

- some of them not yet 20, routinely address the old people by their first names.
- 25 It is commonly known that there are men who feel free to address even women they have not met with terms of affection like 'dear' and 'honey' (cf. Wolfson and Manes 1979). This is contrary to the traditional address pattern.
- 26 But see Evans-Pritchard (1964) for address in Nuer, in a Sudanese language, and Moles (1978) for an analysis of address in Quechua, an indigenous South American language.
- 27 Besides the sources cited, I have benefited from discussions of Chinese address with Professor Wang Chih-kang, of Nanjing University.
- 28 According to Professor Wang, the use of *tóngzhi* could provoke a challenge during the factional times of the Cultural Revolution. Since *tóngzhi* literally means 'having the same ideals', someone addressed with *tóngzhi* could challenge the speaker with 'and who is your comrade?' (With whom do you share ideals?) The use of *shifu* would remove the risk of a response like that.
- 29 As is typical of address in many societies in Asia, there are combinations that allow intermediate degrees of solidarity or familiarity, like *Lǎo Wáng Tóngzhi*, 'Old Comrade Wang', or *Lǎo Tóngzhi*, 'Old Comrade'.
- 30 I am indebted to Pan Yuling for information on recent developments in the use of Chinese address forms.

FASOLD

2

The Ethnography of Communication

INTRODUCTION

The study of address form usage tells us quite a bit about how the speakers of a particular language, in a particular community, organize their social relationships. The approach to the sociolinguistics of language in which the use of language in general is related to social and cultural values is called the ethnography of speaking or, more generally, the *ethnography of communication*.¹ The acknowledged 'father' of this way of studying linguistics is Dell Hymes (1962/1968, 1972a, 1972b, 1974), so it is appropriate to pay close attention to what Hymes says the ethnography of communication is about.

In an early article, Hymes (1962/1968) defined the ethnography of speaking in a way that fits the work that was later done under that label very well: 'The ethnography of speaking is concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right' (Hymes 1962/1968:101). Hymes was concerned that both linguists and anthropologists were missing a large and important area of human communication. Anthropologists had long conducted ethnographic studies of different aspects of cultures – usually exotic ones – such as kinship systems, or indigenous views of medicine and curing. But language was treated as subsidiary; as a way of getting at these other topics. He noted (Hymes 1972b:50) that 'there are no books on comparative speaking to put beside those on comparative religion, comparative politics, and the like.' Linguists, in his view, were paying too much attention to language as an abstract system. They became interested in how to describe and explain the structures of sentences that speakers of a certain language would accept as grammatical. How anybody *used* one of those sentences – whether to show deference, to get someone to do something, to display verbal skill, or to give someone else information – was considered simply outside the concerns of linguistic theory. It seemed to Hymes that,

'linguists have abstracted from the content of speech, social scientists from its form, and both from the pattern of its use' (Hymes 1974:126).

The ethnography of communication would fill the gap by adding another subject (speaking or communication) to the anthropologist's list of possible topics for ethnographic description, and expand linguistics so that the study of the abstract structure of syntax, phonology, and semantics would be only one component of linguistics. A more complete linguistics would be concerned with how speakers go about using these structures as well.

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS

Speech community

To understand what the ethnography of communication is all about, it is necessary to understand some fundamental concepts. It is one of Hymes's emphases that ways of speaking can vary substantially from one culture to another, even in the most fundamental ways. For example, it has been pointed out (for instance, Schegloff 1972) that most middle-class white Americans (and possibly members of other Western societies as well), have a 'no gap, no overlap' rule for conversational turn-taking.² If two or more people are engaged in conversation and if two speakers start to talk at the same time, one will very quickly yield to the other, so that the speech of two people does not 'overlap'. On the other hand, if there is a lull in the conversation of more than a few seconds' duration, the participants become extremely uncomfortable. Someone will start talking about something unimportant just to fill the 'gap' or the group will break up.

So profoundly ingrained is this rule for speakers who have it that they can hardly imagine a conversation being carried on in any other way. But Reisman (1974) found that it was quite the usual practice for Antiguans to carry on discussions with more than one speaker speaking simultaneously. On the other hand, Saville-Troike (1982) reports that there are American Indian groups where it is common for a person to wait several minutes in silence before answering a question or taking a speaking turn. Reisman (1974:112) tells the following story about his experiences in a Lapp community in northern Sweden, where conversational gaps are part of the ordinary way people talk:

We spent some days in a borrowed sod house in the village of Rensjoen . . . Our neighbors would drop in on us every morning just to check that things were all right. We would offer coffee. After several minutes of silence the offer would be accepted. We would tentatively ask a question. More silence, than a 'yes' or a 'no.' Then a long wait. After five or ten minutes we would ask another. Same pause, same 'yes' or 'no.' Another ten minutes, etc. Each visit lasted approximately

an hour – all of us sitting formally. During that time there would be six or seven exchanges. Then our guests would leave to repeat the performance the next day.

Obviously, an ethnography of communication for middle-class white Americans would include the 'no gap, no overlap' conversational rule. The corresponding description of Antigua speech rules would not include the 'no overlap' rule. And a description of the American Indian groups Saville-Troike refers to, or the Lapps that Reisman lived near, would not include the 'no gap' rule.

If the rules for speaking can be different from one social group to the next, how do we decide what a social group is for purposes of ethnographic description? It is clear that it cannot be all citizens of the same country; American middle-class whites and some American Indians have different rules for conducting conversations. It cannot be decided on the basis of speaking the same language, either. In England, for example, conversations in public places like restaurants are subdued such that people who are not in the conversing group cannot hear what is being said. American public conversations can easily be overheard by anyone else in the same average-sized room unless what the group has to say is particularly personal or secret. Yet the two nations share the English language. It is necessary, then, for ethnographers of communication to develop the concept of *speech community*: the group to which a particular ethnographic description applies.

Defining 'speech community' has proved to be far from easy. Numerous definitions have been proposed, most of them at least slightly different from the next. Hymes (1972b:53–5), for example, insists that all members of a speech community share not only the same rules for speaking, but at least one linguistic variety as well. Suppose people in a Czech village and people in an Austrian village just across the border were to have the same rules for how to greet other people, how many people can and must be speaking at a time and so forth; but suppose the Austrians spoke only German and the Czechs spoke only Czech. They would *not*, according to Hymes, be members of the same speech community. Saville-Troike (1982:20) speaks of a level of analysis at which a speech community need not share a language. By all definitions, though, a speech community must at least share rules for speaking.

Of the definitions of speech community I know about, only Saville-Troike's includes a component that I consider essential. Her discussion mentions *overlapping* speech communities. A college student, for example, might be a resident of a particular dormitory, a student at a particular college, a black person, an American, and a member of a Western, European-derived society, all at the same time. Each of these 'speech communities' might have at least some distinguishing communication rules. Some of these speech communities would be different from others

by the addition of special rules of speaking. There might be particular slang terms or a specific greeting behavior that only students at the college know and use; otherwise their speech behavior would be just like that of other American college students. In other cases, rules of one community might conflict with those of one of the others. A black student probably uses speech in ways when talking to other black people that white students would not be able to understand or appreciate. Saville-Troike's insight is that it is not necessary for each speaker to belong to only one speech community or even to two or more completely separate communities. People can be, and normally are, members of several speech communities at the same time, just like you can be in the kitchen, on the ground floor, and in the house all at the same time. People alter their norms for speech behavior to conform to the appropriate speech community, by adding, subtracting, and substituting rules of communicative behavior.

Situation, event and act

In order to study the communicative behavior within a speech community, it is necessary to work with units of interaction. Hymes (1972b:58-9) suggested that a nested hierarchy of units called the speech situation, speech event, and speech act would be useful, and his suggestion has been widely accepted. The three units are a nested hierarchy in the sense that speech acts are part of speech events which are, in turn, part of speech situations. Hymes described speech situations as 'situations associated with (or marked by the absence of) speech.' The examples he gives are ceremonies, fights, hunts, or lovemaking. As Hymes sees it, speech situations are not purely communicative; they may be composed of both communicative and other kinds of events. Speech situations are not themselves subject to rules of speaking, but can be referred to by rules of speaking as contexts.

Speech events, on the other hand, are both communicative and governed by rules for the use of speech. A speech event takes place within a speech situation and is composed of one or more speech acts. For example, a joke might be a speech act that is part of a conversation (a speech event) which takes place at a party (a speech situation). It is also possible for a speech act to be, in itself, the entire speech event which might be the only event in a speech situation. A single invocation which is all there is to a prayer when that prayer is the only event in a rite is the example Hymes gives.

The third level in the hierarchy is the speech act. 'Speech act' is the simplest and the most troublesome level at the same time. It is the simplest because it is the 'minimal term of the set' (Hymes 1972a:56). It is troublesome because it has a slightly different meaning in the study of the ethnography of communication from the meaning given to the term

in linguistic pragmatics and in philosophy (for example, Austin 1962, chapter 4), and because it seems it is not quite 'minimal' after all. According to Hymes, a speech act is to be distinguished from the sentence and is not to be identified with any unit at any level of grammar. A speech act could have forms ranging from, 'By the authority vested in me by the laws of this state, I hereby command you to leave this building immediately', to, 'Would you mind leaving now?', to, 'I sure would like some peace and quiet', to, 'Out!' (all interpretable as commands, if the context is right). For Hymes, a speech act gets its status from the social context as well as grammatical form and intonation. As he puts it, 'the level of speech acts mediates immediately between the usual levels of grammar and the rest of a speech event or situation in that it implicates both linguistic form and social norms' (Hymes 1972a:57). We will later see (in chapter 6) that other approaches to speech acts link them more closely to the syntactic level of grammatical theory and handle the variation in speech act form according to context in another way.

Although speech acts were proposed as the minimal component of speech events, it has become clear that they are not actually quite 'minimal' (Coulthard 1977:40). Hymes mentions jokes as an example of a speech act, but some jokes, like knock-knock jokes or riddles, require speech moves by more than one speaker. For example:

Knock knock.

Who's there?

Joe and Angie.

Joe and Angie who?

Joe momma angie daddy! (Your momma and your daddy)

or:

What do you get when you cross a watermelon with a persimmon?

I don't know, what?

A fruit that's impossible to spit the seeds out.

Other apparent speech acts, like greetings and summonses, are made up of pairs of conversational moves – each made by a different speaker – that go together. In a greeting, for example, if one person greets another, you would expect a return greeting. If the other person does not return the greeting, it is not as though nothing had happened; the absence of the returned greeting is itself significant. It might mean that the greeted person is angry with the original greeter, or that he or she

did not hear the greeting. If the greeting is a speech act, then what do we call each of the utterances by the two people greeting each other? If each move is individually taken to be the speech act, then we have no term for the whole two-move greeting as a unit. Regardless of how this problem is ultimately solved, Hymes's insight about the units of communication being hierarchically organized in this way has proved useful.

Speaking

In addition to looking at communication as composed of speech situations, speech events, and speech acts, Hymes suggests that there are certain *components* of speech that the ethnographer should look for. Although there are more than eight such components, Hymes (1972a:59-65) puts them into eight groups, each labeled with one of the letters of the word 'speaking'. (This technique, of course, has no theoretical significance; it is merely a mnemonic device.) The 'situation' (S) is composed of the setting and the scene. The setting is about the physical circumstances of a communicative event, including the time and place. The scene is the 'psychological setting'; what kind of speech event is taking place according to cultural definitions. The 'participants' (P) include not only the speaker and addressee, but also the addressor and the audience. The distinction between the speaker and the addressor (source) is illustrated by formal scenes among the Wishram Chinook in which the words of a chief (addressor) are repeated by a spokesman (speaker). An example in which the addressor is not even present would be the case in which the addressor is a head of state or other dignitary whose message is read to reporters by a press agent. In some scenes, the audience is not being addressed directly, but is essential for the kind of speech event in progress. The ritual insults called 'sounds' among black American adolescents described by Labov (1972b) require other youngsters to be around who evaluate the insults with remarks like 'Ooo, what a bust! or 'That's stale.' These members of the audience are not spoken to directly, but it would be unthinkable for one person to 'sound on' someone else if there were no one else around to hear it.

The 'ends' of a speech event (E) can be divided into outcomes (the purpose of the event from a cultural point of view) and goals (the purposes of the individual participants). In all sorts of bargaining events, for example, the overall outcome is to be the orderly exchange of something of value from one person to the other. The goal of the seller, of course, is to maximize the price; the buyer wants to minimize it.

Message form (how something is said) and content (what is said) together are called the 'act sequence' (A). Both message form and message content involve communicative skills that vary from one culture

to another. Speakers have to know how to formulate speech events and speech acts in ways that their culture values and also how to recognize what is being talked about, when a topic changes, and how to manage changes in topic. One way to get a feel for the difference between message form and message content is to consider the difference between direct and indirect quotations. If someone were to say: 'He advised me, "Listen! If you buy a used car from that guy, you'll really regret it"', that person has reported both the form and content of the message; both what the advice was and how it was given. If the same speech were reported as, 'He advised me not to buy a used car from that guy', only the content is reported.

'Key' (K) refers to the manner or spirit in which a speech act is carried out: for example, whether it is mock or serious, perfunctory or painstaking. Often, certain keys are closely associated with other aspects of communication, like setting or participant (you expect the key to be solemn in a church but a clown to communicate in a jovial key). A possible result of conflict between the content of an act and the expected key is sarcasm. 'Instrumentalities' (I) include both channels and forms of speech. By channel, Hymes simply means the way a message travels from one person to another. Probably the most commonly used channels are oral or written transmission of a message, but messages can also be transmitted by such means as telegraph, semaphore, smoke signals, or drumming. By forms of speech, Hymes means languages and their subdivisions, dialects, codes, varieties, and registers.³

Communication also involves 'norms' (N), both of interaction and interpretation. We have already seen that Americans typically follow the 'no gap, no overlap' norm of conversational turn-taking, and that this norm is not followed in every other culture. To be competent in communicating in a certain culture, you have to follow norms of interpretation as well. Interpretation, in the sense in which Hymes uses it in this context, is more or less what we mean by the expression 'reading between the lines'.⁴ It involves trying to understand what is being conveyed beyond what is in the actual words used. Although it is possible to make mistakes in interpreting communicative acts by other members of your own culture, it is far more common across cultures. Gumperz (1977) cites an incident aboard a bus in London that is an example of this. The bus was being operated by a West Indian man. As is customary, he would periodically announce 'Exact change, please', with roughly the following intonation:

Exact change please

If a passenger did not have the money ready or tried to give him a large note, the driver would repeat 'Exact change, please', only this time his

'please' was louder, had higher pitch, and there was something of a pause between 'change' and 'please', something like:

Exact change PLEA^{SE}

One passenger who had received the repeated request went on down the aisle looking angry and muttering 'Why do these people have to be so rude and threatening about it?' Why did it sound rude and threatening? To speakers of British or American dialects, to separate the word 'please' from the rest of the sentence by a brief pause, and to say it with higher pitch and greater loudness than usual would mean that the word 'please' was being given special emphasis: that the hearer was supposed to pay special attention to the word. Furthermore, the falling intonation would indicate finality to British or American English speakers: that is, the speaker considers the speech act concluded. This conclusiveness, in turn, seems excessively direct. The passenger would note the special emphasis on 'please' and take it to mean that the driver was emphasizing the fact that he was making a request. When something is emphasized, the hearer has to work out why; in this context it would seem to mean something like 'This is a REQUEST which I have to repeat because you ignored the first one.' Furthermore, the finality implied by the falling intonation might seem to be saying, 'You are in the wrong so there is nothing further to be said or done except for you to make it right by paying the fare with the exact change.' The whole utterance would sound rude and impolite because it seems to place the hearer entirely in the wrong. The problem, according to Gumperz, is that the norms of interaction for West Indian English call for such a slight pause, higher pitch and increased loudness for routine emphasis, with no expressive overtones. That is to say, the word 'please', spoken the way the driver spoke it, is not a clue to look for a hidden 'between the lines' meaning, but simply as a way of emphasizing the word 'please'. If anything, then, the driver was trying to be polite, by emphasizing the politeness word 'please'.

'Genres' (G) refer to categories like poems, myths, proverbs, lectures, and commercial messages. It is often the case that different genres have defining formal characteristics. In Hymes's view, casual speech is not the absence of any genre, but a genre of its own. Genres often coincide with speech events, but have to be distinguished from speech events since a speech genre can occur in more than one kind of speech event. Hymes gives the example of a sermon as a genre occurring outside the context of a church service for serious or humorous effect.

METHODOLOGY

The information that you can expect to get from the study of some phenomenon depends to some extent on how you go about getting it. As a result, there is a close relationship between the analyses that emerge from an academic discipline and the methodology that is used in that discipline. The ethnography of speaking, as an approach to the study of language in social context, is in practice a branch of anthropology. The analyses that come out of ethnographies of speaking, then, are ones that come naturally from the methods used in anthropology.

Unlike much of the work in sociology and psychology, anthropological studies typically do not involve research projects predesigned to control variables and yield statistical results. The goal of work in the ethnography of speaking, and other anthropological studies, is to gain a global understanding of the viewpoints and values of a community as a way of explaining the attitudes and behavior of its members. Information of this kind is not likely to come out of laboratory-style research designs. Rather, what is required is an intimate understanding of the community by the investigator. Saville-Troike (1982:118-34) presents seven procedures for collecting data for an ethnographic analysis of communication, but two of them are the most important. 'Participant-observation' is the staple method that has served anthropology for a long time. The other method, 'introspection' is used when a scholar studies his or her own speech community. Some of the others that Saville-Troike suggests, such as (more-or-less detached) observation, interviewing, and philology (the use of written material, like etiquette books or newspaper advice columns, as well as descriptions of communities that no longer exist), are really auxiliary to the two major methods. Others, like ethnosemantics (for example, the study of how a particular community views medicine and healing, quite apart from the 'scientific' Western approach) and ethnomethodology (a particular kind of detailed analysis of conversational interactions), are for specific kinds of ethnographic work.

Participant-observation is absolutely required for the ethnographic analysis of cultures that the ethnographer does not belong to. To find out what beliefs and values motivate a community of people, the investigator must go as far as he or she can towards becoming a part of the community, filling a role that makes sense in that setting. Usually, he or she has to be content with the role of a relative outsider; perhaps even the role of a guest or stranger. Essentially, the investigator tries to learn to see the world just as the members of the community see it, no matter how foreign that may be to his or her experience so far. Above all, the investigator has to avoid passing judgement on the community's customs. In conducting research in a community where sick people were treated by incantations, for example, no competent ethnographer would

ever report that aspect of the culture as a 'silly superstition'. On the contrary, he or she would attempt to understand the community point of view that it is a valid and efficacious way to heal someone. Participant-observation demands considerable commitment to the research. The researcher spends months – more often years – in the community before he or she feels confident of understanding their outlook. In developing parts of the world, this will mean accepting a reduced material standard of living for that length of time.

Introspection means the investigator tries to analyze his or her own values and behaviors and those of people in his or her community. This is by no means as simple as it sounds. For one thing, the way people operate in their own culture is automatic and largely below the level of conscious awareness. As a result, important facts that a participant-observer in a foreign culture would notice almost immediately might be overlooked entirely. Furthermore, it can be extremely uncomfortable to have to function in the community after the certain formerly implicit rules have been made explicit. For instance, in my own classes, to illustrate how the ethnography of communication is conducted, I conduct a group discussion of the American rules for greetings, using collective introspective. It turns out that people are usually not consciously aware of most of the rules for greetings until we make them explicit. In a way I dread these classes. If a student has to talk to me soon afterwards, it becomes painfully embarrassing for both of us simply to say 'hi' or 'hello' (or decide not to). Each of us is wondering if we are following the rules we have just discussed!

Besides the discomfort that results when a formerly unconscious behavior pattern is suddenly brought to explicit awareness, in the objective analysis of someone's own culture the analysis might easily bring out some of the less flattering practices of the community. To take a mild example from our analysis of greetings, we always discover that one of the rules of greetings is that there must be eye-contact between potential greeters. This leads us to admit that we often deliberately *avoid* eye-contact with another person under some circumstances, as a way to avoid greeting them. For example, we might not be sure if the other person will think it is appropriate for us to greet them, or we do not want to be rude, but we simply do not have the time to risk beginning a long conversation with an acquaintance. It is far easier to be objective and detached about such facts in someone else's culture than in your own.

In a sense, introspection is a late stage of the participant-observation method. When someone studies a speech community which he or she is not a natural member of, that person must become a part of the community to whatever degree possible. From this position, he or she will try to get a deep, almost intuitive understanding of the culture. The

final analysis is, in a sense, an 'introspection' of this newfound understanding. Ethnographers must be very careful that the understanding they *think* they have is really accurate since learning second cultures, like learning second languages, is almost always imperfect: you 'behave with an accent' in the new culture. Ethnographers do this by making sure all the observed behavior and the information that they might get from interviewing members of the community is consistent with the understanding they think they have.

By the way, information obtained by direct questioning of subjects might reflect more the way they think things ought to be, rather than the way they are. The speech community member, after all, is being asked to do on-the-spot introspection without the benefit of education in the methods of anthropological research. We use the term introspection as distinct from participant-observation since, when someone is working in his or her own community, it is assumed that that person is a participant. Ethnographers using introspection in their own community should be just as careful that their explicit understanding of the practices and beliefs of their own culture is as consistent with independent evidence as participant-observers in a foreign community would be.

The dangers from using participant-observation/introspection in a nonnative community and in a native one are real in both cases, but of different kinds. In making observations in a foreign community, an ethnographer is likely to notice most of the relevant facts, since so much will be new and unexpected. The danger comes in trying to reach an accurate interpretation of these facts in terms of the culture. The investigator is hampered by the temptation to interpret what is going on around him or her from the perspective of his or her own culture, or even to see the folkways of the new community as technically and morally inferior to the ways of his or her own community. Hymes (1972b) suggests using an 'etic grid' to overcome these hazards. The term 'etic' is derived from the linguistic term 'phonetic' as opposed to 'phonemic'. In phonetic analysis, linguists try to write down the sounds of a new language as accurately as they can, without assuming that they are phonologically related to each other in the way they are in the linguists' own language. Phonemic analysis involves discovering the sound system of the new language, using the phonetic data. Similarly, the ethnographer has to make 'etic' observations of behaviors, at first assiduously refusing to interpret what they might mean. Only after weeks or months of observations have been collected will the ethnographer begin to place confidence in their 'emic' meaning: the significance they have within the cultural system of the community under observation. The 'grid' Hymes referred to in this early article seems to be a forerunner of the categories of the SPEAKING mnemonic. By focusing on each of these components

and making 'etic'-style observations, the ethnographer improves his or her chances of avoiding the characteristic pitfalls of participant-observation in another community.

Work done in the ethnographer's native community will not suffer from interference from some other cultural system; rather, the danger is that some things people do which have significance will be overlooked simply because they seem so mundane and their meaning so obvious. As we have seen, becoming too aware of the communicative rules in your own culture can make it painful when you find you have to conform to them in daily life. It is tempting to avoid this kind of discomfort simply by not analyzing some of these rules. Perhaps the greatest hazard is the natural tendency to avoid conclusions that might seem to place your own culture in a bad light, even when the facts point in that direction. Native community ethnographers, unlike investigators of a foreign community, then have to live with the fact that they are part of a community that has those possibly unattractive characteristics. This result, of course, could be avoided if investigators, consciously or unconsciously, come to the wrong conclusion, or simply leave that aspect out of the analysis altogether. Interestingly enough, a Hymesian 'etic grid' is also a useful tool for avoiding the dangers of native-community research.

THE WHORF HYPOTHESIS

In the discussion of methodology, I have emphasized the difficulty that ethnographers face in trying to avoid interpreting other community mores in terms of their own cultural values. The special role of language, though, has not been mentioned. The rules of behavior within a community are often unconscious, but still quite binding on members of the community. Similarly, linguistic rules are for the most part not apparent to the speakers of a language, but they none the less conform to those rules in speaking. These observations led two scholars – the second a student of the first – to the hypothesis that the structure of the vocabulary and grammar of an individual's language actually *shape* that person's view of the world. The two scholars were Edward Sapir and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf. The hypothesis is accordingly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or simply the Whorf hypothesis, since Whorf was the one who gathered evidence in support of it.

Sapir (1929: see also Mandelbaum 1958:162) expressed the hypothesis in these words:

Language is a guide to 'social reality.' . . . Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to

imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. . . . We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

These words of Edward Sapir are quite striking. He speaks of societies being 'at the mercy' of their languages and speakers of any two different languages as living in 'distinct worlds'. Whorf (1940, and Carroll 1957) gave a number of examples of how this could be so. One way has to do with different words for similar concepts. Whorf's most famous example is of the different words in Eskimo for falling snow, wind-driven snow, slushy snow, snow on the ground, and hard-packed snow. Eskimos would be tempted to think of an English speaker as cognitively deprived if they discovered there was only the English word 'snow' for all these substances. In the same vein English speakers are inclined to wonder how the Hopi, a native American group in the western US, get along with only one word – *masa'yataka* – that means airplane, insect, and aviator.

Even more profound differences between languages are possible when grammar is taken into account. Whorf goes on to describe some of the startling differences between English and Hopi grammar. In English, as in most European languages, a fundamental division of words is into nouns and verbs. But Whorf argues that this division is an artefact of certain particular languages; nature is not polarized in this way. For example, if verbs are defined as denoting events of relatively short duration, such as 'hit' or 'fall', then 'fist' might well qualify as a verb, although of course it is a noun in English. Similarly, nouns like 'lightning', 'noise', or 'spasm' are events that might well be verbs if verbs are supposed to denote events. On the other hand, verbs like 'dwell' or 'adhere' are situations that are as stable and enduring as 'apple', for instance, or 'newspaper', and those concepts could be denoted by nouns, if stability is the criterion. Is it really so inconceivable that in some language, people might say the equivalent of 'Her dwell is in that house over there', or 'Those kids out there are noising too much'? As it turns out, in Hopi, notions like 'lightning', 'flame', and 'wave' are not nouns at all, but verbs. In Hopi, duration is the criterion for nominal or verbal status and these events are all far too brief to be denoted by nouns. According to Whorf, in Nootka (a language spoken in western Canada) *all* words seem to a native speaker of a European language to be verbs. The Nootka use the equivalent of 'it used to cabin', for example, to express 'there used to be a cabin'.

A possible consequence of this would be that speakers of different languages could stand side by side and experience precisely the same event and yet understand it in profoundly different ways. Furthermore, each would find it difficult or impossible to understand the event from the other's perspective. Whorf provides a speculative scenario in which a physicist from a society in which verbs are not inflected for time becomes involved in a conversation with a Western physicist. The first physicist would have no formulas that involved 'time' or 'velocity'. 'Time' might be replaced by 'intensity', perhaps, and 'velocity' by 'variation'. For a while, each would think the other simply had different words for the same concepts. But eventually the first physicist would become puzzled by the Western physicist's use of the notion 'rate' to describe an object falling to the ground and the progress of a chemical reaction in a beaker. The first physicist would not understand how his or her colleague could speak of an event that takes place in the same spot (like the beaker) in the same terms as a falling object in which there was movement in an obvious plane. The Western physicist would wonder why this other person, who seemed otherwise so knowledgeable and intelligent, could not understand a reasonably elementary concept like the rate of progress of a chemical reaction. It is possible that neither of them might ever come to understand the source of the difficulty.

Needless to say, such a striking hypothesis very quickly became controversial. Critics were quick to point out that, while there certainly were substantial differences between European languages (Whorf was fond of referring to SAE, or Standard Average European) and the indigenous North American languages that Whorf cited, it did not necessarily follow that these differences induced profound differences in the way speakers of each language perceived the world. The Whorf hypothesis has been examined experimentally numerous times since the early 1940s when Whorf published his work on the subject. Most of the experimental research had to do with lexical differences and the different divisions in semantic field that go along with them. Perhaps the best-known example of this research was the work on color terms by Berlin and Kay (1969). One experiment that is based on grammatical categories was conducted by Carroll and Casagrande and published in 1958.

What has been concluded after all these decades of research on the Whorf hypothesis? For a number of reasons, it was difficult to come to firm conclusions. In the first place, as Joshua Fishman (1982) points out, it is not totally clear exactly how far Whorf was willing to carry his hypothesis. Whorf was still developing and clarifying his ideas when he died in 1941 at the age of 44. Much of the controversy, then, is about what Whorf 'really' meant. Another reason, again pointed out by Fishman, is that in general there is a profound difference between Whorf and his supporters on the one hand and his critics on the other about what

methods should be used in this kind of research and what kind of evidence is taken seriously. The critics tend to use carefully-designed experiments with attempts to control variables, along with the use of statistical procedures to evaluate the results. Whorf himself and those who are impressed with his work are more inclined to rely on methods in the spirit of participant-observation and the data that it produces. Nevertheless, it is at least clear that there are several possible degrees of 'Whorfianism'. It is common for scholars to write about 'strong' and 'weak' versions of the Whorf hypothesis (for example, Miller and McNeill 1969). According to the strong version, people's cognitive categories are determined by the languages they speak. According to the weak form, people's behavior will tend to be guided by the linguistic categories of their languages under certain circumstances. As you would expect, it is easier to get someone to agree with the weak form than with the strong form. To a large degree, the argument has become one of how strong a version of the Whorf hypothesis is credible, rather than whether Whorf was right or wrong. As McCormack (1977:4) puts it, 'Nowadays the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is neither wholly accepted nor wholly rejected.'

AN EXAMPLE

Background

An example of an approach to the study of sociolinguistics is often a much better way of understanding how the approach works than any amount of discussion of it. In this section I will describe one of the finest examples of the ethnography of communication I know of, the work of Elinor Ochs on a rural Malagasy village in Madagascar (Ochs 1973, Ochs Keenan 1974, 1975, 1977; Keenan and Ochs 1979). Her work was based on extended participant-observation in a small hamlet in the Vakinankaratra region of south-central Madagascar. The rules for behavior and value system of that community were substantially different from what a Westerner would ordinarily expect and this has a great effect on the rules for communication. As Keenan and Ochs (1979:138) put it:

The European learner of Malagasy who had perfected his knowledge of the sound system of the language and the various ways of forming words, phrases, and sentences would . . . still find himself unable to perform successfully most social acts requiring the use of speech in the type of peasant community in which we lived.

He would frequently draw many incorrect inferences from what people said and equally frequently be misunderstood and find that his attempts at communication prompted reactions quite different from those he intended.

The reason for the difficulty that even a fluent speaker of the language would have is based on several critical facts about the folkways of the Malagasy villagers. Villages are based on a near-subsistence peasant economy, and have very small populations. This means that, in day-to-day life, people will see and work with the same people and be involved in similar activities. Except at harvest time, people seldom see other people from outside the village or leave the village themselves. This means there is never very much new information. Villagers all know each other and what happens in the village is pretty much public knowledge. Information from outside the village is seldom available. Most villagers are not literate, and could not afford newspapers, magazines or books if they could read them. Radios are too expensive to be common. Any new information, then, is passed from one individual to another. Since news is scarce, a person who has information that not everybody else knows is very much sought after. In order to prolong this status, someone who has new information is inclined to keep it for as long as possible.

At the same time, the society is very egalitarian, in particular with respect to actions that might involve guilt or blame. If something goes wrong, or if something desirable does not occur when it is expected, the fault should ideally be shared by everyone. Except for government posts imposed from outside, there is no individual leadership. Families are an important unit of social organization. Rice plots are cultivated by family units and all members – men, women, and children – are involved. The success of the crop becomes the responsibility of the whole family. Actions that go beyond the concerns of any one family are taken by the village elders, called *ray-aman-dreny* (which literally means 'father and mother'). People become elders if they have children and grandchildren, guaranteeing that they will be ancestors (who are very important to the Malagasy villagers). These actions are taken collectively by the elders as a group; no individual takes full responsibility. For example, Keenan and Ochs (1979:143) report that on one occasion six men, jointly and by turns, participated in sawing one single board during the construction of a coffin. If it later turned out that the coffin was poorly constructed, then the blame would not belong to just one builder.

These facts of Malagasy village life have two important consequences for personal interaction. First, if a person has even the simplest scrap of information that is not common knowledge, he or she has, in effect, a valued commodity. Therefore, the privileged person will not want to part with it too soon or all at once. Second, the strong egalitarian principle causes each individual to avoid doing anything that would set him or her apart from the rest of the group. In particular, confrontations with other villagers are carefully avoided.

Information exchange

Keenan and Ochs illustrate the contrast between Western European or North American norms for information exchange and Malagasy village norms. They do this by showing that a Malagasy villager would conceal the same information that a Westerner would reveal without a moment's thought. Imagine a Western man walking down the street and being asked by a neighbor, 'Where are you off to?' He would think nothing of saying, 'Just down to the hardware store to get some nails. Eddie and I are going to build a treehouse today.' A Malagasy would never dream of revealing that he was going precisely to the hardware store, what he was going to buy there, and why he was buying it in two short sentences and in response to such a general question. A Malagasy man who met a friend on the road might, after a greeting, be asked where he was headed. But he would simply say something like, 'Just a little to the north there.' The response does not provide any information at all. It would have been obvious before he said anything what direction the man was taking, but even that statement would be likely to include reduplicated forms for 'North' (*avaraparatra*, unreduplicated *avaratra*). Reduplication has the effect of minimization, as if the walker is not going quite as directly northwards as it is possible to go. An incident of this type would illustrate Keenan and Ochs' point about even a fluent Malagasy-speaking European making wrong inferences. To the European, the Malagasy's apparent evasiveness would mean that he has some special reason for not wanting to say where he is going, maybe because it is exceptionally personal or perhaps even involves some activity that is not quite honest. That inference would be completely wrong; the Malagasy is probably not going anywhere more special than the local equivalent of a hardware store. As strange as it seems to outsiders, the information in a Malagasy utterance is more likely to be something the hearer knows or could work out than something he would not know unless someone told him.

Another kind of information-concealing is involved in referring to individuals in conversation. On one occasion, a teenage boy mentioned to Keenan and Ochs that 'Bosy's mother is a little sick', as a way of indirectly asking for some medicine. A European would normally assume that Bosy's mother is not the boy's mother, even if there was every reason to believe that Bosy is his sister. The European would assume that the boy would refer to his own mother as 'my mother'. But 'Bosy's mother' was in fact the boy's mother, too. To refer to her as 'my mother' would have called too much attention to him by Malagasy standards; it was much more appropriate to deflect that attention by identifying his mother through a third party, his sister. Another way to avoid calling too much attention either to yourself or to the person you are talking about is to

use the generic expression *olona*, 'person'. Someone from a Western culture who heard a woman ask, 'Is the person still sleeping?' would have no doubt that she did not know the person and might be mildly puzzled about why she was not a little more precise in indicating which 'person' it was. The 'person' was actually the woman's husband (Ochs Keenan 1977:261).

Malagasy grammar has a particular grammatical device that makes it easy for a speaker to avoid referring to individuals, the circumstantial voice. Like European languages, Malagasy has an active and a passive voice, for example:

manasa ny lamba amin'ity savony ity Rasoa
wash the clothes with this soap this Rasoa

'Rasoa is washing clothes with this soap'

The verb occurs first, the subject last and the object in between, as is typical in Malagasy. In the passive voice, the sentence would be:

sasan-dRasoa amin'ity savony ity ny lamba
washed-by-Rasoa with this soap this the clothes

'The clothes are washed by Rasoa with this soap'

or, with the subject deleted:

Sasana amin'ity savony ity ny lamba
washed with this soap this the clothes

'The clothes are washed with this soap'

In these sentences *ny lamba*, 'the clothes', occupies the subject position, in a manner similar to English sentences. In the second example, there is no mention of who did the washing, but at the cost of making 'the clothes' prominent in the sentence. The circumstantial voice allows some other noun phrase to be made prominent: one which refers to neither the agent or the patient of the action, but to some circumstance connected with the action. Using the circumstantial voice, it is possible to say:

anasan-dRasoa ny lamba ity savony ity
wash-with-by-Rasoa the clothes this soap this

'This soap is wash-the-clothes-with by Rasoa'

or, more loosely and more naturally, 'This soap is used to wash the clothes by Rasoa.' As in the passive, the agent can be left out in the circumstantial voice, giving:

anasana ny lamba ity savony ity
wash-with the clothes this soap this

'This soap is wash-the-clothes-with' or,
'This soap is (used to) wash the clothes'

The Malagasy speaker has a way of avoiding the agent of an action in an utterance without necessarily making the patient prominent.

Another feature of the Malagasy language – a usage rule rather than a particular syntactic structure – involves the existential construction with the verb *misy*, 'exist' (Keenan and Ochs 1979:128–9). The verb *misy* is morphologically and syntactically an ordinary verb taking the usual inflections and is used in such ordinary existence statements as:

misy liona any Afrika
exist lion there Africa

'There are lions in Africa'

misy Andriamanitra
exist God

'God exists'

But the verb *misy* is regularly used with another verb to indicate an activity without revealing who it is that performed the action, as in:

misy mitomany
exist cry

'There is crying' or 'Someone is crying'

misy mitady
exist look-for

'(Someone) is looking for (something)'

Notice that it is impossible even to translate this construction into understandable English without using an overt subject, at least an indefinite one. In Malagasy, there is no mention at all of either the agent or patient of the action. The second sentence, as Keenan and Ochs (1979:153) point out, could be used by a friend who knows your brother well to tell you your brother has been looking for you. In English, of course, if someone says 'Someone is looking for you', you would most naturally assume that the speaker either never saw who it is who is looking for you or did not recognize the person. This inference would be completely invalid in a Malagasy village.

Giving orders and making requests

When we come back to the topic of speech acts in chapter 6, we will see that orders and requests are socially somewhat hazardous communicative activities. If you give someone an order or make a request, you expect that he or she would be willing to do something that is for your benefit. Typically, it means either that you think that you are in a sufficiently superior social position for the other person to be obliged to carry out the order or request, or that the solidarity between you is sufficient for that person to be willing to act for your benefit. If your assessment is wrong – he or she does not accept your social superiority or acknowledge the right amount of solidarity between you – the other person might openly refuse to carry out the order or fulfil the request, making you look foolish. Even if that person does do what you want, it may be with reluctance and damage will be done to your friendship. From the point of view of the person who is receiving the order or request, there are two choices, neither of them particularly attractive when you think about it. If you are given an order or a request, you can accept it and put yourself momentarily at the service of someone else; or you can risk an open confrontation with the other person by refusing to do what is wanted or by doing it with poor grace. Since the Malagasy value equality and the avoidance of confrontation, you would expect them to manage these speech acts so that the risks are minimized, and they do.

The passive and circumstantial voices can be used in the imperative mood for giving orders and very often are. A passive order in Malagasy would look like:

Sasao ny lamba
Be-washed the clothes

‘(Let) the clothes be washed’

It would also be possible, but less likely, to say:

Sasao-nao ny lamba
Be-washed by-you the clothes

‘Let the clothes be washed by you’

The circumstantial imperative would be:

Anasao ny lamba ity savony ity
Be-washed the clothes this soap this

‘This soap is to be used to wash the clothes’

or less often:

Anasao-nao ny lamba ity savony ity
Be-washed by-you the clothes this soap this

‘This soap is to be used by you to wash the clothes’

These constructions, especially with the form meaning ‘by you’ omitted, have the effect of emphasizing the item that is going to receive the effect of the action, or some other aspect of the act – like the clothes or the soap – at the expense of emphasis on the recipient of the order, and even on the action itself. It is grammatically possible to give orders in the active voice, by saying:

Manasa lamba
Wash clothes

‘Wash the clothes’

This form of request is considered very rude and brusque and would only be used by someone who was provoked. Because of its similarity to imperatives in European languages, European speakers over-use the active imperative and seem haughty and rude to the Malagasy as a result. Requests are de-emphasized in several ways. To begin with, the speech action is likely to take the form of a hint rather than an overt request. Second, even the hint will not be mentioned right away; it will be brought up after considerable conversation has taken place. In the third place, the hint that reveals the desired act will often not be dropped by the person who will benefit, but by someone else on his or her behalf. In fact, requests are often group acts, rather than individual ones.

Keenan and Ochs (1979:154) give the following example of how all this works out in practice. On one occasion, a group of boys arrived at their house for an unannounced visit. After about 20 minutes of talk, someone mentioned a cut foot. Somewhat later, one of the boys in the back of the group showed Keenan and Ochs a badly cut foot, which required first aid.

Clearly, there is considerable potential for misunderstanding between Europeans and Malagasys where requests are concerned. The much more direct requesting style of a European strikes the Malagasy as confrontational and arrogant. And the ordinary Malagasy request seems exasperatingly devious and time-wasting to the European.

It would be mistaken to leave the impression that there are never confrontations or direct substantive revelations of information among the

direct. For example, if a request is made for something unimportant, such as for a piece of tobacco, it will be reasonably direct. More serious requests, such as for a bride, will certainly be indirect. More straightforward speech events are also more likely between relatives and close acquaintances than if one or more participants are outsiders. Furthermore, there are marked differences between men and women in their communicative activity. Women are permitted, and expected, to be much more straightforward than men are. In fact, the difference in communicative expectations for men and women is exploited within the culture. For example, women do most of the buying and selling in markets, especially in town markets where some of the clientele will be European. Buying and selling in a setting where bargaining is customary means there will be a series of minor confrontations where an initial price is going to be refused and a counteroffer made, with the item for sale perhaps alternatively praised and denigrated. This kind of event is considered easier for women.

EVALUATION

The ethnography of communication has been controversial since its beginning. One controversy is about its relationship to the field of linguistics as a whole. Most scholars who study the ethnography of communication are convinced that the limitations that linguists have placed on the study of language during the last 30 years have been too strict. Linguists have deliberately ignored the uses of language by its speakers, as an automotive engineer might be interested in the mechanics of automobiles to the exclusion of whether they are used to bring home the groceries, provide a getaway after a bank robbery, or anything else. Ethnographers of communication take the position that language is intimately human (in a way that automobiles are not) and that it is a mistake not to take into account the cultural values and beliefs connected with its use. Most of them would agree with Saville-Troike (1982:3-4) when she says:

The ethnography of communication takes language first and foremost as a socially situated cultural form, while recognizing the necessity to analyze the code itself and the cognitive processes of its speakers and hearers. To accept a lesser scope for linguistic description is to risk reducing it to triviality, and to deny any possibility of understanding how language lives in the minds and on the tongues of its users.

The more technically-oriented linguists readily admit that their study of linguistic structure abstracted from its use eliminates the possibility of 'understanding how language lives. . . on the tongues of its users', but believe their work leads to profound insights about how language exists

'in the minds' of users and would vehemently deny that their work is trivial; so the controversy continues.

A second controversy centers on the status of the ethnography of communication as an intellectual discipline. One concern is that work done in the field has produced only a series of descriptions of communicative interaction in a variety of exotic cultures, like the work on the Malagasy village I have just summarized, rather than a cohesive theory of human communication. Joel Sherzer (1977a:47), who has himself produced some of the best ethnographic research, had this to say:

The ethnography of speaking has thus amassed a growing collection of ethnographic tidbits from around the world, relating to various theories of language and language use, either as confirmation or as refutation or corrective. At the same time, in spite of the theoretical and methodological impetus provided by Gumperz, Hymes, and others, recent research has offered relatively little new theoretical or methodological perspective of its own which draws on this valuable ethnographic data.

According to Hymes (1974:108), ethnography can learn a lesson on explicitness and falsifiability from linguistics:

Linguists write rules, or formalize relationships in data in other ways, and study the conditions in which one or another formalization is to be preferred, not to ape mathematics, but in order to do a decent job of work. Rule-writing commits one in explicit terms, as to what is being claimed and comprised.

Ben Blount (1981), another student of the ethnography of communication, calls for improvements in the practice of ethnography precisely so that the descriptions it produces will be adequate for theory-development. It seems, then, that the ethnography of communication is open to the criticism, even by its own advocates, that it has not been rigorous enough in developing precise theoretical formulations about its subject matter.

Related to the problem of precision and theory-building is the issue of the methods used in the ethnography of communication. In the search for precision, other social sciences have relied heavily on carefully designed experiments where extraneous factors are controlled. In psychology, for example, it is common to bring people into a laboratory and ask them to do certain tasks without telling them the reason for the experiment. Investigators doing research in this way consider the participant-observer method an open invitation to hopelessly contaminated results due to the lack of controls. To the ethnographer of communication, the controlled experiment method seems so flagrantly intrusive into the natural life of human societies as to dash all hope of seeing life as the community under study sees it. In any case, whatever the validity of experimental methods in an investigator's own society, their use in other cultures is likely to be grossly inappropriate (Saville-Troike 1982:9-10). The controlled experiment methodology produces results whose interpretation is clear

and replicable, but limited in scope and potentially invalidated by the intrusion of the controls. Using participant-observation as a method does not disturb the phenomena being observed nearly so much and is potentially capable of deeper insights, but the interpretation is much more dependent on who it is that is doing the observing and results are not nearly so easily replicated.

My own observation is that ethnographic work on speaking and communication routinely exceeds the work of other social sciences on language-related topics where comprehensive understanding and depth of insight are concerned. But this is true only when the research is done by the most skilled ethnographers. On the other hand, in my judgement the ethnography of communication, even after some 20 years of development, has not developed theoretical models of the cultural aspects of human communication that are both precise enough to be tested for accuracy and general enough to be applied to any human society in the world. One reason might simply be that ethnographers of communication prefer to make clear the human values displayed in the cultures they describe, and do not think the methods used in the physical sciences are appropriate. Another reason is that they may be right. Quite possibly human culture is too complex and too varied to be captured by understanding a small number of principles and a handful of units, as is true in the physical sciences and even in the study of the syntax of languages. If so, it would be beside the point to complain that the ethnography of communication has not developed theories that look like the ones that a physicist would produce.

SUMMARY

The ethnography of speaking – or, more generally, the ethnography of communication – is the study of the organization of speaking as an activity in human society. The study of the ethnography of communication was initiated by Dell Hymes in the early 1960s and numerous studies of the communication patterns in various societies around the world have been conducted since. A central concept is the speech community. ‘Speech community’ is difficult to define, but most ethnographers would agree that it refers to a group of people who share the same rules and patterns for what to say, and when and how to say it. A valuable addition to understanding speech community was made by Saville-Troike (1982), when she proposed that speech communities should be understood as overlapping. That is, each individual speaker can, and probably does, belong simultaneously to several speech communities; some of the smaller ones included in larger ones, and some separate from the others.

The units of interaction that Hymes proposed as the focus of ethnographic study include the situation, event, and act. Situations are general settings, such as a party, in which communicative events, like conversations, can occur. Within events, speech acts occur, such as asking a question. Speech acts are somewhat of a troublesome concept because the same term is used by philosophers of language and linguistic pragmaticists who take a different approach to them from the one taken by ethnographers of communication, and because some speech acts can be divided into components and would not be the minimal units that Hymes originally thought they were.

As an aid to organizing the information that is collected in an ethnographic research project, Hymes suggested that observers look for eight groups of components, grouped under labels whose first letters spell out the word SPEAKING to make them easier to remember. The components are the situation, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genres. The data that ethnographers of communication use are collected largely by two methods: participant-observation and introspection. Participant-observation is the traditional method used in anthropology and means that the investigator will move into a community (typically a little-studied group in a remote part of the world), attempt to find some role to play as at least a marginal member of the community, and try to gain an intimate feel for group values and communicative patterns. The researcher is normally a participant-observer for a period of months or years. Introspection is used in the study of the investigator’s own culture. Using introspection, the researcher tries to make explicit the rules and values unconsciously absorbed while growing up in a particular community. Each method has its own particular hazards and advantages.

Even before the development of the ethnography of communication as a field of inquiry, the study of the relationship between language and human thought by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf led to a startling hypothesis now known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, a language influences or even determines the way its speakers understand the world around them because of the way the words in the language divide up the field of meaning, and because of the patterns found in the grammar of the language. Whorf speculated that even some of the basic concepts in physics would be understood very differently if they had been developed by speakers of certain non-European languages. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been investigated over a period of some 40 years, but the results are unclear because of conflicts among scholars over what methods should be used and because it is not fully clear just how strong a version of the hypothesis either Sapir or Whorf really intended. At the present time, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is accepted as having some validity, but few scholars would

agree with the strong version that says a speaker of a particular language is locked into a particular world-view by that language.

The ethnography of speaking conducted in a Malagasy village in Madagascar by Elinor Ochs shows us a community whose speech activity is substantially different from what is typical in European and North American cultures. An emphasis on equality, the subordination of individuals to the group, and the scarcity of new information lead the Malagasy villagers to organize their speech behavior in interesting ways. From the Western perspective, Malagasy speakers are uninformative in the content of their conversations, evasive in the way they make reference to other people, and extraordinarily indirect in giving orders and making requests. This is the normal way of speaking in the village and it is completely consistent with the society's values.

Research in the ethnography of speaking is sometimes criticized for the repetitive collection of data from numerous societies at the expense of an attempt to build a general theory of human communication that would have some generality over all societies. The participant-observation and introspective methods are faulted by researchers in other social sciences as being insufficiently rigorous and too dependent on the particular intuitive skills of the ethnographer. Ethnographers of communication, on the other hand, find the controlled, laboratory-style research favored by the other social sciences to be so intrusive and unnatural that using them would destroy exactly what the ethnographer is most interested in. The criticism, it seems, will not end until it becomes clear how much of the rigorous methodology and theory-construction that is used in the sciences is appropriate, or even possible, in the ethnography of communication.

NOTES

- 1 Earlier Hymes used the term 'ethnography of *speaking*', but I think the wider scope suggested by the term 'ethnography of communication' is more appropriate, and I am sure Hymes would agree.
- 2 We will look at turn-taking in conversation in detail in the next chapter.
- 3 All these will collectively be called 'lects' in later chapters.
- 4 Formal theories about how it is possible to understand more than what is said have been developed in a subject area called linguistic pragmatics, the subject of chapters 5 and 6. The range of cases covered in linguistic pragmatics has a tendency to be narrower than what is studied in this area in the ethnography of communication.

FASOLD

3

Discourse

THE SCOPE OF DISCOURSE RESEARCH

Discourse analysis is possibly the field within sociolinguistics that has undergone more research activity in recent years than any other. The language issues treated within discourse analysis are myriad: in a sense the study of discourse is the study of *any* aspect of language use. Sociolinguists have not been the only ones to do research on discourse. Discourse has been studied by general linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, communication scientists, psychologists, scholars in artificial intelligence, and rhetoricians. Although there are no doubt many ways to subdivide the study of discourse, one way is to consider the study of *texts* as distinguished from the study of *interactive events*. By the study of texts, I do not mean only research about written texts, but work on sound recordings or transcriptions of spoken language as well. Discourse studies on interactive events concern the problems and successes people have using language in their interactions.

The study of texts, often called, appropriately enough, *text linguistics* (van Dijk 1980; de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981; de Beaugrande 1983; Longacre 1983), is a prominent area of linguistics in Europe. An important feature of the study of texts, written or oral, are the notions of *coherence* and *cohesion*; those features that contribute to the sense of unity in a text. An influential book developing the notion of coherence in language was written by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The structure of oral narratives has been studied about as much as the structure of written texts (cf. Linde and Labov 1975; Sherzer 1977b; Linde 1977, 1984; Chafe 1980; Schiffrin 1981, 1984a; Polanyi 1982; Polythress 1982; Wolfson 1982; Mittwoch 1983; and the contributions to Tannen 1982a, 1982c, and 1983b).

The analysis of discourse behavior shows two tendencies. One trend is to analyze how people manage their discourse behavior with respect to their cultural backgrounds and their interactive goals at the time of talk