradiction further—and doing so with a particularly keen eye to the way in which faith-based registers emerge in Martin's rhetoric—I feel it only appropriate to turn to the research of Bauman and Briggs on genre and intertextuality.

Bauman and Briggs understand *genre* as a kind of large semiotic frame, a set of expectations that undergirds social situations and that provides a template for meaning-making and text-receiving, which entangles multiple features and expectations simultaneously. This concept may be applied to any social practice, and seeks to describe the uniting features of its occurrences; the “genre” of restaurant dining, for example, might consist of certain types of conversation, decorum, ordering styles, and payment methods. Importantly, Bauman and Briggs emphasize, distinctions between genres emerge “not within texts but in the practices used in creating intertextual relations with other bodies of discourse” (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 163). In other words, genres emerge not in singular, isolated texts, but in the entwining of *multiple* texts, multiple varieties of text. And, indeed, these relations may be complex: per Bauman and Briggs, “a text can be linked to generic precedents in multiple ways; generic framings of texts are thus often mixed, blurred, ambiguous, contradictory” (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 163) For this reason,

a genre may become perceivable in a moment of rupture, or in a moment of *contrast* with another genre—a nuance that will become particularly important in our study of James Martin’s speech.

Though Martin’s speech, as I highlighted in the previous section, exhibits a number of overlapping meanings and indexes, I would like to draw particular attention to the way in which it layers the genre of a secular, inclusivity-oriented speech with the genre of a specifically Catholic speech, which employs religious language and attention to Catholic concepts but which might not, conventionally, be linked to LGBT+ inclusivity. In keeping with Bauman and Briggs’ understanding of genre, these categories perceptible through their rupture, making one another known—and ultimately, *co-constituting* a more unified meaning in the speech, one that inextricably links LGBT+ inclusion efforts with Catholicism.

The genre of Secular Inclusive Speech™, for its part, forms a core element of Martin’s speech, even in spite of its obvious religious orientation and poetics—it draws from the conventions of secular speech, employing a format that is distinctly different from typical Catholic genre speeches and drawing points in its argument from secular data not explicitly connected to Catholicism. In the first place, the very format of the speech marks its involvement in a paradigm that is more secular than Catholic, per se: it was clearly a mixture of prepared remarks and points read from a script, it focused on a single, pre-announced topic, and it featured a question-and-answer session at its conclusion. Thus, in a classic moment of medium-as-message (thanks be unto Marshall McLuhan), the speech’s format marks it as a kind of secular entity, a communicative event that owes some of its parentage to secular conventions. This inclination toward the secular speech genre was further incarnated in Martin’s precise rhetorical points—in keeping with the genre of secular, LGBT-inclusion oriented speeches, Martin

employed data from the social sciences in pursuit of his argument, sharing the broad scientific consensus about the “origin” of homosexuality and data points on the percentage of LGBT+ youth who experience homelessness. These points, importantly, would not likely be found in a purely religious speech genre, which might draw more exclusively from moral reasoning or prior teachings of the faith; instead, Martin’s speech accords with more secularly oriented trends and provides data entangled with the academic disciplines (and ideologies) of the social sciences. In this way, then, we may find that Martin’s speech is surprisingly secular in parts of its generic conventions—and, consequently, its meaning encompasses, in some way, the secular.

Yet, at the same time, Catholicism clearly plays a considerable role in generically defining Martin’s speech—in some ways, even more than the secular genre. In particular, I might note the spatial poetics (to borrow from Bachelard) of the speech; the prominence of prayer in the event; the infusion of Gospel narratives and Catholic reasoning; and the particular nature of Martin’s humor, all of which root the speech in a distinctly Catholic priestly genre of speech. The spatial environment of the speech, in the first place, was hugely significant to the event’s indexical meaning—the speech took place in the main hall of Holy Trinity Catholic Church, in the same space where mass is conducted (and had been conducted, just hours before), and Martin stood at a podium often used for Gospel readings during mass. Consequently, the very poetics of the space, from its acoustics to its visual arrangements to its spatial politics, were infused with Catholic religious sensibility, obliging those present to experience the speech in a distinctly Catholic manner. This sensibility became manifest with Martin’s recitation of prayers at the beginning and end of the event, both reciting an improvised prayer and closing the event with a recitation of The Lord’s Prayer. The same Catholic poetics were recapitulated throughout the event with Martin’s rhetorical technique, which involved extensive analysis of the Bible

(including an allegorical reading of the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and an argument against literalist interpretations of Leviticus); Martin also, importantly, brought more direct Catholic reasoning into his argument, asserting that the Christian imperative to love and Catholicism's impulse towards community as substantial arguments in favor of greater inclusion of LGBT+ people in the Catholic Church. Finally, and perhaps most subtly, Martin's speech manifested a particular trait that, to my mind, is fundamentally Catholic: its humor. Though it takes a particular kind of ear to identify it, there's a distinct variety of humor that's entwined with Catholic homilies, a kind that's witty, corny, and very dry, landing perfectly with the crowds of middle-aged and elderly people that crowd a stereotypical Catholic mass. Importantly, Martin used this very humor and achieved that very effect in the speech. As a result, he infused the speech's poetics, and thus contoured its meaning, with a distinctly Catholic sense, shaping the speech not simply as a secular argument dressed in Catholic clothes but rather crafting a communicative event that was fundamentally Catholic in its genre.

With all these in mind, it is easy enough to see how the genre of "Catholic speech" constitutes a key part of Martin's speech—but we may also note the particular *blending* he performed, the way in which he entwined secular rhetorical genres with basic Catholic sensibilities and responsibilities to speak on LGBT+ inclusion. The speech was, in one way, an artifact of a secular genre; and, in another way, it was wholly, profoundly Catholic. Importantly, while these two frames are layered, they did not produce any dissonance or conflicting *meaning* in the indexical reality that Martin's speech generated; rather, in their mingling, they functioned to create a singular *unified* meaning, one that energized the Catholic speech genre to subsume and become inclusive of the secular speech genre. Thus, the secular genre of the speech *became*,

in the communicative event, inextricably tied with the Catholic genre, filtered through it and undergirded by it.

To further explore this concept, the significance of Catholicism as a prism for the speech's meaning, I turn to Lutz.

Lutz: Catholicism as Emotional Framework

Now that we've come to see the significance of Martin's generic layering—and its consequence of subsuming the secular genre into the Catholic genre—I feel it appropriate to broaden my analysis of Martin's speech to its affective content, to examine the way in which emotion comes into being in the communicative event. In doing so, I will draw on Lutz's work with the cultural constitution of emotion.

Before diving into Martin, let us first examine Lutz herself. In her groundbreaking *Unnatural Emotions*, Lutz argues that cultural and linguistic anthropology fundamentally errs when, in its efforts to explore emotion in different cultures, it assumes the inherent correctness of Western emotional categories and simply tries to translate them across language. Instead, she argues, we must understand emotion as culturally constituted, brought into being through contexts of social interactions. Indeed, she says, "What must be translated are the meanings of the emotion words spoken in everyday conversation, of the emotionally imbued events of everyday life, of tears and other gestures, and of audience reaction to emotional performance" (Lutz 1998: 21). Furthermore, Lutz argues, the cultural frames through which emotions come into existence are intensely meaningful in shaping the *essence* of those emotions, so much so that the emotions, in turn, indexically recapitulate the realities from which they emerged:

In particular cultures and contexts, emotion words may be used to theorize about events, to moralize about or to judge them, and to advance one's interests by defining the situation in a particular way. Thus, the calling up of a scenario by the speaker of emotion words is done in particular contexts for particular ends, to negotiate aspects of social reality and to create that reality. (Lutz 1998: 21)

This is all to say that there is intense significance to the cultural contexts, the structures of expectation, that give emotions their shape in cultural practice. This, we may find, is precisely the case in Martin's speech.

Now, I know what you're thinking. *The constitution of emotions through a cultural context?* you say. *Well, wouldn't that suggest that emotional experience is, in some way, relative? And isn't that at odds with Christianity's claim at accessing a transcendent truth?*

Well, yes. In one way, you're right. But here, I invite you to view Christianity's claim toward transcendent truth and emotional experience as another lens through which emotion, itself, might be framed—a framework that fundamentally contours the emotions of a Christian communicative situation. Thus, to understand how emotion exists in a Christian social context, one needs to give *some* kind of good faith reading to the Christian claim. In the case of Martin's speech, a profound part of the event's emotional character is that the emotions that underpin LGBT+ inclusion emerge through the Catholic way of understanding the world—in particular, Catholicism's *incarnational* manner of conceiving God, where God is, in some fashion, present and embodied in all things of the world.¹ Consequently, as we shall see, the emotional

¹ Without going into an extended digression, I will simply refer the reader to Andrew Greeley's *The Catholic Imagination*, an academic study that argues that Catholicism conceives of reality enchanted by God, where God is embodied in all things and all things are revelatory of the presence of God—a spirituality quite similar to Martin's own Ignatian spirituality, articulated in *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*.

dimension of Martin's speech conveys that it matters *profoundly* that you LGBT+ inclusion is Christian and Catholic.

Over the course of his speech, Martin's language works to constitute the emotions behind LGBT+ inclusion, contouring them through, giving them shape in, and making them inextricable from a Catholic context. I might return here to the Biblical allegories and Christian reasoning I mentioned in my previous section. In these moments and others, Martin worked to entwine conventional Christian rationale with the affective imperative LGBT+ inclusion, repeatedly emphasizing the way in which Christian love and compassion works to reveal God's presence in the world (a significant concern for Catholic spirituality), reframing Biblical narratives to speak to the condition of LGBT+ individuals, thus emphasizing their spiritual sanctity, and bookending the event with prayers that affectively sanctified the speech's mission of LGBT+ inclusion. Thus, he entwined the affect of LGBT+ inclusion with Christianity itself. That is to say, Martin's rhetoric did not propound LGBT+ inclusion because it was rational, or because it was simply the "nice" thing to do, or because of (ostensibly) secular values of tolerance; rather, in mobilizing Christian reasoning, he filtered the emotional impulse toward LGBT+ inclusion through a Christian emotional lens, ultimately calling for support for LGBT+ people because it channels God's love in the world, recognizes the profound sanctity of the human being, and follows in the path of Jesus.

Such an act is particularly fitting, I think, because it is not especially easy to articulate the emotion that underpins the desire to be accepting of LGBT+ people. Is it empathy? Compassion? Kindness? Some mix of them? Here, Martin's speech provides an answer, using the Bible and Christian reasoning to bundle together all these emotions into a uniquely Christian framework, one that understands that LGBT+ inclusion is an act of Christian love that may bring us closer to

God. And, in accordance with Lutz argument about the indexical resonance of emotional speech—its ability to both describe and *create* reality—Martin’s speech fundamentally transforms the concept of LGBT+ inclusion in this context. No longer is it simply a secular act, nor is it simply a side project for Christians (as in, *he’s a Christian who happens to be inclusive of LGBT+ people*); in Martin’s speech event, with the emotion that he has culturally constituted, the inclusion of LGBT+ people becomes an indexical Christian act, fulfilling Christian cultural expectations and constituting a Christian identity in its performance.

On the whole, then, we may say that, in Martin’s speech, Catholicism becomes the cultural frame through which the “intensely meaningful” is filtered, and Christian reasoning becomes the context through which LGBT+ inclusion is understood—and in turn, LGBT+ inclusion efforts become moments that recapitulate *Catholicism* and *Catholic sensibilities*. Thus, to further iterate my discussion of genre, we may find that Martin’s speech is not simply a transposition of secular LGBT+ inclusion into Catholicism, but is, rather, fundamentally Christian in his message. Much as the rhetorical genre of the speech cannot be disentangled from or understood without the Catholic subgenre, the emotion underpinning LGBT+ inclusion in the speech, and thus its *vision* of LGBT+ inclusion, is enveloped in Catholicism, and cannot be understood without an affirmation of Catholicism’s metaphysical claims.

Conclusion

Now that we’ve gone on that wondrous adventure through rhetoric and Catholicism, we may return to the starting point of this analysis: anthropological frameworks for communication generally, and Ochs specifically. As my first section indicated, Ochs’ framework is undoubtedly useful for understanding the ways in which language events are connected with and index

cultural realities, not only drawing from these realities but also reproducing them. That said, however, my analysis of Martin's speech vis-à-vis Bauman and Briggs and Lutz has, I hope, helped to highlight the way in which Ochs' culturally oriented model might fall short in its treatment of religion—and might explicate a potential space for development.

To be precise, here, I might ask—would it have been possible to use Ochs' model to capture the precise way that Martin's speech entwined Catholic genres and secular genres, and would it have been sufficient to explicate the existential importance of LGBT+ inclusion, for Martin? I, for one, am dubious. Considering the light that Bauman and Briggs shed on Martin's speech, we may return to Ochs and expand her conception of communicative dimensions, giving more weight to the potential metaphysical category housed within the epistemic—which, clearly, is a major part of Martin's speech, and, indeed, many speeches, that is not simply captured through Ochs' social model. Certainly, Ochs' model capture much of Martin's speech, but the real emotional weight emerges in the filtering of the emotions behind LGBT+ inclusion into a Christian context (achieved through the proliferation of the Catholic genre features)—the infusion of Christian existential concerns into the emotional content that frames the LGBT+ inclusion rhetoric.

Certainly, Ochs' framework offers the category of the *epistemic stance*, but this category, much like the impassive agnosticism of anthropological reasoning broadly, seems insufficient to capture the weight of Catholicism's existential weight and claims in this communicative context. Might it be better, perhaps, for a revision of Ochs' framework to include a kind of *metaphysical stance*, one that highlights how a communicative event fits into a broader existential claim on reality? This seems particularly critical for a comprehensive and full anthropological understanding of language, culture, and cognition—after all, how could we begin to properly

interpret a culture if our methods are unable to capture just *how* important certain truth claims to that culture? Thus, it simply doesn't capture the event to conceive of the event in a purely social sense; we must also consider it with the religious and spiritual dimension that the participants, themselves, infuse into it, meaning that we must extend Ochs' dimensions to encompass the spiritual, as well.

References

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