



## Speech genres and cultural value in the Anglo-American public speaking course as a site of language socialization

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### ABSTRACT

Speech genres have a significant role in socializing children and adults not only to speak in culturally appropriate ways but also to present desirable identities. We analyze narratives of self-transformation collected in an undergraduate public speaking course in the United States to learn how the acquisition of public speaking as a speech genre contributes to U.S. students' language socialization. Our study contributes to two traditions of intercultural communication research, one interested in the context-bound, culturally situated character of Anglo-American speech, and another that seeks to explain how local communication resources, including speech genres, travel across cultural boundaries.

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Observable speech is, to a significant extent, generic. Groups socialize their members to interact in ways that observe and utilize locally recognized, relatively stable conventions for the production and interpretation of context-bound speech. Such conventions or speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986; Voloshinov, 1973) are inevitably social in that they serve as discursive resources for social participation and their use is subject to evaluation by audiences and/or conversational partners. Speech genres are also inevitably cultural and historical in that their form, function, value, and availability varies across communities of speakers and historical periods.

Blum-Kulka (2005) distinguished two dominant approaches to speech genres. Structural theories of genre tend to assume that genres possess stable structures that determine their functions, and that generic types of expression can be clearly distinguished from one another according to their structural properties. By contrast, dynamic functional approaches deny that speech genres are easily classifiable, due mainly to the varying degree of their structural and functional stability, the frequent lack of congruence between their structure and function, and the fact that their performance is always subject to the process of their interpretation. We share this latter approach to genre, and adopt an anthropological stance toward genre with an emphasis on their situated use and their socio-cultural significance. Such an approach is captured well in Bauman's (1999) definition of genre as "a constellation of systemically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework

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for the production and reception of discourse” (p. 84; see also Briggs & Bauman, 1992). Such constellations inhere interpretive procedures and expectations “that are not part of discourse structure, but of the ways actors relate to and use language” (Hanks, 1987, p. 670).

One such interpretive procedure that is not located in generic structure but rather in actors’ relation to language is the ascription value to genres. Ideology, or the value ascribed to speech genres, is essential to their construction and use (Hanks, 1987). Explicit value ascriptions are a particularly salient feature of language socialization (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004; Ochs, 1990, 1996, 2002; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011). The anthropological theory of language socialization holds that learning valued local discourse practices (including speech genres) is a means of becoming a competent member of society and assuming valued identities. The value of such practices is inseparable from the value of the social identities a competent user of those practices will be able to claim. The relationship between practices and identities is mutually constitutive: speaking like a member of a society or social group allows a speaker to credibly claim membership, and membership calls for the development of the ability to speak like a member. Contrary to Kamberelis (1995) who suggests that most socialization into genres occurs implicitly through participation in social interaction, ethnographic studies of language socialization have shown that the explicit socialization of valued genres has a significant role in a variety of cultural contexts. Learning the speech genre of the *dozens* helps African-American children enter young adulthood, assume gendered identities, and perform a racial identity on Twitter (Morgan, 2014). Parents socialize children in St. Lucia to “curse” in the local Creole variety, Kwéyòl, as opposed to English, to perform an assertive personal identity (Garrett, 2005). Religious events become a site of language socialization for Gitano children in Spain where adults praise them for their competent performance of presentations and farewells, genres children are then able to translate into performances of written literacy (Poveda, Cano, & Palomares-Valera, 2005). Genre-based socialization does not cease with childhood, and is in fact quite common in institutional settings. For example, DiDomenico (2015) analyzes how a gay advocacy group at a U.S. university socializes adult speakers to perform institutionally sanctioned coming-out narratives and, by implication, exemplary LGBTQ lives and identities. Dunn’s (2014) study of students’ generic narratives of self-transformation at a Japanese center for teaching public speaking showed how the competent performance of such narratives was seen as evidence of an enterprising, positive adult self within the context of the institution. In sum, there is ethnographic evidence that communities of speakers frequently treat valued genres as resources for integrating children and novices into social life.

In this paper, we develop an anthropological account of the cultural value of public speaking as an Anglo-American speech genre in the context of a common site of language socialization – the university public speaking course in the United States – using data from fieldwork the first author conducted in 2013. In particular, we studied how students’ narratives of self-transformation in the public speaking course portray the course as a site of language socialization and ascribe value to public speaking as a speech genre in the process. Our choice to focus on narratives stems from the fact that narratives are particularly rich discursive sites, and displays, of language socialization (Miller, Koven, & Lin, 2012; Molina-Markham, 2012; Ochs & Capps, 1996), identity formation, identity negotiation (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 2001; De Fina, 2009; Tileagă, 2005;

van De Mieroop, 2011), and, as we show, value ascription. Telling autobiographical narratives such as narratives of self-transformation is an equally valuable means of cultivating valued selves and identities in relation to learning new forms of expression.

Some of our readers might object that public speaking, as it is taught in the United States, is not a speech genre in its own right but rather a collection of a variety of speech genres such as informative and persuasive speaking, epideictic/ceremonial speaking, business/professional speaking, limited preparation speaking, narrative speeches, and Lincoln-Douglas debates (Levasseur, Dean, & Pfaff, 2004). Indeed, the public speaking course is a complex communicative ecology (Shoaps, 2009) featuring the interplay of a wide variety of instructional genres such as textbooks (Sproule, 2012), activities, written assignments, student-teacher interaction and so on in addition to the genres of speaking listed above. However, it is reasonable to approach *public speaking* as a type of oratory that can be considered a secondary speech genre (Bauman, 2004), that is, a generic collection of other, more basic speech genres. As students learn from public speaking textbooks, this secondary genre has an overall, linear structure and encompasses a particular range of (para)linguistic resources and communication norms (Boromisza-Habashi, Hughes, & Malkowski, 2016). Additionally, as the analysis of our primary data shows, participants talk about public speaking as a recognizable form of expression, which serves as an ethnographic warrant to treat it as an emic genre type (Goldsmith, 1989).

As we mentioned above, the anthropological literature on genre and socialization recognizes and demonstrates the importance of value ascription in genre-oriented socialization. Extant scholarship, however, does not sufficiently demonstrate how speakers assume authority to ascribe value to particular genres, and what categories of value are salient to situated acts of value ascription. We show how tellers of self-transformation narratives perform a particular epistemological orientation (Potter, 1996) toward anxiety that positions them as authoritative speakers with vivid personal experience of coping with that anxiety in the process of learning public speaking. We also draw on cultural discourse theory (Carbaugh, 2005, 2011) to show the salient indigenous value system active in the narratives. Cultural discourse theory holds that cultural premises (basic, taken-for-granted beliefs) about what is better or worse animate specific discourse practices. Such premises can be reconstructed as five radiants of meaning: being (personhood), acting (communication), relating (social relations), feeling (affect), and dwelling (relationship to place). Combining language socialization theory's claim that the learning of valued discourse practices is inseparable from stepping into valued social identities and cultural discourse theory's insight about cultural value immanent in communication practices we use the following model to interpret the value of public speaking:

It is good to (learn to) use discursive practice (P) because those who (learn to) use P are better persons and/or communicate better and/or have better relationships and/or feel better and/or have a better relationship to their place than those who do not.

Based on the cultural value system we reconstructed from the narratives we argued that students' narratives presented public speaking a *for-anyone-anywhere* discourse genre. We speculate that this feature of public speaking contributes to its mobility (Blommaert, 2010), that is, its global circulation across linguistic and social boundaries.

## Methods

The research reported in this paper is an element of a larger ethnographic research project investigating the cultural significance of public speaking in the United States and the global reach of the Anglo-American model of public speaking. The project was founded on the basic theoretical orientation to public speaking and public speaking pedagogy as two sets of related, culturally embedded practices (Boromisza-Habashi et al., 2016). We designed the present study to capture the social significance of students' narratives of coping with anxiety in the course. To clarify: the purpose of the present study is not to show that public speaking anxiety was a unique feature of a particular social group, but rather to illustrate how a group of speakers rendered the experience of anxiety as an element of learning to speak in public socially real and meaningful. When speakers want to capture some element of reality in interaction with others and present themselves as authoritative witnesses they often turn to narrative (Potter, 1996). We approached both tellers' position of authority and their experiences with anxiety as social facts that gained their status as fact through the act of narration. We also acknowledged that autobiographical narratives served as a key resource for the demonstration of language socialization across cultures (Ochs & Capps, 1996). We pursued answers to the following research questions:

- (1) How do narratives constitute tellers as authoritative narrators?
- (2) How does the use of narratives of self-transformation demonstrate language socialization?
- (3) What types of value do such narratives ascribe to public speaking as a speech genre?

We derived the data used for this study from two sources. The first author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a basic public speaking course in the Spring semester of 2013 at the University of Colorado Boulder, a large public research university. In the course of fieldwork he held nine focus group discussions (total length = 7 hours, 35 minutes) with students ( $N = 27$ ) taking the same course during the same semester. One data set used for this study consisted of narratives told spontaneously during these focus group discussions. The second data set contained narratives derived from so called "self-evaluation videos" students taking the course recorded at the end of the semester and posted on YouTube. Instructors teaching the course prompted students to record a video – using their cell phones or any other kind of video recording equipment – in which they reflected on the most important things they had learned in the course and offered tips to future students regarding how to succeed in the public speaking course. Students were encouraged to produce videos that were creative and showcased what they learned during the semester. The assignment had a dual pedagogical function: it gave students a chance to try using an online platform as a channel for public speaking, and instructors did in fact show some of these videos in future classes with the intention of helping students manage their fear of public speaking at the beginning of the semester. The first author collected a total of 77 publicly available videos from YouTube (total length = 2 hours, 34 minutes). Both types of data were fully transcribed.

The University of Colorado Boulder is a large public research university with a student body of 30 000 undergraduate and graduate students. Offered in a seminar-only format,

the course is available to all majors around campus. At the time of data collection 371 students were enrolled in 18 sections of the course. A faculty member in the role of course director and nine graduate teaching assistants taught individual sections of the course. All instructors used a customized edition of Lucas's *The Art of Public Speaking* (2012), the most widely used commercial public speaking textbook in the U.S. (Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds, 2016). Student evaluations of the course at the time of data gathering suggested that public speaking was popular across majors and across every level of the university structure (department, college, campus).

We began data analysis by isolating places in the data where speakers discussed public speaking anxiety. We then conducted axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) using Labov and Waletzky's (1967) features of narrative. In their seminal work on autobiographical narratives Labov and Waletzky argued that such narratives minimally contained two features: (1) complicating actions and events (i.e., a sequence of temporal clauses), and (2) the assessment of the significance of events (i.e., a statement that establishes why the narrated sequence of events is significant or newsworthy). Using these minimal criteria we identified 63 narratives and 67 narrative tropes (discourse units that demonstrated narrative features but did not contain the minimum temporal sequences or a statement of significance). Once we identified our narratives and narrative tropes we first performed the line-by-line, unrestricted coding Lindlof and Taylor (2011) call open-coding, and then we combined our categories (particularly indigenous symbolic terms for types of communication, persons, relationships, affective states, and metaphorical and physical places) with the theoretical constructs of discursive construction, socialization, and self-transformation. We held regular meetings where we conducted coder adjudication with the aim of finding consensus regarding the coding process (Saldaña, 2016).

In the following sections we first reconstruct the structure of students' narratives by describing the four stages of self-transformation the narratives referenced. Next, we describe the discursive resources the narratives mobilized in order to cast their tellers as authoritative speakers with direct experience of self-transformation resulting from learning public speaking. Third, we describe three ways in which narratives demonstrated language socialization: (1) by presenting public speaking as an efficacious form of expression, (2) by portraying learning public speaking as a transformative experience, and (3) by recognizing the value of the institution as a site of personal transformation. Finally, we interpret the cultural value of public speaking. The complete transcripts of narratives and narrative tropes referenced in data excerpts can be found in the online supplemental data.

## **Narrative structure**

Narratives displayed a patterned structure consisting of four stages tellers invoked to narrate their progress through the public speaking course, a pattern we call the Arc of Triumph and Transformation. Although not all students reported all of these four stages, our analytic strategy of looking across narratives led us to identify a robust pattern across individual narratives which constitutes a powerful, widely recognized discursive resource in the socio-cultural scene at hand.

Students began by reporting how *nervous* they felt at the beginning of the course. As they moved through the course – and their narrative – they shared how they became

more *comfortable* with speaking publicly and their anxiety subsided. As students became more comfortable – and less anxious – with public speaking, they shared how they ultimately became more *confident* individuals as a result of their experiences and efforts. Finally, although at times they were more implicit and at other times strategically explicit in their articulations, students presented themselves as persons in possession of a useful skill set which, in turn, they treated as evidence of their potential to become *successful persons* in the future. In sum, students narrated that, as a result of taking the public speaking course, their selves and future prospects were fundamentally transformed.

To what extent can we consider such narratives as authentic and spontaneous accounts of personal experience? According to the first author's recordings of classroom interaction and field journal, the instructor prompted students to rate their level of nervousness on a scale of 1–10 on the first day of class, and reminded them numerous times throughout the semester that having the “nerves” was a natural reaction to the situation where one is required to give a speech. In a manner typical for best-selling textbooks available in the U.S. market (Pearson, DeWitt, Child, Kahl, & Dandamudi, 2007), the textbook discussed anxiety in some detail and explicitly presented public speaking skills as the key to future success. In their self-evaluations, students followed instructors' prompts to share their personal experiences with future students. Undoubtedly, students' narratives conformed to the performative expectations (DiDomenico, 2015) of the course, and in all likelihood, they would have narrated their experiences in different ways to different audiences. This feature of the socio-cultural scene, however, does not undermine our research goals, as we are less interested in students' actual, authentic experiences than the form, functions, and cultural meanings of their personal narratives in this scene.

### Establishing authority

Personal narratives took on the function of establishing students as authoritative narrators of their personal experience by portraying a particular epistemological orientation (Potter, 1996) toward anxiety. As they narrated anxiety, tellers used vivid descriptions by relying on discourse features such as upgraders, contrasts, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, and colloquialisms. They also positioned themselves as members of a social category with relevant experience (i.e., regular students in a public speaking course) to concurrently shore up their authority and the factuality of anxiety.

Typically, narratives began with accounts of tellers' nervousness. Some students reported that initially they were not nervous because of past familiarity with speaking publicly. However, they went on to argue that they indeed experienced unanticipated anxiety during their first speech and had to work to overcome this nervousness over the course of the semester. Students' narratives vividly described the experience of nervousness by means of five types of contrast: (1) contrasting personality characteristics, (2) contrasting initial feelings, (3) contrasting contexts, (4) the contrast between normal and anxious conduct and cognition, and (5) the contrast between their first speech and subsequent speeches.

First, tellers contrasted two kinds of personalities, “outgoing” (“I was nervous, which I'm not used to, I'm a pretty *outgoing* person so kinda caught me off guard.”) and “quiet/shy” (“It was a joke in our family, our big, loud, Irish family, that I, the only *quiet, shy* one, was taking a public speaking class. So with that being said, I did it, and,



I was freaking out at first ... ”). Second, some students reported contrasting and extreme emotions at the outset of the course:

(1) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 19

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47	Our first speech in the class, <i>I was super confident</i> about, uh I
48	thought I was gonna do great, and I got up in front of everyone,
49	surprisingly my words came out shaky, <i>I was nervous</i> , which I'm not used
50	to, I'm a pretty outgoing person so kinda caught me off guard. But after
51	that, I realized that I wasn't as confident as I thought I was [...].

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Third, students reflected on how they found the social context of the public speaking classroom strangely anxiety-producing in spite of having prior experience as public performers. By doing so, they introduced a contrast between the public speaking classroom and other social contexts where they had participated in public performances.

(2) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 41

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1176	I've never been scared of public speaking
1177	until this class. <i>I've spoken at many funerals, events, and large gatherings,</i>
1178	<i>but I've never been nervous until now.</i> Something about talking in front of
1179	your peers makes it pretty scary, and I – although I've never been one to
1180	shy away from putting myself out there, taking a challenge, or trying new
1181	things, I was definitely pushed to find what I was capable of.

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Fourth, students narrated the contrast between their regular and anxious conduct (“And uh and I remember just getting up there, and *just losing control*”) and cognition (“I don't even know, I – I uh *it's a blank memory in my head*”) as evidence of anxiety. Finally, they invoked the contrast between the quality of the first speech and subsequent speeches to gauge their initial anxiety.

(3) Excerpt from Focus Group 2, April 12, 2013

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212	S4	I remember
213		like <i>my first speech</i> , I had practiced uh a pretty decent amount, and you
214		know I was fairly confident, but as soon as I walked in the room like oh
215		man, I gotta say this in front of everybody, I don't know any of these
216		people, like – and you know that thought kinda definitely hurt my speech,
217		<i>but since then it's – it's improved.</i>

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Following the discursive structure of the Arc of Triumph and Transformation, after narrating their nervousness students turned to narrating a transformative process by which they became more “comfortable” in public speaking. The Arc's second stage brought into view the social dimension of participation in the public speaking course. Some student narratives cast light on the process of self-transformation occurring in a distinctly social environment that included peers and instructors. A second distinguishing feature of this stage was that narratives and tropes belonging to this category described a passage from a nervous to a confident stage and activities that facilitate that passage. The five themes we grouped into the category of becoming more comfortable were the following: (1) opportunities for presentation of perspectives and personal connections to topics (“I also looked forward to presenting my topic, because it um *gave me the opportunity to share a passion of mine with a group of strangers [...].*”); (2) an experience shared with peers (“I also realized that *everyone gets nervous ad everyone doesn't wanna be in that situation*, and so that made me feel a

bit better about speaking in public.”); (3) teacher guidance (“[*The instructor*] really encouraged you to bring out your personality and to try to be more and more confident on your speeches. And she probably challenged you on things that you – that brings you as I told out of your comfort zone [...].”); (4) preparation (“If you come prepared it also helps your confidence in what you’re going to say [unintelligible] can tell when you’re confident and when you’re not, and they can also tell when you’re prepared and when you’re not.”); and (5) self-critiques and ongoing performance assessments (“In the very beginning, I always thought that my speeches were just gonna be horrible and my presence was gonna be horrible. Um but as the semester went on, I learned to be more confident with myself, and understand and love what I’m talking about most.”).

Taken together, these ways of narrating anxiety did not only establish students as authorities on their own experiences with public speaking anxiety but also talked that anxiety into being, confirming and affirming it as fact. Students presented anxiety as a distinct entity with objective existence in their own experience, and they cast it as an experience they must overcome or conquer. As a result of combating anxiety they developed a sense of personal transformation, which they described in spatial terms:

(4) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 25

18	The speech forced me to go outside of my
19	comfort zone, and it ended up being a very successful speech and one that
20	I even ((laughs)) caught myself enjoying and having fun with, which I
21	never thought would ever happen. So, my advice would be not to be
22	scared – you will be, ‘cause I was.

Notice that having a sense of comfort with a speech (“enjoying and having fun with it,” line 20) occurs “outside [the student’s] comfort zone” (lines 18–19). “Outside” the comfort zone with which the student arrived to the public speaking course lies a new, expanded comfort zone that came about as a result of overcoming being “scared” (line 22). The expansion of the comfort zone is understood as the outcome of a collaboration among the individual student, their peers in the course, and the instructor. Students’ increasing comfort level in the classroom was presented as the expansion of the self into new domains of effortless, creative competence.

Besides establishing the early stages of self-transformation, narratives also constituted tellers’ epistemological authority. This type of authority positioned students as speakers who, due to having a personal and direct experience of self-transformation in the public speaking classroom, could legitimately assess the value of public speaking. In the following section we continue the discussion of the Arc and demonstrate how the narratives cast self-transformation as language socialization.

## Demonstrating language socialization

After the stages of feeling nervous and attaining a sense of comfort The Arc of Triumph and Transformation proceeded to the stage of accomplishing a sense of confidence. Unlike attaining a sense of comfort, which they characterized as the outcome of a collaborative process, student narratives presented becoming confident as an individual, internalized process. “Becoming confident” involved accomplishing two separate but complementary



goals: mastering the task, and managing one's fears. To begin with the first goal, developing mastery was sometimes described as "hitting one's stride."

(5) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 23

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2895	But I really
2896	<i>didn't hit my stride for a little while. I didn't have the speech. Now to me,</i>
2897	<i>the speech is a speech that you actually hit your stride, and you get</i>
2898	<i>whatever aspect you can bring to the table. And you'll find, it for many,</i>
2899	<i>it's a really quirky delivery. For others, it's a voice. Some, it's a</i>
2900	<i>personality. For me, it was my significant speech about Josh Morgan</i>
2901	<i>advocating for his mother at the Susan G. Komen race for the cure.</i>
	<i>((five lines omitted))</i>
2907	<i>I really felt as if I was him and was really able to convey the</i>
2908	<i>emotion that he had, and that's where I – I hit my stride. I hit the emotion.</i>
	<i>((eight lines omitted))</i>
2917	<i>And that's really where I hit my stride, and as you guys – many will hit yours.</i>

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Here, the speaker described the discovery of an emotional connection to the subject matter as the source of his competent, creative speaking performance. Emotional connection, however, is described as only one feature a speaker "can bring to the table" (line 2898). The key to mastery was discovering what would drive an individual speaker's performance and allow her or him to give an actual "speech" (line 2897). In addition, this narrative positioned the teller as a typical, "everyman" character whose ability to hit his stride is emblematic of others' ability to do the same and therefore foreshadowed student success in future public speaking classes. The narrative prompted future viewers of this self-evaluation video to identify with the teller and project their own success at "hitting their stride" and mastering public speaking. In sum, the narrative constituted a resource for the linguistic socialization of future students.

A second way to master the task was to "do what it takes," in particular, to practice one's speech. Practice built up one's confidence which in turn allowed the speaker to develop a stage "presence," be "entertaining" because "ultimately the most important thing is that you wanna get your message out there and you want people to remember you." Getting the message out and being memorable to the audience were equally significant speaker goals; the valued performance and the valued performer were two sides of the same coin. This sentiment captured the driving force of language socialization: the achievement of competence in valued, culturally specific communicative activities allowed speakers to assume valued social identities in a particular community of speakers (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011).

A third way to achieve mastery of the task was what a narrator referred to as "faking it 'til you make it."

(6) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 2

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1941	So I was freaking out.
1942	Really scared. But then, I realized alright, I'm in a classroom full of – of other
1943	kids who are taking this class who are also scared and, they don't know
1944	that I'm scared, really. They don't know that I'm terrified of speaking in
1945	front of people. <i>So why not fake it 'til I make it and pretend like I do this</i>
1946	<i>all the time, and I'm really great at speaking in front of people because</i>
1947	<i>then maybe, if I convince them I'll be able to convince myself.</i>

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This excerpt adds complexity to the relationship between speaking performance and confidence. Confidence can be conceived of not only as an emotional state but also as a

matter of persuasion. Task mastery, thus, involved convincing the self that, for novice speakers, confidence was not a spontaneous feeling but the outcome of a strategic performance designed to project confidence.

The second goal associated with becoming confident was learning to manage one's fears. Narratives suggested that tellers could achieve this goal in four ways. First, one needed to learn about one's ability to overcome fear ("In this COMM class, not only did I learn a lot about public speaking, but I also learned plenty about myself, what I am capable of, and *how easy it is to overcome these little fears*"). Second, one needed to manage one's expectations ("I have learned in COMM 1300 is how to *manage my expectations*. In the very beginning, I always thought that my speeches were just gonna be horrible and my presence was gonna be horrible. Um but as the semester went on, I learned to be more confident with myself, and understand and love what I'm talking about most.") Third, one had to accept the inevitable feeling of anxiety ("you'd be nervous going into this class, you're gonna be nervous for your first speech. *Accept it, it's gonna happen, you can't really do anything against it.*"). Finally, one had to persevere ("So with that being said, I did it, and, I was freaking out at first, like I'm sure you guys are freaking out, but honestly *hang in there, stick with it, it gets so much better*, and you'll be surprised that it's actually fun"). All sub-themes associated with the themes of mastering the task and learning to manage fears pointed to a system of local communicative norms explicitly shared with novices and invoked to position the narrator as a competent speaker who followed those norms.

The final stage of the Arc extended the significance of autobiographical narratives into the future. It is this stage that revealed the most about the valuable, desirable identities students expected to assume as speakers in possession of public speaking skills. The ultimate sense of self-transformation comprised three elements: self-improvement, self-discovery, and future success. Self-improvement comprised improving one's ability to convey one's own thoughts to an audience ("overall, I just learned how to *speak better my thoughts*") and developing the ability to address strangers with confidence ("In this class [...] I was given the ability to *stand self-assured in front of a class of strangers*"). Self-discovery brought about improved self-esteem ("I think it can help with um *self-esteem* while talking") and an experience of personal growth ("It *forces you to grow*, and it forces you to learn."). Students reported that they expected their new speaking skills to permeate every aspect of their future lives and to set them up for success:

(7) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 67

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1539	The most important
1540	thing I've learned this semester in public speaking has been confidence,
1541	and that is because I've always had a hard time with speaking, even to
1542	friends, sometimes I think that when I'm – when I'm about – wh – I'm
1543	about to say isn't very important or interesting, but public speaking has
1544	taught me that if you say something with confidence and you know you
1545	say it like it's important, then people do – will think that what you have to
1546	say is important. And that's <i>helpful in everything in my life really,</i>
1547	<i>speaking with friends, you know making phone calls, especially going into</i>
1548	<i>the field that I want to which is advertising, I'm gonna have to present</i>
1549	<i>projects, and I'm gonna have to you know convince whoever I'm</i>
1550	<i>presenting it to that what I have to say matters, and it is important.</i>

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This excerpt extends the value and efficacy of public speaking skills far beyond the classroom into social and professional domains of life. To summarize, the local logic of self-transformation can be formulated like this: Public speaking teaches confident speaking; confident speaking produces attentive and persuaded audiences; such audiences are at once vehicles and evidence of success.

Narratives and narrative tropes presented the public speaking course as a site of productive language socialization. By doing so, they contributed to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of the institution (Linde, 2003), which in our case were the university and one of its academic departments. The narratives of self-transformation discursively constituted an institution within the context of which it was not only possible but easy to answer the questions: Why take public speaking? Why subject yourself to this anxiety-producing, grueling process? The answer, using students' words, was that this course was "unlike your other classes" in that "you're going to learn about yourself." So while students might be "anxious at the beginning" (just like everyone else) they will be "happy [they] did it." They will improve their speaking skills, learn about themselves, build supportive social relationships with peers and instructors, boost their potential success across social and occupational domains, and experience fundamental transformation while overcoming their fear of public speaking. Triumph over anxiety was not only a token of individual self-transformation, it also marked the triumph of the institution in its attempt to maintain its legitimacy and to attract students by offering them relevant and productive knowledge, skills, and experiences and the opportunity to turn themselves into socially successful adult members of society.

We should note that students were not the only source of narration that reinforced the Arc of Triumph and Transformation and the legitimacy of the institution as a site of language socialization. On the first day of the course, the instructor began the class by narrating how she herself had felt "mortified" and "terrified" at the outset of the first public speaking course she had taken and how she had gradually overcome that fear as a result of her training. She also explicitly presented the course as the site of personal transformation. "I want you to have confidence when you walk out of here [i.e., the public speaking course]," she said at the end of her narrative. After listing a number of notable public speakers (Cicero, Abraham Lincoln, Margaret Sanger, Winston Churchill, Oprah Winfrey, Conan O'Brien, Jay Leno) who reported suffering from public speaking anxiety, the textbook (Lucas, 2012) related a narrative by Jesse Young, a student who "combined enthusiasm for his topic with thorough preparation to score a *triumph* in speech class" (p. 11, emphasis added). Following the narrative, the text reassured readers that they too could become successful public speakers if they "follow[ed] the techniques suggested by [their] teacher and in the rest of this book" (p. 12). Such narratives cast the institution as an indispensable and effective facilitator of students' progress along the Arc, and reinforced the instructor's sustained, explicit reflection on students' diminishing public speaking anxiety throughout the semester.

To summarize, narratives of self-transformation demonstrated language socialization by casting tellers as endorsing public speaking as an efficacious form of expression and learning public speaking as a transformative experience, and by casting the institution as a site of self-transformation. The following prototypical narrative weaves together a local sense of language socialization with the Arc of Triumph and Transformation:

## (8) Excerpt from Self-evaluation Video 54

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3334	The biggest lesson I have learned in COMM 1300 is that I should never be
3335	fearful of new experiences, because it could turn out to be very valuable.
3336	At the beginning of the semester, I was <i>terrified of this course</i> . In my first speech,
3337	I thought I was <i>shaking so much that it looked like I was having a</i>
3338	<i>seizure</i> , but speech after speech I became <i>increasingly more comfortable</i> .
3339	Granted, that could be because I have had <i>a great class</i> but that's beside
3340	the point. <i>What I thought was going to be my least favorite class actually</i>
3341	<i>turned out to be my favorite</i> . Learning the <i>techniques to a successful s –</i>
3342	<i>public speech is a maturing experience</i> , because it is something that I can
3343	work on throughout my entire life. Public speaking is a very valuable skill,
3344	because there are so many ((pause)) people who find it very hard to stand
3345	up and speak in front of an audience, and for my future, whether that
3346	means improvising and thinking on my toes, or giving a well-rehearsed
3347	speech, ((pause)) I wouldn't be anywhere close to <i>being as successful as I</i>
3348	<i>am now if I hadn't taken this course</i> . I am now very thankful that I have,
3349	because it has helped me to become more <i>confident</i> about my future.

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This narrative constituted the teller's epistemological authority by vividly describing the teller's experience being "terrified of this course" (line 3336) and "shaking so much that it looked like I was having a seizure" (lines 3337–3338), and casting the teller as a member of a social category (student) that could reasonably claim to have first-hand knowledge of anxiety. The teller established the efficacy and "value" of public speaking (lines 3343–3347). The teller described self-transformation by narrating all four stages for the Arc of Triumph and Transformation, starting with nervousness, progressing to becoming "increasingly more comfortable" (line 3338) in the context of "a great class" (line 3339), to "being successful" (line 3347) as a student in command of "techniques to a successful [...] public speech" (lines 3341–3342), and to becoming "more confident about [her] future" (line 3349). The narrative presented the teller as a successful and confident public speaker *and* person ("being as successful as I am now," lines 3347–3348), on a path to realizing a desirable future for herself, and opened up the same possibility to public speaking novices who might take public speaking in the future and might be presented with this narrative. The value of the public speaking course – and the value of the institution offering the course – was cemented when the teller mentioned that "[w]hat [she] thought was going to be [her] least favorite class actually turned out to be [her] favorite" (lines 3340–3341) and that she would not be experiencing success "if [she] hadn't taken this course" (line 3348).

### Ascribing cultural value to public speaking as speech genre

How does this patterned form of language use inform us about the value of public speaking? Cultural discourse theory holds that complex cultural meaning systems immanent in communication practices can be captured "by noticing key symbols that are being used, prominent symbolic forms that are being practiced, and by interpreting the meaningfulness of those symbols and symbolic forms" (Carbaugh, 2011, p. 102). On the heels of our analysis, we now interpret the symbolic practice of narrating self-transformation that organizes key symbols such as the locally identified stages of self-transformation into a coherent expressive system by focusing specifically on values the narratives ascribe to public speaking as a speech genre. As we discussed in the introduction to this paper, we combined theories of language socialization and cultural discourses to fashion a model for performing this task:

It is good to (learn to) use discursive practice P because those who (learn to) use P are better persons (*being*) and/or communicate better (*acting*) and/or have better relationships (*relating*) and/or feel better (*feeling*) and/or have a better relationship to place (*dwelling*) than those who do not.

The local system of values, that is, the culturally-specific system of taken-for-granted distinctions between better and worse, pertaining to public speaking as a speech genre takes the following form: It is good to (learn to) use public speaking because those who (learn to) use public speaking

- are more likely to grow personally and succeed, whereas those who do not are less likely (*being*);
- are in control of their public speech by controlling their expectations, their anxiety, their self-esteem and their personal growth, whereas those who do not lose control (*acting*);
- are capable of convincing others, be heard by others, and can bring out their thoughts and personalities, whereas those who do not cannot (*acting*);
- are able to relate to friends and strangers and build personal connections, whereas those who do not cannot (*relating*);
- feel at least comfortable but ideally confident in front of a gathering of (potential) strangers, whereas those who do not feel scared, nervous, or freak out (*feeling*);
- can comfortably speak outside of their comfort zones, “up there,” in front of people, whereas those who do not cannot (*dwelling*).

We would like to offer two points of contrast here to lend additional force to the claim about the cultural uniqueness of this value system, and to begin developing our claim that public speaking is a mobile speech genre. In contrast to the Blackfeet cultural view of public speaking (Carbaugh, 2005), the values ascribed to public speaking in the Anglo-American context reflect a cultural emphasis on individual growth, goals, and success. Acquiring the ability to speak in public figures squarely as a technique of the self (Foucault, 1994; Kelly, 2013), a means of self-cultivation and mastery available to anyone willing to discipline their selves. Within the Blackfeet value system, the value of public speaking is tied to a particular historical experience (such as the community in turmoil) and a particular social persona (the wise male elder). The French stand-up comedy genre (Vigouroux, 2015) is also a useful point of contrast. Comics of North and sub-Saharan African origin adopted the U.S. American stand-up genre to express opposition to France’s Republican model of social integration and the denial of social and cultural diversity. They also use this genre to index not an ethnic but an urban identity using a complex combination of particular varieties of Arabic, French, and English. To them, stand-up comedy is a speech genre they imported from the United States and deploy to respond to the social challenges of a particular historical period in France’s history. The value system that informs students’ narratives, by contrast, provides us with an image of a speech genre that is not anchored in any particular social group, linguistic variety, or historical moment. It is a speech genre for everyone, in any place, at any time.

## Discussion

Our study addresses the lack of systematic reflection on value ascription to speech genres in the relevant literature. We anchor the study of value ascription in a particular context-

bound discourse practice (narration in the U.S. undergraduate public speaking course) as a rich site of explicit talk about public speaking as a speech genre. It demonstrates how that practice establishes three aspects of value ascription: the authority of the teller, the relationship between self-transformation and language socialization, and cultural value as a system of differences organized around five radiants of meaning. In sum, we establish that narratives of genre socialization are useful sources of cultural information about the value of speech genres.

An inherent limitation of our study is that it is a case study of a specific genre in the discursive context of a specific public speaking course. As such, it does not (and cannot) address all of the ways and means of ascribing value to public speaking in the Anglo-American cultural context. Value ascription may occur in the interaction context of discourse practices other than narration. Tellers may claim other types of authority besides epistemological (e.g., moral, generational, political, etc.) in other kinds of institutional contexts, or outside of them. Values ascribed to public speaking may also vary on the basis of type of practice, speaker, authority, and context. In addition, due to public speaking's status as a secondary speech genre, it is possible that speakers ascribe different sets of values to the primary genres public speaking encompasses. Future investigations of the public speaking genre and its related, more primary genres, in other discursive and broader socio-cultural contexts will be able to address these, and other, possibilities.

In the case under consideration, we argued that personal narratives were a particularly rich discursive site of value ascription. Narratives constituted epistemological authority through vivid description and positioning the speaker as having relevant personal experience with public speaking anxiety. They accomplished vividness of description by means of five types of contrast: contrasting personality characteristics, contrasting initial feelings, contrasting contexts, the contrast between normal and anxious conduct and cognition, and the contrast between students' first speech and subsequent speeches. Anxiety was talked into being as a social fact as students narrated their personal experience of first becoming comfortable in the classroom in collaboration with their peers and instructors, and then becoming confident speaking in front of their classroom audience. We showed that students narrated increasing mastery of public speaking skills that set them on a path toward success. Such narration cast tellers as having the ability to not only speak publicly but also to present themselves as a socially well-adjusted individuals who could command the attention of others and who had an important role to play in teaching future generations of students to accomplish the same. In addition, narratives of self-transformation also painted a picture of the institution (the university) as a significant site of personal self-transformation where students had the opportunity to conquer their fears. Finally, we organized key symbolic terms captured in our analysis to present the value system immanent in the narratives, and claimed that this value system constituted the value students ascribed to public speaking in the context of the course.

Our findings serve as points of departure for cultural comparison. Dunn (2014) conducted ethnographic fieldwork at an institution she called the Tokyo Speech Center with the aim of studying how Japanese students narrated their experiences in public speaking courses loosely modeled on the Carnegie system. For their final assignment, students were required to give three-minute speeches in which they narrated how the course helped them become not just better speakers but also more enterprising people. The speeches



followed a tightly structured generic pattern. Students described negative personality traits or habits they had before taking the course (Before), what they learned in the course (Pivot) and how they applied that lesson to their personal lives (After), reflected on the center's teachings (Reflection), and expressed commitment to carry on following those teachings (Coda). The most successful students were able to use the narrative form to make a case for the accomplishment of a *sekkyokuteki* ("positive, active, assertive") self. "To be *sekkyokuteki*," Dunn explains,

means to take a positive perspective (*purasu shikoo*), to think cheerful thoughts (*akarui mono no kangaekata*), to be forward looking (*maemuki*), and to have a willing spirit (*yaru ki*). Being *sekkyokuteki* means looking on the positive side and seeing opportunities rather than problems (p. 137)

The structure was never taught, rather "it fulfilled the situational mandate to narrate a changed self as a result of taking the speech class" (pp. 139–140). The best speeches were presented to novice learners in the context of a competition between classes at the Center.

Although we do not have the space here to develop a comprehensive cross-cultural analysis of Japanese and U.S. narratives of learning public speaking it is worth noting some differences and similarities. The narratives Dunn studied were relatively more structured, presented face-to-face to fellow students and instructors, and competitively performed. Their structure differed from the Arc of Triumph and Transformation, and they invoked a different cultural model of self-transformation (becoming *sekkyokuteki* in Japan vs. personal growth in the U.S.). However, we should note three significant similarities as well. First, Japanese and U.S. narratives had the same social functions: they were deployed as evidence of individual tellers' successful socialization; they were used to socialize novices; and they presented the institutions as a valued scene of language socialization and personal transformation. Second, both served the purpose of assigning value to public speaking as a speech genre. Third, both presented the value of public speaking as a genre as inseparable from the valued process of self-transformation in the context of the course. This last similarity reveals a significant feature of the genre's cultural value in the context of language socialization, namely that, *from members' perspective, value is not solely associated with the genre itself, but rather with the genre and the narrated experience of its acquisition.*

In the previous section, we alluded to a theoretical upshot of describing the cultural value of public speaking. In the context of language socialization, the narratives present public speaking as a type of generic speech available to anyone (regardless of group identity, language, age, or gender) in any place at any historical period. As a valued speech genre, public speaking appears radically mobile (Blommaert, 2010), especially compared to other genres such as Blackfeet public speaking or French stand-up comedy whose use speakers tie to particular types of speakers, places, languages, or historical experiences. This insight provides an additional explanation for the increasingly global presence of public speaking as a communication resource. Missionaries, rhetoric scholars, debaters (Morooka, 2016), and the global dissemination of textbooks (Neville Miller, 2002) and self-help literature (Dunn, 2014) all have a role to play in the circulation of public speaking in the global speech economy. However, ostensibly, so does the fact that students are socialized to interpret and evaluate public speaking as a fully mobile, for-anyone-anywhere

genre. Such socialization, we surmise, is a significant contributor to a genre's mobility besides other salient (cultural, economic, social, political, historical, institutional, etc.) features as it disregards and, indeed, erases the genre's cultural specificity and highlights its universal utility and availability. The mobile character of Anglo-American public speaking does not mean, however, that this genre interacts with local speech economies (Hymes, 1974) in the same ways around the world. Whereas in Japan (Dunn, 2014), Kenya (Neville Miller, 2002), and China (Pan, Scollon, & Scollon, 2002) it was adopted as a unique expressive resource it encountered resistance among Blackfeet students in the United States (Carbaugh, 2005). The complex relationship between mobile and local genres remains an empirical question.

The study of discursive mobility and speech genres stand to benefit from mutual engagement. On the one hand, sociolinguistic studies of mobile discursive resources such as standard English (Blommaert, 2010), hip hop (Alim, 2009) and the language of texting (Blommaert, 2011) tend to focus on how such resources are localized and thus become examples of vernacular globalization (Appadurai, 1996). Typically, such studies do not examine closely what properties of those resources rendered them mobile in the first place. We argue that, by studying how value is ascribed to speech genres as a type of discursive resource, we can learn about how salient value systems render certain genres more or less mobile (or immobile). On the other hand, the cultural study of value ascriptions can contribute to the anthropological approach to speech genres. In addition to variation in structure, social function, taxonomic relations to other locally recognized speech genres, and types and significance of intertextual connections (Briggs & Bauman, 1992), such scholarship can also distinguish speech genres according to their degree of mobility across communities of speakers.

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