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Cultural Terms for Communication Events Among Some American High School Adolescents

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Through ethnographic interviewing, participant observation, and cluster analysis of perceptual judgment data, this study examines the natural language descriptions employed by some American high school adolescents in talking about the kinds of communication events they experience in everyday life and the underlying semantic dimensions by which these adolescents perceptually organize this domain. Adolescents described communication events through use of setting, participant, speech act, and purpose marker terms. Nine basic clusters of communication events were differentiated along five underlying semantic dimensions.

THE STUDY OF EVERYDAY SITUATIONS appears to be experiencing a renaissance among contemporary social scientists (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985). Under such rubrics as "social episodes" (Forgas, 1979, 1982), "scripts" (Abelson, 1976; Schank & Abelson, 1977), "situations" (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981), "event schemata" (Lichtenstein & Brewer, 1980), "activity types" (Brown & Fraser, 1979), and "speech events" or "communication events" (Hymes, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1989), researchers are investigating the units of social life by which human experience is organized. Two distinct but complementary perspectives can be identified in the situations literature—the social cognitive perspective and the ethnography of communication perspective. This study combines elements of both of these perspectives in examining the cultural terms used by some American high school adolescents in describing the communication situations enacted in their everyday lives.

The social cognitive perspective is predicated on the assumption that the situation, as mediated by the individual's cognitive activity, is an important determinant of behavior (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985). The perceived situation is typically treated as an independent variable affecting communicative action, and quantitative methods are used in the discovery of individuals' perceptions of situations. The study of situational influences on choice of compliance-gaining strategies (Cody,

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Greene, Marston, O'Hair, Baaske & Schneider, 1985) is representative of situations research on communication from a social cognitive perspective.

In contrast, the ethnography of communication perspective is predicated on the assumption that the situation is an interactional accomplishment of the actors (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 3). Through their communicative practices, speech community members construct and enact the social order and meanings of their culture. Given the assumed significance of communicative practices in constructing situations, it is not surprising that the central analytic unit in the ethnography of communication literature is the speech or communication event (Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986). A communication event refers to a unified constellation of attributes (e.g., purpose, topic of talk, relationship between the interactants, the interaction structure, the emotional tone of the discourse) which is distinguishable from other events by members of a speech community (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 27). Ethnographers' commitment to the insider perspective in distinguishing communication events appears similar on its surface to the social cognitive researchers' focus on the perception of situations. However, an important distinction separates the two perspectives. From the social cognitive perspective, an individual's perceptions of the situation operate in an information processing model to affect the individual's subsequent cognitive activity and choice of behavior. Such a focus maximizes the contribution of individual differences to the communication process (Hewes & Planalp, 1987). In contrast, the fundamental units from the perspective of the ethnography of communication are the interactional patterns which enact shared cultural knowledge understood by all members of the given speech community. Such a focus on conventionalized perceptions casts the individual as a social member of a speech community rather than as a distinct cognitive player (Hewes & Planalp, 1987).

Although ethnographers of communication occasionally employ traditional quantitative methods in their study of communicative practices, they typically rely on a variety of naturalistic or qualitative methods to describe the practices and meanings of the speech community's code (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 118). One form of data which ethnographers of communication frequently seek is a description of the cultural terms of talk by which speech community members describe their own communicative practices. As illustrated by Carbaugh's (1989) recent comparative study of fifty cultural terms for talk in eleven societies, indigenous terms shed insight into a speech community's system of meanings for their communicative code. Despite substantial variation among speech communities in their respective types of communication acts, communication events, styles of talk, and functions of communication, Carbaugh's (1989) study suggests that there are certain recurring patterns of ways speech community members organize their understanding of communicative practices. Specifically, Carbaugh argues that speech

community members convey three orders of messages in their talk about talk: messages about how communication practices are differentiated and organized by speech community members; messages about social relationships among participants on dimensions of solidarity and power; and messages about personhood. With reference to messages about communication, Carbaugh observes that speech community members often differentiate their communicative practices on dimensions of directness; degree of structure, i.e., how fixed or rigid the enactment is; emotional pitch or tone, including the seriousness and formality of the enactment; and efficacy or importance of the event.

Although Carbaugh presents these dimensions as a possible basis for comparative ethnography of communication research, he appropriately observes that speech communities vary in the particularity of their communication codes. It is precisely such particularity which provides a warrant for this study's examination of the indigenous terms and semantic dimensions by which some high school adolescents organize their understanding of the communicative events in their everyday lives. We use naturalistic methods in order to attend closely to the language of speech community members. However, this study also benefits from the statistical precision afforded by methods employed by social cognitive researchers. In particular, we submit the communication events identified through indigenous terms to perceptual sorting by the adolescents and cluster analysis of these judgment data. We elicit perceptions of communication events in order to understand the shared cultural knowledge of the adolescents, rather than to understand the adolescents as information processors of situational stimuli.

Although the ethnography of communication literature has grown substantially in the last two decades, Sherzer (1983, p. 19) notes that the vast majority of this work still deals with formalized or ritualized communicative events in non-American speech communities. The corpus of research on the ethnography of communication within the boundaries of the U.S. is limited, but nonetheless affords insights into a wide range of American communication practices. Ethnographers of communication have described communication practices of some American minority groups, including members of Native American communities (e.g., Basso, 1979; Philips, 1982) and urban black youths (e.g., Goodwin, 1980; Kochman, 1981). A number of speech community "enclaves" have been examined, including, among others, the Chicago working-class neighborhood identified as "Teamsterville" (Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1986), Rutgers undergraduate dormitories (Moffatt, 1989), middle-class and working-class communities in the Piedmont Carolinas (Heath, 1983), and various organizations (e.g., Carbaugh, 1988a). Work painted in a broader stroke has examined the meaning of the cultural term "communication" as it relates to the American ideology of Self and Individualism (e.g., Katriel & Philipsen, 1981; Carbaugh, 1988b). The goal of the current study is to extend our understanding of communicative

practices within the boundaries of the U.S. by exploring the domain of communicative events perceived by some American high school adolescents.

Of the work published on American communicative practices, the study of greatest relevance to our research is Moffatt's (1989) recent ethnography of late-adolescence among Rutgers undergraduates. Moffatt cogently argues that adolescence in the American experience is a cultural moment for the individual worthy of study in its own right, not merely a population of "convenience" (and criticism) for social scientists interested in generalizing to the adult American experience. Rice (1981, p. 255) echoes this same point:

> Adolescents reflect many adult values and norms, but certain aspects of their lives are distinguishable from American adult culture. . . . Matters such as style of dress, tastes in music, language, . . . are properly adolescent subcultural.

Through interviewing and periodic participant observation, Moffatt (1989, p. 234) identified four major communicative events that were enacted in Rutgers dormitories by his sample of contemporary college students: Lounge Talk, characterized by interaction in which a group of students exchanged cynicisms about experience domains common to them such as instructors, the university bureaucracy, etc.; "Busting," a form of teasing enacted among friends; Private Talk, open and honest conversations between close friends in a private setting; and Locker Room Talk, humorously crude talk normally occurring in same-sex male and female groups. Private Talk seems to be very similar to the "sharing" event discussed by Carbaugh (1988b) and the "real communication" ritual discussed by Katriel and Philipsen (1981).

The four communicative events that Moffatt (1989) identified among Rutgers undergraduates illustrate many of the basic dimensions that Carbaugh (1989) discusses. The students classified their social relationships along a closeness or solidarity continuum, with Private Talk and "Busting" reserved for friends, Locker Room Talk reserved for same-sex friends and acquaintances, and Lounge Talk reserved for relationships that could include little prior familiarity among peers. The communicative events also differed in their status or power implications. Private Talk and "Busting" were exchanges between equals. By contrast, Lounge Talk and Locker Room Talk were situations in which participants indirectly competed with one another for respect and status among their peers. The types of talk also appear to vary in importance and tone, with Private Talk regarded as important and serious, in contrast to the more superficial and entertaining talk of "Busting," Locker Room Talk, and Lounge Talk. Locker Room Talk and Lounge Talk cynicism were generally highly charged emotionally, in contrast to the lesser intensity of "Busting" and the seriousness of Private Talk. Private Talk and Locker Room Talk were both characterized by directness, the former through "sincerity" and "honesty" and the latter through directness bordering on the crude and vulgar. By contrast, Lounge Talk

cynicism and friendly "Busting" generally placed greater emphasis on the interlocutors' ability to manipulate words in clever ways which conveyed multiple messages on many levels. In contrast to the flexibility with which students could enact Lounge Talk cynicism, Private Talk, and Locker Room talk, "Busting" was a tightly enacted event in which the participants walked a delicate interactional line to prevent offense.

Moffatt's (1989) observations are intriguing, but his larger project is designed to be a complete ethnography of Rutgers dormitory life, only one small portion of which is devoted to communication. Further, in emphasizing dormitory life, Moffatt may have missed communicative events which occur in other settings. Additional kinds of talk events may characterize the interactional lives of his late adolescents outside the dormitory setting.

In summary, this study focuses on an analysis of one speech community's communicative events, employing methods common to the ethnography of communication tradition (ethnographic interviewing and participant observation) and to the social cognitive tradition (paper-and-pencil judgment data submitted to statistical cluster analysis). In combining elements from these two perspectives on social situations, the study attempts to marshall their respective strengths—the emphasis on insider understandings from the ethnography of communication perspective and the statistical precision more characteristic of the social cognitive perspective. The study asks two general questions:

1. What are the various kinds of communication events differentiated by the study's sample of American high school adolescents?
2. How do the identified kinds of communication events relate to one another, and what are the semantic dimensions by which these adolescents organize their understanding of communication events?

METHODS

Participants

Participants were forty 16- and 17-year-old high school students of middle-class, Caucasian background. The group was comprised of approximately equal numbers of males and females. They were enrolled in a six-week summer residential academic program for college-bound students which was sponsored by the institution of higher education with which the researchers were associated at the time of the study. The adolescents attended classes together and shared meals and living quarters during the duration of the summer residential program. As discussed below, three different methods of data collection were employed, and not all forty students were involved in each of the data collection procedures. All participants were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary and that complete confidentiality would be maintained.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Ethnographic Interviewing. Ten informants, selected randomly from the group of forty, participated in an initial interview of approximately one hour's duration. The interviewer asked these adolescents, five males and five females, to provide their natural language labels and descriptors for the different kinds of talk they experienced in their daily lives. The introduction to the interview framed the task by asking the informant to imagine that the interviewer was a foreigner who knew nothing about how Americans in general and adolescents in particular spent their typical days. Informants were asked to provide as much detail as possible to help the "foreigner" understand, taking nothing for granted. The body of the interview employed Spradley's (1979) method of ethnographic interviewing. Informants were asked a "grand tour" question which encouraged them to describe all the different types of communication events that had occurred in a recent typical day. Each of the ten informants opted to describe a day in their home and school environments rather than a day in the residential academic program in which they were participating. Following this general questioning, informants were asked if they could think of additional types of communication events which they had experienced on an occasion other than the day selected for "touring." Follow-up questions embedded within the "grand tour" structure included example questions (e.g., "Can you give me an example of. . .") and direct-language questions (e.g., "How do you refer to that kind of situation?") (Spradley, 1979). In addition, the last five adolescents interviewed were asked verification questions to determine whether the types of communication events generated in the first five interviews generalized across informants (e.g., "Some of the conversations I've had with others have mentioned a situation described as _____. Is this phrase familiar to you?). Verification was sought with the first five informants through a separate second interview. All interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed in order to allow a close analysis of the language used by informants.

Participant Observation. Because the interviewer for the study was living in the informants' dormitory as a residence hall assistant, she also engaged in participant observation during the six weeks of student residence. Whenever appropriate, the interviewer queried the high school students on encounters that had just taken place, some of which she herself had participated in directly. The interviewer sought natural language terms and descriptive attributes with which the students captured "what was going on here."

Cluster Analysis. The researchers developed a corpus of forty-eight types of communication events that had appeared in two or more interviews and/or participant observation incidents. Although this corpus of natural language terms contained elements of Katriel and Philipsen's (1981) cluster of non-close communication events ("small talk" and "chat"),

no informant directly used the term "communication" as in Katriel and Philipsen's cluster of "real communication," "open communication," "supportive communication," and "really talking." The absence of the "communication" terms among our informants surprised us, given the salience of these terms among Katriel and Philipsen's informants. We wondered if our adolescent informants would be able to understand the "communication" terms in ways similar to Katriel and Philipsen's informants if presented with them as stimuli. In order to examine this possibility, the corpus of communication genres was expanded to fifty by including the terms "really talking" and "real communication."

The pool of fifty communication events was individually presented in the form of a card deck to a total of twenty-two additional high school adolescents (11 males and 11 females) who were randomly selected from the residential group. These respondents were asked to sort the cards into two or more piles based on the perceived similarity among the events. After sorting the cards, respondents were asked to explain in writing the basis of their sorting decisions.

In an attempt to reduce the pool of fifty events to a more parsimonious number of basic event types, the sorting data were submitted to an average-linkage hierarchical cluster analysis procedure (Krippendorff, 1980). The proportions of co-occurrence with which communication event types were sorted into the same pile comprised a matrix of proximity data suitable for submission to cluster analysis (Shepard, 1972).

Componential Analysis. The taxonomy of communication events which emerged in the cluster analysis was interpreted through a componential analysis (Spradley, 1979) of the underlying semantic dimensions by which informants made sense of their sorting activity. A componential analysis involves a systematic search for the attributes or components of meaning by which speech community members identify two cultural phenomena as similar or different. The written explanations which accompanied the card sorts were used in conjunction with written transcriptions of the initial ten interviews in order to identify the semantic attributes which informants and sorters used in describing the communication events. The two researchers independently read the sort explanations and the interview transcriptions in order to discern basic attributes or components of meaning.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Talk About Communication: Natural Language Terms

Table 1 lists the fifty communication events that were presented to card sorters, including the two terms added from the Katriel and Philipsen (1981) study. These natural language expressions from our group of high school adolescents display an interesting array of terms by which communication events were referenced. Considered collectively, this corpus of indigenous terms constitutes a rich metacommunicative

TABLE 1
List of Communication Events Identified by Adolescents

47.*	talking about homework
48.	talking about assignments
46.	talking about a test
14.	having a class discussion
24.	a classroom lecture
37.	a public speech
38.	the kind of talk which occurs in church services
20.	having a philosophical discussion
45.	the kind of talk which occurs between teachers and students
22.	the kind of talk when people are making plans
27.	the kind of talk when people are taking care of business
19.	having an argument
32.	the kind of talk when people are arguing
35.	having a fight
29.	having a disagreement
25.	a heated discussion
5.	arguing over nothing
41.	the kind of talk when people are having a griping session
23.	personal talk
43.	the kind of talk which occurs between close friends
15.	the kind of talk when people are discussing personal problems
6.	the kind of talk when people are talking things out
28.	the kind of talk which occurs when one person says "Can we have a talk?"
33.	serious talk
1.	the kind of talk when people are really talking**
7.	the kind of talk when people are having a talk
10.	real communication**
31.	having a pep talk
42.	counseling talk
44.	the kind of talk which occurs between parents and children
8.	telling personal stories
50.	the kind of talk when people are reminiscing
3.	writing notes
4.	in-class whispering
11.	joking around
13.	telling jokes
12.	gossiping
39.	BSing
9.	the kind of talk when people are engaged in flirting
2.	the kind of talk when people are exchanging greetings
17.	saying "hi"
21.	the kind of talk between newly acquainted people
40.	visiting
36.	talk about the day's events
49.	the kind of talk which occurs at meals
16.	just talking
34.	regular conversation
18.	small talk
26.	chatting
30.	shooting the breeze

* Numbers reflect the randomly determined order of the cards in the deck.
** From Katriel and Philipsen (1981).

resource with which users could frame their everyday accounts to others of their own and others' communicative practices.

The most frequent way in which communication events were described was by use of a speech event marker term, i.e., reference to the participants, setting, purpose, dialogue, etc. For example, five of the events were referenced by describing a setting marker: "the kind of talk which occurs in church services," "the kind of talk which occurs at meals," "having a classroom discussion," "in-class whispering," and "a classroom lecture." An additional four events were described by the adolescents simply through reference to the participants involved in the exchange: "the kind of talk between newly acquainted people," "the kind of talk which occurs between close friends," "the kind of talk which occurs between parents and children," and "the kind of talk which occurs between teachers and students." Two event types were referenced by citing verbatim portions of the event's scripted dialogue: "the kind of talk which occurs when one person says 'Can we have a talk?' " and "saying 'hi.' " Additional types of communicative events were referenced by indicating the interaction goal or purpose: "the kind of talk when people are making plans" and "the kind of talk when people are taking care of business." Last, several event types were described by citing the general category of speech acts, e.g., "telling personal stories," "the kind of talk when people are exchanging greetings," "telling jokes," and "saying 'hi.' "[1]

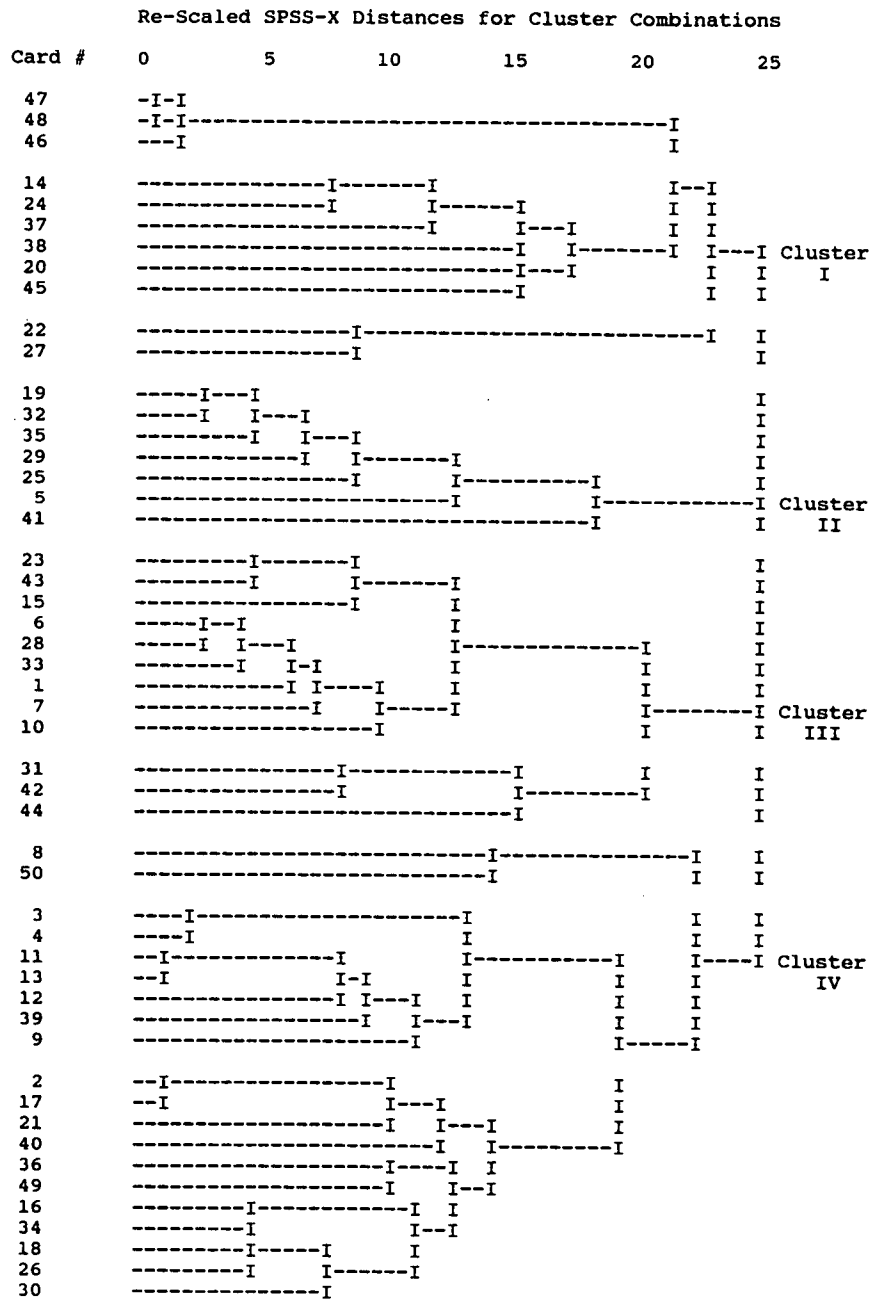
The most interesting feature of this marking pattern is that it was accomplished with but a single feature of the communicative event. In response to interviewer probes, the informants repeatedly indicated that the people they were with would "know what was meant" from the single-marker expressions they provided. When two people are described as "arguing," for example, our informants felt confident that their listener(s) would understand what was occurring without additional distinguishing markers such as purposes or goals.

The salience of single-marker descriptors among these high school adolescents suggests that their interaction world was highly segmented and/or highly scripted. Segmentation involves high co-occurrences between given features of communicative events which obviate the need to employ multiple features in distinguishing event types; to verbalize all of the features (e.g., setting, participants, act sequence, etc.) would be unnecessarily redundant. Alternatively, the communicative events which comprised these adolescents' communication worlds may have been highly constrained or scripted such that variation in setting participants, for example, would not have affected the content or structure of the talk event in any significant way.

Toward a Folk Taxonomy of Communication Events

Figure 1 provides a dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis performed on the sorted data. An examination of the right-most portion

Figure 1. Hierarchical cluster analysis dendrogram of the card sort data.



of the dendrogram makes evident that the fifty communication events can be reduced to four basic clusters. In turn, three of these four basic clusters are composed of meaningful sub-clusters.

Cluster I consists of three sub-clusters which appear task-oriented in some way: *Schoolwork Talk* events ("talking about homework," "talking about a test," "talking about assignments"); *Formal Talk* genres ("a class discussion," "a classroom lecture," "a public speech," "church services talk," "a philosophical discussion," and "talk between teachers and students"); and *Personal Agenda Talk* ("making plans" and "taking care of business").

Cluster II, which could not be meaningfully differentiated into subclusters, consists of conflict-related communication events and was accordingly labelled *Conflict Talk:* "having an argument," "arguing," "having a fight," "having a disagreement" "having a heated discussion," "arguing over nothing," and "having a griping session."

Cluster III appears to consist of highly personalized and supportive kinds of communication events which are grouped into two sub-clusters: *Personal Talk* events ("personal talk," "talk between close friends," "talking about personal problems," "talking things out," "the kind of talk when people are really talking," "having a talk," and "real communication"); and *Advice Talk* ("having a pep talk," "counseling talk," and "the kind of talk which occurs between parents and children").

Cluster IV consists of the remaining twenty communication events, all of which cohere around a theme of socially-oriented interpersonal events. Three sub-clusters of communication events comprise this basic grouping. *Past-Oriented Talk* events include "telling personal stories" and "reminiscing talk." *Passing Time* events include "writing notes," "in-class whispering," "joking around," "telling stories," "gossiping," "BSing," and "flirting." Last, *Social Talk* events include "exchanging greetings," "saying 'hi,'" "talk between newly acquainted people," "visiting," "talk about the day's events," "mealtime talk," "just talking," "regular conversation," "small talk," "chatting," and "shooting the breeze."

The hierarchical cluster analysis confirms the componential analysis we performed by closely reading the interview transcripts and the written essays provided by card sorters. In independent readings of the written materials, both researchers identified five basic semantic dimensions that clearly emerged in distinguishing the four basic clusters and their subclusters: Task-Impersonal vs. Socio-Personal; Positive-Pleasant vs. Negative-Unpleasant; Important vs. Unimportant; Formal vs. Informal; and Equal vs. Unequal.

These five semantic dimensions are substantially similar to the conceptual system identified in Carbaugh's (1989) comparative study of indigenous terms for talk. Task-Impersonal communication events do not highlight the interlocutors' individual selves, in contrast to Socio-Personal communication events, thereby capturing Carbaugh's (1989)

theme of messages about Personhood. Socio-Personal events also convey messages of solidarity (Carbaugh, 1989), in contrast to Task-Impersonal communication events. Carbaugh's theme of structural rigidity is a latent feature of the Task-Impersonal vs. Socio-Personal dimension, as well. Carbaugh's relational theme of power is evidenced in the semantic dimension of Equal vs. Unequal communication events. The semantic theme of Formal vs. Informal and Positive-Pleasant vs. Negative-Unpleasant are matched by Carbaugh's conceptual theme of emotional tone. Finally, our semantic dimension of Important vs. Unimportant is found in Carbaugh's conceptual theme of importance. In short, our five semantic dimensions appear to replicate all of Carbaugh's conceptual themes except directness-indirectness.

In order to determine how each of the nine identified communication event types was perceived on each of the five semantic dimensions, the researchers independently re-read all written materials and made holistic judgments on all forty-five of the possible event type x dimension combinations. That is, each researcher asked of a given event type whether that type was best described as Task-Impersonal or Socio-Personal, Positive-Pleasant or Negative-Unpleasant, and so forth. The two researchers agreed on 42 of 45 of their independent judgments, reflecting a 93% agreement rate. The three discrepant judgments were resolved through joint discussion. Table 2 produces the final matrix of the nine communication event types in terms of their underlying semantic features.

TABLE 2
Semantic Features of the Clustered Communication Events

	Semantic Dimensions				
Cluster	Task/Impersonal vs. Socio/Personal	Positive vs. Negative	Important vs. Unimportant	Formal vs. Informal	Equal vs. Unequal
Cluster I					
Schoolwork Talk	+	0	–	–	+
Formal Talk	+	+ or –	+ or –	+	–
Personal Agenda Talk	+	0	+ or –	–	+
Cluster II					
Conflict Talk	–	–	+	–	–
Cluster III					
Personal Talk	–	+	+	–	+
Advice Talk	–	+	+	–	–
Cluster IV					
Past-Oriented Talk	–	+ or –	–	–	–
Passing Time Talk	–	+	–	–	+
Social Talk	–	0	–	–	+

NOTE: A "+" indicates correspondence with the first-listed half of a given semantic pair; a "–" indicates correspondence with the second-listed half of a given semantic pair; a "+ or –" entry indicates that the sample was divided in its perceptions; a "0" indicates that the event cluster was perceived as neutral on a given semantic pair.

The Task-Impersonal vs. Socio-Personal dimension distinguishes Cluster I communication events from event types in the other three clusters. As one respondent noted in his written rationale for his sorting decisions, the Cluster I events "have a point and purpose" to them. However, the three sub-clusters within Cluster I are distinguishable from one another on the remaining semantic dimensions. *Schoolwork Talk* and *Personal Agenda Talk* were affectively neutral to our informants and sorters, whereas *Formal Talk* was generally talked about as either positive or negative, depending on the informant/sorter. Talking about schoolwork and personal agenda talk events were taken-for-granted features of daily life to our adolescents—events which happened often but which were experienced as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. By contrast, *Formal Talk* events were not neutral, although the adolescents in our sample differed widely in their perceptions of the pleasantness of these formalized talk events.

The task-oriented communication events of Cluster I also differed on their perceived importance or significance. *Schoolwork Talk* events were widely perceived as unimportant. One informant described these events as "academic small talk" and "not really needed." Another described *Schoolwork Talk* by indicating that it "wasn't heavy talking but just what one would talk about on the way to or from class to fill the void." By contrast, *Formal Talk* events and *Personal Agenda Talk* events displayed greater variation among adolescents in perceived significance. Although some adolescents found little significance in any of the task-oriented talk events of Cluster I, a significant number of adolescents described *Formal Talk* events through such glosses as "serious subjects of general importance" and described *Personal Agenda Talk* events with such phrases as "everyday but essential."

In contrast to the informality and unstructured nature of *Schoolwork Talk* and *Personal Agenda Talk* events, *Formal Talk* events were regarded as formalized communicative situations. As one informant indicated about the events clustered in this grouping, "You don't talk about just anything—it's not general but set by the situation."

The fifth dimension of Equal vs. Unequal also differentiates the three sub-clusters which comprise Cluster I. In contrast to the relationship of equality which prevailed for *Schoolwork Talk* and *Personal Agenda Talk* events, *Formal Talk* events were perceived as imbalanced in some way. Typically, these formal talk events were perceived to involve "one-way" communication, with one interlocutor dominating the talk event. In a revealing description of classroom discourse, one informant indicated, "You're trying to find out what [the teacher] wants you to do. With a teacher, it is more like 'do this,' and you just kind of take it."

Cluster II was overwhelmingly perceived by these adolescents as negative and unpleasant. The following sampling of words and phrases used by our informants and respondents illustrates this negative reaction: "not pleasant," "bitterness and anger," "disruptive," "doesn't get

anywhere," "gets in the way of friendship," "trying to hurt the other person," "irrational," "pointless," and "full of tension." Only one informant established a distinction between "healthy" and "unhealthy" conflict events. There is no inherent logical reason why conflict events must be socio-personal as opposed to task-impersonal; argument and disagreement can, after all, occur surrounding the performance of an impersonal task. However, our adolescents overwhelmingly understood conflict events as personalized. Conflict could logically occur over trivial as well as significant issues; in fact, the event of "arguing over nothing" explicitly recognizes insignificant conflict. Nonetheless, our informants perceived conflict events as important—less so for the significance of the topic *per se* and more so for the relational implications of the conflict. The conflict events were not perceived as structured or formalized in any way. Last, our adolescent sample perceived conflict events as unequal because of attempted opinion domination of one party and the tendency for participants to try to "win" and avoid "giving in."

The affective response of the adolescents to Cluster III contrasted with their response to Cluster II. Both *Personal Talk* events and *Advice Talk* events were perceived as very positive. Additionally, the two sub-clusters were regarded as socio-personal, important, and informal. The only semantic feature which differentiated *Personal Talk* from *Advice Talk* was the equality dimension. Unlike the close, personal talk between friends which characterizes *Personal Talk* events, *Advice Talk* events were perceived as involving unequal relations between the participants. "Pep talk" and "counseling talk" were unequal in the sense that one party was dominant over the other in the role of helper. Parent-child talk events were also perceived as unequal. To some respondents, this inequality was rooted in the unequal roles of parent and child. To others, the inequality resulted from the advice giving/seeking nature of the exchange, sometimes with the parent dominant as the counselor and sometimes with the child dominant as the counselor. Interestingly, interaction with parents was regarded as positive by our adolescents, contrary to the stereotype of a pervasive "generation gap" in families.

Although our informants did not volunteer Katriel and Philipsen's (1981) terms of "really talking" and "real communication" during the interview portion of the study, the adolescents were able to understand these terms during the sorting task. Consistent with the findings of Katriel and Philipsen (1981) and of Carbaugh (1988b), these terms were equated with close, open, and honest dialogue between relationship parties.

Cluster IV consists of three sub-clusters of events, all of which were perceived as socio-personal, unimportant, and informal. However, differences emerged among the communication event types on the remaining dimensions. *Past-Oriented Talk* was perceived as either positive or negative, depending on one's role in the exchange. If one were the party engaged in telling or reminiscing, the talk event was perceived as

positive and pleasant; however, if one were the listener to such talk, the experience ran the risk of being negative. *Past-Oriented Talk* events were also regarded as unequal, with much "one-way" talk between speaker and listener. By contrast, *Passing Time* events and *Social Talk* events were both perceived as equal.

Passing Time events and *Social Talk* events differed on perceived positiveness and pleasantness. *Passing Time* events were described as anti-boredom mechanisms, initiated when the situation was boring and people were in need of some entertainment or fun. Writing notes and in-class whispering were initiated to offset a boring class; joking around, telling jokes, gossiping, BSing, and flirting were all employed to "kill time," to "pass the time," or to change a "dull situation" into an entertaining one.

In contrast to the pleasantness of *Passing Time* events, *Social Talk* events were affectively neutral to our adolescents; they were pervasive talk events that were "simply there" and "trivial." Repeatedly, informants told us that such talk events were the normal baseline communicative events of their lives—"background filler" against which other talk events were framed.

CONCLUSIONS

The largest proportion of communication events identified by these adolescents involved relatively superficial sociality (i.e., Cluster IV events). If quantity of events can be accepted as an index of salience, these findings imply an adolescent world characterized by a series of pleasant and entertaining interpersonal contacts. The easy comfort of this interactional world is reinforced by the strong negativity these adolescents felt toward conflict-related talk and the relative paucity of task-oriented talk genres. Interestingly, this portrait of the adolescent communicative world is mirrored by Moffatt's (1989) study of Rutgers undergraduates. Moffatt notes, as do we, the relative infrequency of communication events associated with the academic side of student life, observing instead student discourse dominated by the personal and the social. Moffatt notes, as well, the pervasive tone of "friendliness" in the interactions of his Rutgers students, a tone which functioned to produce comfortable interpersonal contact among dorm residents.

An obvious question for subsequent research is whether this portrait of the interactional world of the adolescent and the late-adolescent is related to the temporal moment of their "coming of age" (Moffatt, 1989). The apparent prevalence of comfortable sociality may signal social identities still in the formative stages of development. If, however, this interaction portrait generalizes to American adults, the implication is that our sample of high school adolescents did not represent a unique speech community but rather the more general Caucasian, middle-class cultural identity.

The high school adolescents of this study differentiated nine major types of communication events, in contrast to the four types of talk events presented by Moffatt (1989). Method and setting differences between the two studies may account for this difference in findings. However, all of Moffatt's (1989) event types display a "family resemblance" to communication event types distinguished by our high school adolescent group. Lounge Talk, "Busting," and Locker Room Talk appear to be variants of *Passing Time Talk* events. Moffatt's Private Talk parallels the genre of *Personal Talk* events identified in this study. The "family resemblance" between Moffatt's Rutgers adolescents and the high school adolescents of our study suggests that adolescents do not constitute a homogeneous cultural group but rather consist of distinctive groups that share common cultural elements. The communication codes of these two adolescent groups are like dialects of a broader American cultural code.

The five semantic dimensions by which the adolescents organized their understanding of the types of communication events in their lives replicates in large measure the conceptual system identified by Carbaugh (1989). This replication supports Carbaugh's argument for cross-cultural commonalities in ways speech community members reference their interactional worlds. However, Carbaugh's conceptual theme of directness-indirectness did not emerge as a salient semantic dimension in this study. The failure to replicate this theme may reflect a method artifact in our work. The direct-indirect feature may be sufficiently latent in adolescents' cultural knowledge of communication events to prevent its observation through the participant observation, ethnographic interviewing and judgment sort tasks employed in this study. On the other hand, the type of communication events which dominate the interaction world of adolescents may work against differentiation among events on direct-indirect grounds. The apparent prevalence of Cluster IV events, i.e., superficial sociality, may not present these adolescents with complicated face redress goals for which indirectness is well-suited (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

This study attempted to paint in broad strokes the landscape of communication events among some American adolescents. A full ethnographic portrait of these communication events is needed, particularly observation of how adolescents enact these events. It is at the observational level that the social cognitive emphasis on individual differences in information processing and message choice behavior may become evident, as well. Additional work is also needed to examine how speech community members employ this corpus of metalinguistic terms as symbolic resources in their accounts of or metacommunicative commentaries on their interaction experiences. By describing to one another such events as "joking around," "BSing," and "talking things out," for instance, speech community members rely on implicit shared knowledge in order to contextualize what was enacted or is in the process of enactment.

ENDNOTE

1. "Saying 'hi' " is an unusual example in that although it is a single marker, it simultaneously references both a verbatim portion of dialogue and a category of speech act. This is nonetheless consistent with the general observation concerning economy of markers. For example, speakers do not find it necessary to specify participants, setting, topic, or other features of the act, perhaps because they do not vary, or perhaps because their variation wouldn't alter the enactment of the event. Nor do they find it necessary to distinguish between different kinds of dialogues that might accomplish the same act. The single dual function marker is adequate, and more information is unnecessary.

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