The Ethnography of Communication

AN INTRODUCTION

Third Edition

Muriel Saville-Troike

Blackwell
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The Ethnography of Communication

Language in Society

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Preface

Any attempt such as this to present a synthesis of the growing field of the ethnography of communication is necessarily indebted to many people, as the bibliography will attest. Most of all I am indebted to Dell Hymes, who is truly the father of the field. While I have drawn heavily on the ideas of Hymes and others, responsibility for the formulation presented here must remain my own.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to students at Georgetown University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Arizona who have served both as source and trial audience for much of this book. The names of those who have provided examples for the languages or countries indicated are listed at the beginning of the bibliography. In a few cases where the information might be politically sensitive, I have intentionally omitted the source; any other omissions are with my regrets and apologies.

Many scholars have made substantial contributions to the development and application of the ethnography of communication since the second edition of this book was published in 1989. These advances are reflected in this third edition by the addition of approximately 250 titles to the list of references, and by the addition of almost 40 languages to a comparative base for the analysis of patterns of communicative phenomena. The most extensive revisions have been made, first, in redefining the basic concepts of *communicative competence* and *speech community* to emphasize their dynamic nature and to give more consideration to multilingual individuals and groups, and second, in the addition of entirely new chapters on contrasts in patterns of communication (chapter 5) and on politeness, power, and politics (chapter 8).

The addition of chapter 5 extends methods of data collection and analysis to larger units of communication than those previously addressed, and to interaction which crosses traditional boundaries of community and culture. This extension results primarily from my application of the ethnography of communication to teaching and research in the domain of comparative rhetoric; it has been particularly enlightened by collaboration with my late colleague Donna M. Johnson and by input from many students with crosscultural knowledge and experience, as well as from other colleagues who have interdisciplinary interests which span linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education.

The addition of chapter 8 acknowledges the ever-increasing influence and importance of critical approaches to sociolinguistic and ethnographic analyses, and reflects my own interests in the potential applications of this field to the delivery of social services, minority language education, and language planning. I feel strongly that scholars of language have an ethical responsibility both to the subjects and to the consumers of their research, and I have intended hereby to strengthen that message.

Preparing this edition 20 years after the first has highlighted for me how much progress has been made in integrating analyses of language with other aspects of social life, and in considering communication as praxis. In 1982 I concluded that "the effort to fulfill this task may barely be said to have begun." In 2002 I now conclude, "I am very pleased to be saying how much progress has been made, and to recognize the promise of future research."

1

Introduction

Ethnography is a field of study which is concerned primarily with the description and analysis of culture, and linguistics is a field concerned, among other things, with the description and analysis of language codes. In spite of long-standing awareness of the interrelationship of language and culture, the descriptive and analytic products of ethnographers and linguists traditionally failed to deal with this interrelationship. Even anthropological linguists and linguistic anthropologists until the 1960s typically gave little attention to the fact that the uses of language and speech in different societies have patterns of their own which are worthy of ethnographic description, comparable to – and intersecting with – patterns in social organization and other cultural domains. The realization of this omission led Dell Hymes to call for an approach which would deal with aspects of communication which were escaping both anthropology and linguistics.

With the publication of his essay "The ethnography of speaking" in 1962, Hymes launched a new synthesizing discipline which focuses on the patterning of communicative behavior as it constitutes one of the systems of culture, as it functions within the holistic context of culture, and as it relates to patterns in other component systems. The *ethnography of communication*, as the field has come to be known since the publication of a volume of the *American Anthropologist* with this title (Gumperz and Hymes 1964), has in its development drawn heavily upon (and mutually influenced) sociological concern with interactional analysis and role identity, the study of performance by anthropologically oriented folklorists, and the work of natural-language philosophers. In combining these various threads of interest and theoretical orientation, the ethnography of communication has become an emergent discipline, addressing a largely new order of information in the structuring of communicative behavior and its role in the conduct of social life.

As with any science, the ethnography of communication has two foci: particularistic and generalizing. On the one hand, it is directed at the description and understanding of communicative behavior in specific cultural settings, but it is also directed toward the formulation of concepts and theories upon which to build a global metatheory of human communication. Its basic approach does not involve a list of facts to be learned so much as questions to be asked, and means for finding out answers. In order to attain the goal of understanding both the particular and the general, a broad range of data from a large variety of communities is needed.

A major early contribution to the field included an outline of information to be collected in doing ethnographies of communication, by Dell Hymes, Joel Sherzer, Regna Darnell, and others (1967), and this served as a guide for the scope and organization of the first edition of this book in 1982. Other major contributors to the development of the field have included John Gumperz, Dan Slobin, Richard Bauman, Susan Philips, Susan Ervin-Tripp, Shirley Brice Heath, and Ben Blount. Hymes's influence has been so pervasive that it is impossible to specifically credit each of the concepts and visions for which he was initially responsible, and which inform this book and the work of others in various ways.

Scope and Focus

The subject matter of the ethnography of communication is best illustrated by one of its most general questions: what does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, and how does he or she learn to do so? Such knowledge, together with whatever skills are needed to make use of it, is *communicative competence*. The requisite knowledge includes not only rules for communication (both linguistic and sociolinguistic) and shared rules for interaction, but also the cultural rules and knowledge that are the basis for the context and content of communicative events and interaction processes. Each of these components will be further delineated in the chapters which follow.

The focus of the ethnography of communication is the *speech community*, the way communication within it is patterned and organized as systems of communicative events, and the ways in which these interact with all other systems of culture. A primary aim of this approach is to guide the collection and analysis of descriptive data about the ways in which social meaning is conveyed: "If we ask of any form of communication the simple question what is being communicated? the answer is: information from the social system" (Douglas 1971: 389). This makes the ethnography of communication a mode of inquiry which carries with it substantial content.

Among the basic products of this approach are ethnographic descriptions of ways in which speech and other channels of communication are used in diverse communities, ranging from tribal groups in Africa and the Amazon regions, to nomadic herdsmen, to highly industrialized peoples in Europe, Asia, and North America. The priority which the ethnography of communication places on modes and functions of language is a clear point of departure from the priorities announced for linguistics by Chomsky: "if we hope to understand human language and the psychological capacities on which it rests, we must first ask what it is, not how, or for what purpose it is used" (1968: 62).

Hymes repeatedly emphasizes that what language is cannot be separated from how and why it is used, and that considerations of use are often prerequisite to recognition and understanding of much of linguistic form. While recognizing the necessity to analyze the code itself and the cognitive processes of its speakers and hearers, the ethnography of communication takes language first and foremost as a socially situated cultural form, which is indeed constitutive of much of culture itself. 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.

Method

"Doing ethnography" in another culture involves first and foremost field work, including observing, asking questions, participating in group activities, and testing the validity of one's perceptions against the intuitions of natives. Research design must allow an openness to categories and modes of thought and behavior which may not have been anticipated by the investigator. The ethnographer of communication cannot even presuppose what a speech community other than his own may consider to be "language," or who or what may "speak" it: "language" for the Ojibwa includes thunder; dogs among the Navajo are said to understand Navajo; the Maori regard musical instruments as able to speak; and drums and shells are channels through which supernatural forces are believed to speak to members of the Afro-Cuban Lucumí religious cult.

Ethnography by no means requires investigating only "others": one's own speech community may be profitably studied as well. Here, however, discovering patterned behavior which operates largely unconsciously for the native investigator presents quite different problems for "objectivity." One of the best means by which to gain understanding of one's own "ways of speaking" is to compare and contrast these ways with others, a process that can reveal that many of the communicative practices assumed to be "natural" or "logical" are in fact as culturally unique and conventional as the language code itself. A valuable by-product which emerges from this process is an essential feature of all ethnography: a deeper understanding of cultural relativism.

Complete escape from subjectivity is never possible because of our very nature as cultural animals; however, the constraints and guidelines of the methodology are intended to minimize our perceptual and analytical biases. The tradition of participant-observation is still basic for all ethnography, but it may be augmented by a variety of other data collection and validation procedures depending on the focus of investigation and the relation of the investigator to the speech community being studied.

Historical Background

Ethnographic study has been at the core of anthropology virtually since its inception, both in Britain and America. The American tradition, begun by Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber, tended toward a somewhat static presentation of cultural patterns and artifacts which was sometimes criticized as the "trait list approach." The British tradition, which came to be called "functionalist," was developed along two rather different orientations by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, both of which strongly influenced American anthropology. The British tradition, especially following Malinowski, was much concerned with the social and cultural "meaning" of actions, events, objects, and laws as they functioned within the immediate or larger cultural context.

North American anthropologists, beginning with Boas, were primarily concerned with preparing ethnographic descriptions of Native American cultures before they were destroyed or assimilated by European settlers. Even before Boas, however, the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) under John Wesley Powell had placed a priority on describing Native American languages and collecting texts, which still serve as a major source of data for comparative studies of languages on the North American continent. Few of the linguistic descriptions from this period go beyond a sketch of the phonological system and grammatical structures (as outlined in Powell 1877; 1880; Boas 1911) and a list of vocabulary items collected according to a schedule distributed by the BAE (e.g., see Powell 1880), but accompanying reports often include observations which are relevant to understanding patterns of communication. In his *Introduction to the Study of Indian Languages*, Powell clearly states his intent to relate the description of language to other aspects of culture:

> It has been the effort of the author to connect the study of language with the other branches of anthropology, for a language is best understood when

> the habits, customs, institutions, philosophy – the subject-matter of thought embodied in the language – are best known. The student of language should be a student of the people who speak the language; and to this end the book has been prepared, with many hints and suggestions relating to other branches of anthropology. (1880: vi)

One of the earliest sociolinguistic descriptions I can find within this tradition was prepared by a physician, J. B. White, who described Apache greeting behavior in an unpublished manuscript from the 1870s:

> Kissing which seems to us natural [as] an expression of affection is never practised by the Apaches – and they seem to have no form of salute or of greeting – when meeting or of taking leave of each other. On one occasion the writer of this – being curious to know what kind of reception an Indian would give his wife and family after an absence from them of several months – placed himself in a position, where he could overlook (without himself being noticed) an Apache's entrance into his dwelling after a long absence. In this instance the Indian simply rode up to his little brush dwelling and dismounted. One of his wives took charge of the horse. [He] approached a fire along side of his hut where his family were collected without exchanging a word to any of them – not even to the wife who had taken the horse. There he stood motionless and speechless for some ten to fifteen minutes when at last he took a seat on the ground and engaged in ordinary conversation without having observed any form of greeting. (Cf. the more recent description of Apache greetings in Basso 1970.)

Occasionally, descriptions of traditional educational practices contained references to training in "speaking well," as in this brief mention of sociolinguistic constraints imposed on girls of the Carrier Indian tribe of Canada: "The stone labret worn by the noble maiden was a perpetual reminder to her that she should speak slowly and with deliberation" (Jenness 1929: 26). Most information on communication beyond the vocabulary lists and structural sketches of the language codes was limited to listings of kinship terms, reflecting social organization and role-relationships within the groups; ethnological dictionaries, indicating plants and animals in the environment and of importance to the culture; and accounts of language origins and attitudes toward language reflected in creation myths and other folkloristic texts.

The American tradition of descriptive linguistics in conjunction with anthropological fieldwork continued with such notable figures as Edward Sapir, and (in spite of the divergence of an "autonomous linguistics") more recently in the work of such Amerindian language scholars as Floyd Lounsbury, Mary Haas, Carl Voegelin, Paul Friedrich, and Dell Hymes.

Ethnography underwent a period of decline within anthropology during the middle years of the last century as values began to favor more "scientific" studies of social structure and issue-oriented research. There was a resurgence of interest, however, deriving from Goodenough's cognitive reformation of the concept of culture, and in the wave of growing disenchantment with behaviorism. Observed behavior was recognized as a manifestation of a deeper set of codes and rules, and the task of ethnography was seen as the discovery and explication of the rules for contextually appropriate behavior in a community or group; in other words, culture was conceived to be what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community.

Concurrent with this latter development in anthropology was the introduction of interactionist and cognitive orientations in sociology by Goffman and Cicourel, which focused attention on the processes by which members of a community negotiate relations, outcomes, and meanings, and construct new realities and meanings as they do so. Hymes reports that he and others who were advancing "a social approach to language" during this period were influenced by developments in European linguistics:

> Some of us with interest in the Prague School saw its attention to a range of functions and factors (e.g. Jakobson 1960) as healthy and desirable. That was a stimulus to me, in any case, seeming to provide a basis in linguistics itself for the study of language as organized as a part of social life. (2000: 313)

The convergent interest in sociology and linguistics, and the description of language use in a social context, raised serious questions about the autonomy of linguistics and the "ideal speaker-hearer" in the "completely homogeneous speech-community" (Chomsky 1965: 3), central concepts in the dominant theoretical model of American linguistics during the 1960s. By the end of that decade, merely accounting for *what* can (and cannot) be said in a language, but not *when*, *where*, *by whom*, *to whom*, *in what manner*, and *under what particular social circumstances* it can (or cannot) be said, came to be considered inadequate as a goal for linguistics by many linguists, and by all identifying themselves as "sociolinguists."

Significance

While the goals of ethnography are at least in the first instance descriptive, and information about diverse "ways of speaking" is a legitimate contribution to knowledge in its own right, the potential significance of the ethnography of communication goes far beyond a mere cataloging of facts about communicative behavior.

For anthropology, the ethnography of communication extends understandings of cultural systems to language, at the same time relating language to social organization, role-relationships, values and beliefs, and other shared patterns of knowledge and behavior which are transmitted from generation to generation in the process of socialization/enculturation. Further, it contributes to the study of cultural maintenance and change, including acculturation phenomena in contact situations, and may provide important clues to culture history.

For psycholinguistics, the ethnography of communication means that studies of language acquisition must now not only recognize the innate capacity of children to learn to speak, but must account for how particular ways of speaking are developed in particular societies in the process of social interaction. Experimental design can no longer presume that mothers are primary caregivers in all societies, for example, nor can a researcher assume that the presence of an observer (and a tape recorder) will distort data comparably in all settings among all groups. Any study of language pathologies outside of one's own speech community must include culture-specific information on what is considered "normal" and "aberrant" performance within the other group. Claims about universal strategies and processes need to be tested against descriptive data from other cultures, and such cross-cultural research requires the openness and relativism of ethnographic methods.

For sociolinguistic research, which generally involves recording naturalistic speech in various contexts, the potential contribution of this perspective was noted by Gumperz:

> Even after the material has been recorded, it is sometimes impossible to evaluate its social significance in the absence of ethnographic knowledge about social norms governing linguistic choice in the situation recorded. (1970: 9)

Again, the qualitative information which forms an essential part of ethnographies of communication should become an important prerequisite for sampling, data collection, and interpretation in quantitative studies. Experimental design which is based only on the researcher's own cultural presuppositions has no necessary validity in a different speech community.

For the field of applied linguistics, one of the most significant contributions made by the ethnography of communication is the identification of what a second language learner must know in order to communicate appropriately in various contexts in that language, and what the sanctions may be for any violations or omissions. There are also important applications for contrasting whole communicative systems in cross-cultural interaction and translation, and for recognizing and analyzing communicative misunderstandings.

For theoretical linguistics, the ethnography of communication can make a significant contribution to the study of universals in language form and use, as well as to language-specific and comparative fields of description and analysis. Its approach and findings are essential for the formulation of a truly adequate theory of language and linguistic competence.

Throughout this book, an attempt has been made to relate the methods and products of the ethnography of communication to the other disciplines which are concerned with the description, explanation, and application of various aspects of communication. Because the book is included in a series on sociolinguistics, particular emphasis is placed on the relationship of the ethnography of communication to other developments in this field. In particular, the position is taken here that qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of culturally situated communication are not mutually exclusive, and that each can and should inform the other. While ethnography has tended to be identified exclusively with qualitative approaches, many practitioners today are recognizing the need to extend the boundary to include quantitative data in ethnographic descriptions. Gumperz and others have also stressed the need to look at the larger sociopolitical contexts within which culturally situated communication takes place, as these contexts may determine features of communication in ways that are not evident from a narrow focus on communicative patterns alone. An important development in ethnography and related fields has been emphasis on how sociopolitical contexts may be determined and reinforced by features of communication, as well as determinative of them.

Thus while the ethnography of communication has a unique contribution to make in terms of the questions it asks and its relativistic perspective, its contribution to the description and understanding of culturally constituted patterns of communication will be limited if its methods and findings are not integrated with other descriptive and analytical approaches. It is the nature of ethnography to be holistic in nature, and this should also characterize the disciplinary orientation of its practitioners.

A well-known fable tells of three blind men describing an elephant: to one (feeling the tail) it is like a rope; to one (feeling the side) it is flat and leathery; and to one (feeling the trunk) it is like a long rubber hose. While each perception is accurate so far as it goes individually, they fail to provide an accurate picture of the total animal because there is no holistic perspective. Such an integrative approach seems essential if we are to fulfill Hymes's call to develop an ethnographic model for the study of communication which will help us more fully to understand its role in human affairs.

Organization of the Book

Beyond this introduction, chapter 2 defines and discusses basic terms, concepts, and issues which are central to the ethnography of communication.

Chapter 3 surveys varieties of language which may constitute the communicative repertoire of a group, along with their relationship to social organization and practices, and considerations of selection and use. Chapters 4 and 5 emphasize methods for conducting research in the field: Chapter 4 focuses primarily on the description and analysis of recurrent, bounded units of communication within a single speech community, while chapter 5 extends application of descriptive and analytic procedures to longer stretches of discourse and to cross-cultural communication. Chapter 6 considers various aspects of attitudes toward communicative performance, including discussion of methods which may be used in this area of research and related considerations of language maintenance, shift, and spread. Chapter 7 on acquisition of communicative competence emphasizes the development of communicative knowledge by children and older learners in relation to socialization contexts, processes, and outcomes. Chapter 8 on politeness, power, and politics explores the interaction and reciprocal impact of these constructs with linguistic structure and use. Finally, chapter 9 provides a summary and projection.

2

Basic Terms, Concepts, and Issues

The principal concerns in the ethnography of communication, as these have been defined by Hymes and as they have emerged from the work of others, include the following topics: patterns and functions of communication, nature and definition of speech community, means of communicating, components of communicative competence, relationship of language to world view and social organization, and linguistic and social universals and inequalities.

Patterns of Communication

It has long been recognized that much of linguistic behavior is rule-governed: i.e., it follows regular patterns and constraints which can be formulated descriptively as rules (see Sapir 1994). Thus, sounds must be produced in language-specific but regular sequences if they are to be interpreted as a speaker intends; the possible order and form of words in a sentence is constrained by the rules of grammar; and even the definition of a well-formed discourse is determined by culture-specific rules of rhetoric. Hymes identifies concern for pattern as a key motivating factor in his establishment of this discipline: "My own purpose with the ethnography of speaking was . . . to show that there was patterned regularity where it had been taken to be absent, in the activity of speaking itself" (2000: 314).

Sociolinguists such as Labov (1963; 1966), Trudgill (1974), and Bailey (1976) have demonstrated that what earlier linguists had considered irregularity or "free variation" in linguistic behavior can be found to show regular and predictable statistical patterns. Sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication are both concerned with discovering regularities in language use, but sociolinguists typically focus on variability in pronunciation and grammatical form, while ethnographers are concerned with how communicative units are organized and how they pattern in a much broader sense of "ways of speaking," as well as with how these patterns interrelate in a systematic way with and derive meaning from other aspects of culture. Indeed, for some, pattern *is* culture: "if we conceive culture as *pattern that gives meaning to social acts and entities* . . . we can start to see precisely *how* social actors enact culture through patterned speaking and patterned action" (Du Bois 2000: 94; italics in the original).

Patterning occurs at all levels of communication: societal, group, and individual (cf. Hymes 1961). At the societal level, communication usually patterns in terms of its functions, categories of talk, and attitudes and conceptions about language and speakers. Communication also patterns according to particular roles and groups within a society, such as sex, age, social status, and occupation: e.g., a teacher has different ways of speaking from a lawyer, a doctor, or an insurance salesman. Ways of speaking also pattern according to educational level, rural or urban residence, geographic region, and other features of social organization.

Some common patterns are so regular, so predictable, that a very low information load is carried even by a long utterance or interchange, though the social meaning involved can be significant. For instance, greetings in some languages (e.g. Korean) may carry crucial information identifying speaker relationships (or attitudes toward relationships). An unmarked greeting sequence such as "Hello, how are you today? Fine, how are you?" has virtually no referential content. However, silence in response to another's greeting in this sequence would be marked communicative behavior, and would carry a very high information load for speakers of English.

Greetings in many languages are far more elaborate than in English (e.g. Arabic, Indonesian, Igbo), but even a lengthy sequence may convey very little information as long as it is unmarked. In all cases, patterned variations can be related to aspects of the social structure or value and belief systems within the respective cultures.

The potential strength of a pattern may be illustrated by the opening sequence of a telephone conversation in English (Schegloff 1968). The ring of the telephone is a summons, and the person who answers must speak first even though the caller knows the receiver has been picked up. (Many people will not pick up the telephone in the middle of a ring because they feel it is an interruption of the summons.) Even an obscene telephone caller generally waits for the person who is answering to say something before the obscenities begin. If someone picks up the telephone and does not say anything, the caller cannot proceed. He or she can either say something like "Hello, hello, anybody there?" as a second summons, or else hang up. The caller may dial back again to repeat the sequence, but not continue if there has not been an appropriate response.

The relationship of form and function is an example of communicative patterning along a different dimension. Asking someone in English if he or she has a pen is readily recognized as a request rather than a truth-value question, for instance, because it is part of the regular structural pattern for requesting things in English; the person who answers "Yes, I do," without offering one is joking, rude, or a member of a different speech community.

Finally, communication patterns at the individual level, at the level of expression and interpretation of personality. To the extent that emotional factors such as nervousness have involuntary physiological effects on the vocal mechanism, these effects are not usually considered an intentional part of "communication" (though they may be if deliberately manipulated, as in acting). An example of a conventional expression of individual emotion (and thus part of patterned communication) is the increased use of volume in speech conveying "anger" in English. A Navajo expressing anger uses enclitics not recognized as emotion markers by speakers of other languages, and a friendly greeting on the street between Chinese speakers may have surface manifestations corresponding to anger for speakers of English. Similarly, American Indian students often interpret Anglo teachers' "normal" classroom projection level as anger and hostility, and teachers interpret students' softer level as shyness or unfriendliness. Perceptions of individuals as "voluble" or "taciturn" are also in terms of cultural norms, and even expressions of pain and stress are culturally patterned: people in an English speech community learn withdrawal or anger, in Japanese nervous laughter or giggling, and in Navajo silence.

Although I have listed societal, group, and individual levels of patterning separately, there is an invisible web of interrelationships among them, and indeed among all patterns of culture. There may very well be general themes that are related to a world view present in several aspects of culture, including language. There are societies that are more direct than others, for instance, and this will be manifested in ways of speaking as well as in belief and value systems. The notion of a hierarchy of control seems to be pervasive in several cultures, and must first be understood in order to explain certain language constraints as well as religious beliefs and social organization (see Witherspoon 1977; Thompson 1978; Watkins 1979).

The concern for pattern has always been basic in anthropology (cf. Benedict 1934; Kroeber 1935; 1944), with interpretations of underlying meaning dependent on the discovery and description of normative structure or design. More recent emphasis on processes of interactions in generating behavioral patterns extends this concern to explanation as well as description.

Communicative Functions

At a societal level, language serves many functions. Language selection often relates to political goals, functioning to create or reinforce boundaries in order to unify speakers as members of a single speech community and to exclude outsiders from intragroup communication. For example, establishing the official use of Hebrew in Israel functioned to unify at this level in building the new nation-state, while the refusal of early Spanish settlers in Mexico to teach the Castilian language to the indigenous population was exclusionary. Members of a community may also reinforce their boundaries by discouraging prospective second language learners, by holding and conveying the attitude that their language is too difficult – or inappropriate – for others to use.

Many languages are also made to serve a social identification function within a society by providing linguistic indicators which may be used to reinforce social stratification, or to maintain differential power relationships between groups. The functions which language differences in a society are assigned may also include the maintenance and manipulation of individual social relationships and networks, and various means of effecting social control. Linguistic features are often employed by people, consciously or unconsciously, to identify themselves and others, and thus serve to mark and maintain various social categories and divisions. The potential use of language to create and maintain power is part of a central topic among ethnographers of communication and other sociolinguists concerned with language-related inequities and inequalities.

At the level of individuals and groups interacting with one another, the functions of communication are directly related to the participants' purposes and needs (Hymes 1961; 1972c). These include such categories of functions as *expressive* (conveying feelings or emotions), *directive* (requesting or demanding), *referential* (true or false propositional content), *poetic* (aesthetic), *phatic* (empathy and solidarity), and *metalinguistic* (reference to language itself).

The list is similar to Searle's (1977a) classes of illocutionary acts (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations), but there are differences in perspective and scope which separate the fields of ethnography of communication and speech act theory. Among these are the latter's primary focus on form, with the speech act almost always coterminous with sentences in analysis; for ethnographers, the functional perspective has priority in description, and while function may coincide with a single grammatical sentence, it often does not, or a single sentence may serve several functions simultaneously. Further, while speech act theorists generally exclude the metaphorical and phatic uses of language from basic consideration, these constitute a major focus for ethnographic description. Phatic communication conveys a message, but has no referential meaning. The meaning is in the act of communication itself. Much of ritual interaction is included in this category, fully comprising most brief encounters, and at least serving to open and close most longer encounters (Goffman 1971). Not accounting for such functions of communication is ignoring much of language as it is actually used.

The distinction between *intent* and *effect* in function (Ervin-Tripp 1972) is comparable to the difference between *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts in pragmatics (Searle 1969, 1977b). The difference between the functional intent of the speaker and the actual effect on the hearer is part of the notion of functional relativity (Hymes 1972c). Both are relevant to the description and analysis of a communicative event.

While many of the functions of language are universal, the ways in which communication operates in any one society to serve these functions is language specific. The same relative status of two speakers may be conveyed by their choice of pronominal forms in one language; in another, by the distance they stand apart or their body position while speaking; and between bilinguals, even by their choice of which language is used in addressing one another.

The social functions or practices of language provide the primary dimension for characterizing and organizing communicative processes and products in a society; without understanding why a language is being used as it is, and the consequences of such use, it is impossible to understand its meaning in the context of social interaction.

To claim primacy of function over form in analysis is not to deny or neglect the formal structures of communication; rather it is to require integration of function and form in analysis and description. Sentences and even longer strings of discourse are not to be dealt with as autonomous units, but rather as they are situated in communicative settings and patterns, and as they function in society.

Speech Community

Since the focus of the ethnography of communication is typically on the speech community, and on the way communication is patterned and organized within that unit, clearly its definition is of central importance. Many definitions have been proposed (e.g. Hudson 1980: 25–30), including such criteria as shared language use (Lyons 1970), shared rules of speaking and interpretation of speech performance (Hymes 1972c), shared attitudes and values regarding language forms and use (Labov 1972), and shared sociocultural understandings and presuppositions with regard to speech (Sherzer 1975).

Linguists are generally in agreement that a speech community cannot be exactly equated with a group of people who speak the same language, for Spanish speakers in Texas and Argentina are members of different speech communities although they share a language code, and husbands and wives within some speech communities in the South Pacific use quite distinct languages in speaking to one another. Speakers of mutually unintelligible dialects of Chinese identify themselves as members of the same larger speech community (they do indeed share a written code, as well as many rules for appropriate use), while speakers of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese are not members of the same speech community although their languages are to some degree mutually intelligible. Questions arise in deciding if speakers of English from England and the United States (or Canada and Australia, or India and Nigeria) are members of the same speech community. How different must rules of speaking be to be significantly different? Are deaf signers and hearing interpreters members of the same speech community? Answers to such questions are based on history, politics, and group identification, rather than on purely linguistic factors. It is thus useful to distinguish between participating in a speech community and being a member of it; speaking the same language is sufficient (yet not necessary) for some degree of participation, but membership cannot be based on knowledge and skills alone.

All definitions of *community* used in the social sciences include the dimension of shared knowledge, possessions, or behaviors, derived from Latin *communitae* 'held in common,' just as the sociolinguistic criteria for speech community enumerated above all include the word 'shared.' A key question is whether our focus in initially defining communities for study should be on features of shared language form and use, shared geographical and political boundaries, shared contexts of interaction, shared attitudes and values regarding language forms, shared sociocultural understandings and presuppositions, or even shared physical characteristics (e.g., a particular skin color may be considered a requirement for membership in some communities, a hearing impairment for others). The essential criterion for "community" is that some significant dimension of experience be shared, and for "speech community" that the shared dimension be related to ways in which members of the group use, value, or interpret language.

While sociolinguistic research has often focused on the patterning of language practice within a single school, a neighborhood, a factory, or other limited segment of a population, an integrated ethnographic approach would require relating such subgroups to the social and cultural whole. There is no necessary expectation that a speech community will be linguistically homogeneous, nor that it will be a static entity which necessarily encompasses the same membership over time or situations – although degree of fluidity will depend on the nature of bounding features and attitudes concerning their permeability.

At any level of speech community selected for study, the societal functions of language will include the functions served by such bounding features, of *separating*, *unifying*, and *stratifying*. The interactional functions which are present will be dependent on the level of community studied, with a full complement of language functions and domains present only at the level defined as including a range of role opportunities. At this more inclusive level, a speech community need not share a single language, and indeed it will not where roles are differentially assigned to monolingual speakers of different languages in a single multilingual society (e.g. speakers of Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay, discussed in chapter 3).

An informal typology of speech communities as "soft-shelled" versus "hard-shelled" may be distinguished on the basis of the strength of the boundary that is maintained by language: the "hard-shelled" community has of course the stronger boundary, allowing minimal interaction between members and those outside, and providing maximum maintenance of language and culture.

Speech communities which primarily use one of the world languages are more likely to be "soft-shelled," because it will be known as a second language by many others, and interaction across the boundary will be relatively easy in both directions. A speech community speaking a language with more limited distribution would more likely be "hard-shelled," because relatively few outside the community learn to use it. Educated speakers learn a world language for interaction across the boundary, but this is unidirectional, with outsiders still very restricted in their internal linguistic participation. The most extreme form of a "hard-shelled" community would be one like Mongolia, where members speak a language outsiders do not know, yet few learn a world language for wider communication; another would be the Tewa-speaking San Juan pueblo in New Mexico, where outsiders are forbidden even to hear the language, and only a few insiders traditionally learn either English or Spanish.

Language often serves to maintain the separate identity of speech communities within larger communities, of which their speakers may also be members. Within the United States, for instance, Armenian continues to function in some areas as the language of home, religion, and social interaction among members of the group. Because the Armenians are bilingual and also speak English, they participate fully in the larger speech community, but because outsiders seldom learn Armenian, the language is a barrier which keeps others from participating in their internal social and religious events. A similar situation exists in Syria, where Armenians bilingual in their native language and Arabic participate in two speech communities; these remain separate entities because of the one-way boundary function the Armenian language serves. In cases where individuals and groups belong to more than one speech community, it is useful to distinguish between primary and secondary membership.

On the other hand, there is no necessary reason for a speech community to be geographically contiguous. Armenians in California and Syria may be considered members of the same speech community even if they have little interaction with one another, and (especially with widespread access to telephones and e-mail) individuals and groups who are dispersed may maintain intensive networks of interaction. Largely because of the internet, "virtual" communities of interest have been established world-wide. Even with no face-to-face contact, patterned rules for communication have emerged and become codified.

Individuals, particularly in complex societies, may thus participate in a number of discrete or overlapping speech communities, just as they participate in a variety of social settings. Which one or ones a person orients himself or herself to at any moment – which set of rules he or she uses – is part of the strategy of communication. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to recognize that each member of a community has a repertoire of social identities, and each identity in a given context is associated with a number of appropriate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression. It is therefore essential to identify the social categories recognized in a community in order to determine how these are reflected linguistically, and how they define and constrain interpersonal interaction in communicative situations.

The use of the speech community as a basic social unit for study has been criticized by some because of its implicit acceptance of existing social/political boundaries and categories as legitimate entities. One alternative is a more complex model of "nested" speech communities reflecting expanding fields of individuals' interactions and networks (Kerswill 1994; Santa Ana and Parodi 1998). Another is the *discourse community*, which is a flexible grouping of individuals who share rules for "discursive practice." This construct (based on notions from Foucault, e.g. 1972)

> creates a group of compelling unspoken historic rules, which in turn determine in a certain social, economic, geographic or linguistic area what can be said, how it can be expressed, who may speak, where, and under which dominant predictions. A discursive practice oversees the distribution of knowledge and arranges certain ways of speaking into a hierarchy. (Lehtonen 2000: 41–2)

Yet another alternative is the *community of practice*, defined as "a group whose joint engagement in some activity or enterprise is sufficiently intensive to give rise over time to a repertoire of shared practices" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999: 185; see also Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999). This latter construct seems especially appropriate for the study of processes in the development of norms of interaction within dynamic groups, involving either enculturation or acculturation and sometimes lengthy periods of apprenticeship.

Of particular interest in relation to all of these constructs is how membership involves learning how to use language – the acquisition and extension of communicative competence.

Communicative Competence

Hymes (1966a) observed that speakers who could produce any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language (per Chomsky's 1965 definition of *linguistic competence*) would be institutionalized if they indiscriminately went about trying to do so without consideration of the appropriate contexts of use. *Communicative competence* involves knowing not only the language code but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. Further, it involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms. Hymes (1974, 1987) augmented Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence (knowledge of systematic potential, or whether or not an utterance is a possible grammatical structure in a language) with knowledge of appropriateness (whether and to what extent something is suitable), occurrence (whether and to what extent something is done), and feasibility (whether and to what extent something is possible under particular circumstances). The concept of communicative competence (and its encompassing congener, social competence) is one of the most powerful organizing tools to emerge in the social sciences in recent years.

Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, to whom one may speak, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like – in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative modalities in particular social settings.

Clear cross-cultural differences can and do produce conflicts or inhibit communication. For example, certain American Indian groups are accustomed to waiting several minutes in silence before responding to a question or taking a turn in conversation, while the native English speakers they may be talking to have very short time frames for responses or conversational turn-taking, and find long silences embarrassing. Conversely, Abrahams (1973) has pointed out that among African Americans conversations may involve several persons talking at the same time, a practice which would violate White middle-class rules of interaction. And as mentioned earlier, even such matters as voice level differ cross-culturally, and speaker intent may be misconstrued because of different expectation patterns for interpretation.

The concept of communicative competence must be embedded in the notion of cultural competence, or the total set of knowledge and skills which speakers bring into a situation. This view is consonant with a semiotic approach which defines culture as meaning, and views all ethnographers (not just ethnographers of communication) as dealing with symbols (e.g. Douglas 1970; Geertz 1973). The systems of culture are patterns of symbols, and language is only one of the symbolic systems in this network. Interpreting the meaning of linguistic behavior requires knowing the meaning in which it is embedded.

Ultimately all aspects of culture are relevant to communication, but those that have the most direct bearing on communicative forms and processes are the social and institutional structure, the values and attitudes held about language and ways of speaking, the network of conceptual categories which results from experiences, and the ways knowledge and skills (including language) are transmitted from one generation to the next and to new members of the group. Shared cultural knowledge is essential to explain the shared presuppositions and judgments of truth value which are the essential undergirdings of language structures, as well as of contextually appropriate usage and interpretation.

While referential meaning may be ascribed to many of the elements in the linguistic code in a static manner, situated meaning must be accounted for as an emergent and dynamic process. Interaction requires the perception, selection, and interpretation of salient features of the code used in actual communicative situations, integrating these with other cultural knowledge and skills, and implementing appropriate strategies for achieving communicative goals.

The phonology, grammar, and lexicon which are the target of traditional linguistic description constitute only a part of the elements in the code used for communication. Also included are the paralinguistic and nonverbal phenomena which have conventional meaning in each speech community, and knowledge of the full range of variants in all elements which are available for transmitting social, as well as referential, information. Ability to discriminate between those variants which serve as markers of social categories or carry other meaning and those which are insignificant, and knowledge of what the meaning of a variant is in a particular situation, are all components of communicative competence.

The verbal code may be transmitted on oral, written, or manual (signed) channels. The relative load carried on each channel depends on its functional distribution in a particular speech community, and thus they are of differential importance in the linguistic repertoire of any individual or society. Full participation in a deaf speech community requires ability to interpret language on the manual channel but not the oral, for instance; a speech community with a primarily oral tradition may not require interpretation of writing; and a speech community which relegates much information flow to the written channel will require literacy skills for full participation. Thus, the traditional linguistic description which focuses only on the oral channel will be too narrow to account for communicative competence in most societies. Although it may cause some terminological confusion, references to *ways of speaking* and *ethnography of speaking* should be understood as usually including a much broader range of communicative behavior than merely speech.

The typical descriptive focus on oral production has tended to treat language as a unidirectional phenomenon. In considering the nature and scope of communicative competence, it is useful to distinguish between *receptive* and *productive* dimensions (Troike 1970); only shared receptive competence is necessary for successful communication. Knowledge of rules for appropriate communicative behavior entails understanding a wide range of language forms, for instance, but not necessarily the ability to produce them. Members of the same community may understand varieties of a language which differ according to the social class, region, sex, age, and occupation of the speaker, but only a few talented mimics will be able to speak them all. In multilingual speech communities, members often share receptive competence in more than one language but vary greatly in their relative ability to speak one or the other.

The following outline summarizes the broad range of shared knowledge that is involved in appropriate communication. From the ethnographer's perspective, this inventory also indicates the range of linguistic, interactional, and cultural phenomena which must ultimately be accounted for in an adequate description and explanation of communicative competence (see also Gumperz 1984; Hymes 1987; Duranti 1988).

1 Linguistic knowledge
    (a) Verbal elements
    (b) Nonverbal elements
    (c) Patterns of elements in particular speech events
    (d) Range of possible variants (in all elements and their organization)
    (e) Meaning of variants in particular situations
2 Interaction skills
    (a) Perception of salient features in communicative situations
    (b) Selection and interpretation of forms appropriate to specific situations, roles, and relationships (rules for the use of speech)
    (c) Discourse organization and processes
    (d) Norms of interaction and interpretation
    (e) Strategies for achieving goals
3 Cultural knowledge
    (a) Social structure (status, power, speaking rights)
    (b) Values and attitudes
    (c) Cognitive maps/schemata
    (d) Enculturation processes (transmission of knowledge and skills)

Communicative competence within the ethnography of communication usually refers to the communicative knowledge and skills shared by a speech community, but these (like all aspects of culture) reside variably in its individual members. The shared yet individual nature of competence reflects the nature of language itself, as expressed by von Humboldt (1836):

> While languages are in the ambiguous sense of the word . . . creations of nations, they still remain personal and individual creations of individuals. This follows because they can be produced in each individual, yet only in such a manner that each individual assumes a priori the comprehension of all people and that all people, furthermore, satisfy such expectation.

Considering communicative competence at an individual level, we must additionally recognize that any one speaker is not infrequently a member of more than one speech community – often to different degrees. For individuals who are members of multiple speech communities, which one or ones they orient themselves to at any given moment – which set of social and communicative rules they use – is reflected not only in which segment of their linguistic knowledge they select, but which interaction skills they utilize, and which aspects of their cultural knowledge they activate. The competence of non-native speakers of a language usually differs significantly from the competence of native speakers; the specific content of what an individual needs to know and the skills he or she needs to have depend on the social context in which he or she is or will be using the language and the purposes he or she will have for doing so.

This further emphasizes why the notion of an "ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community" (Chomsky 1965: 3) is inadequate for ethnographic purposes. Also, multilingual speakers' communicative competence includes knowledge of rules for the appropriate choice of language and for switching between languages, given a particular social context and communicative intent, as well as for the intralingual shifting among styles and registers which is common to the competence of all speakers. An extension has been made to "intercultural communicative competence," which requires an additional level of metacompetence involving explicit awareness of differential usages and ability to adapt communicative strategies to a variety of cultural situations (Kim 1991). Liu (2001) further extends the construct to "adaptive cultural competence" as a goal for second language learners, which also encompasses social identity negotiation skills and culture-sensitivity knowledge. He argues that such a higher level competence is needed for appropriate and effective social participation of non-native speakers who are in roles of international students or immigrées.

Accounting for the nature of communicative competence ultimately "requires going beyond a concern with Language (capital L) or a language.