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5

Fifty Terms for Talk
A Cross-Cultural Study

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This chapter examines cultural terms for talk in different cultural communities and conducts a cross-cultural analysis of their levels of application and message functions. The findings suggest that indigenous labels for speaking (a) identify speech at three distinctive levels, as acts, events, and styles, and (b) are used to convey multiple levels of meanings. A structural framework that organizes the levels and meanings is proposed, with a special application to intercultural communication.

In the past 25 years, a large fund of ethnographic studies (more than 200) about speaking has developed (Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986). Several critics have commented on the lack of comparative studies among them (Bloch, 1976; Leach, 1976; Watson-Gegeo, 1976). These published studies and the ethnographic perspective that guides them provide a rich empirical base for such comparative study, especially since comparative study was one of the fundamental impulses that gave birth to the ethnography of communication. As Hymes put it in 1962, "Why undertake such [ethnographic] work? . . . so that systematic descriptions can give rise to a comparative study . . . a 'comparative speaking' beside comparative religion, comparative law, and the like" (p. 102). While there are few comparative studies of speaking that have heeded Hymes's early call (but see Braithwaite, 1981; Keenan, 1976; Rosaldo, 1982), there is now an ample empirical base upon which to conduct cross-cultural studies.

My purpose in this chapter is to analyze comparatively the phenomenon of cultural terms for talk as they occur in various systems of communication. The basic data of the study are ethnographic interpre-

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tations of the words and the meanings that people from various cultural fields use to conceive of and evaluate speech. My most general goal is to discover the levels of enactments and the types of meanings that these words about speech suggest. I will pursue that goal through a cross-cultural comparative study.

The type of study conducted here follows others who have attempted to identify cultural variation across speech communities in order to develop conceptual frameworks for understanding specific features of communication performance. For example, Irvine (1979) examined how political meetings were conducted among Wolof (Senegal), Mursi (Ethiopia), and Ilongot (Philippines) in order to develop an "analytical framework of formality" in communicative events; Lein and Brenneis (1978) compared children's discourse of White Americans, Black Americans, and rural, Hindi-speaking Fiji resulting in a theory of "argument" that embraces cultural variability; Philips (1976) compared how Anglos and Native Americans sustained interaction in order to examine how talk is regulated; and Keenan (1976) used Malagasy and English speech patterns as a comparative test of Grice's maxims. These studies demonstrate how cultural resources of speaking, and ethnographic reports about them, can be pressed into the service of communication theory. Similarly, the present report compares various cultural resources in speaking, terms for talk, and proposes an analytic framework about such terms that has cross-cultural utility. Such comparative research is necessary both to test the generality of the specific local patterns of any one society and to develop theoretical frameworks that are sensitive to cultural variation. A consequence of such inquiry is a renewed perspective on various analytical models that may themselves be skewed by features of "Western cultures." As much has been suggested by Rosaldo's (1982) use of Searle's speech act theory, Keenan's (1976) use of Grice's "universal maxims," or Katriel's (1986) appropriation of Goffman's theory of face. The charge of the present study is somewhat different from these. Comparative study is used more to construct a cross-cultural theory of terms for talk, and less to critique extant theory, although lines of inquiry related to the latter are discussed.

Comparative research serves other important purposes, especially concerning intercultural communication. As is highlighted in the studies above, and will become clearer below, cultural conceptions of talk vary widely such that for some, like the Kuna, the Waiwai, the Yanomamo, the Yucatec, the Trio, some Black Americans, and the

Antiguans, events of coparticipation and simultaneous verbal performance are culturally identified and valued, while for others, as for some North Americans, cultural terms identify and value verbal genres guided by the basic rule: one speaker at a time. For some, like the Fiji and the Ilongot, when social relations are strained, cultural talk is preferred that treats strained relations very indirectly, while for others, especially some North Americans, strained relations create moments for "supportive communication" and "sharing" where "the relationship" is discussed explicitly. For some, such as the Ilongot and Israeli Sabra, cultural "talk" highlights a sense of the actor as a member in broad social and cultural groups. For others, like the Anglo-American and Paliyan, cultural "talk" motivates a model for the actor *as an individual*, over and against the broader social system.

Each of these cases provides important implications for understanding intercultural communication, particularly as it unveils deep moral systems that guide what constitutes proper "talk" itself. In practice, it is important for persons to understand that cultural models motivate such speech performances, especially when miscommunication occurs, as when some persons violate others' expectations, for example, by talking (or keeping silent) while others talk, by speaking indirectly (or directly) about strained relations, or by invoking broad social models (or personal ones) for communication conduct. Cultural terms for talk and related cultural performances lead some persons in one direction and others in another. What is suggested, then, as a matter for both practice and theory, is an understanding of initial moments of intercultural contact, less as the "reduction of uncertainty" and "anxiety" (Gudykunst, 1988), and more as an invocation of various and deeply coded patterns for talking. A productive path for developing a theory of intercultural communication is thus a sustained and intensive look at cultural terms for talk, to develop a sensitivity to cultural variation in the bases for "talk" itself, especially where these reveal deep differences, for what is coherent as talk and what is proper to say.

After describing the criteria used for selecting the cases, I will (a) introduce the main ethnographic cases used in the study, then sketch the method used for the analysis, (b) present four levels of cultural terms that reflect distinctive speech performances, (c) interpret the general types of messages that are highly salient when people label their speech, and (d) summarize the structural framework that organizes these cultural terms for talk, with special attention to intercul-

tural communication theory and practice. The most general goal is to explore several cultural practices through indigenous terms for talk in search of the basic principles that hold, generally, within and across the cases.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CASES

Criteria for Selection

Several ethnographic field studies were chosen to ground the report because each met three basic criteria: (a) Each case is a published ethnographic account of native conceptions about speaking, conducted explicitly within the ethnography of communication program of research (Hymes, 1972; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986); (b) each account includes some systematic description and interpretation of indigenous terms used to conceive of and evaluate speech; and (c) each account includes description of actional sequences and contexts to which the cultural terms refer. Thus the study is based upon published reports that use a general theoretical lens, focus it upon a general class of phenomena, including interpretations of both cultural terms about talk and the cultural performances so labeled. Thus the study explores not only the ideational domains of words about speech outside their actional contexts, but also their meanings and functions with reference to specific sociocultural scenes.

The Cases and Method

The main data for the study consist of seven ethnographic cases (which represent eleven different societies). The first and perhaps exemplary case is of speech activity among Afro-American peasants of St. Vincent, British West Indies (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971). The second case is more recent and thorough, exploring the ways of speaking among the San Blas Kuna of Panama (Sherzer, 1983). The third case is itself a comparative study of "ceremonial dialogues" in six South American societies (Urban, 1986). The fourth is of the speech acts and oratory of the Ilongot of the northern Philippines (Rosaldo, 1973, 1982). The fifth explores the various verbal performances of the Hindi-speaking Indians of Bhatgao, Fiji (Brenneis, 1978, 1984). The sixth is a set of cases that describe an American system of speech through the words and phrases that label it

(Carbaugh, 1988; Katriel & Philipsen, 1981; Michaels, 1981). The last provides an extensive cultural study of "talking straight" among the Israeli Sabra (Katriel, 1986). Other cases are interspersed throughout this report, but these seven form the primary corpus for the present study.

I reviewed the above cases, recording cultural terms that identify an indigenous pattern of speech as well as the type of speech to which the terms referred. Following this procedure yielded ethnographic interpretations of 50 cultural terms for talk.[1] I asked: What cultural features are used to describe these 50 instances? Then, what analytic framework will account for this cultural variation? I constructed my response through a multi-implicational space (see Campbell, 1975) that mapped a kind of cultural-case by instance-of-term-for-talk by features-of-the-talk interaction for each datum—for example, Fiji, song challenge, an event of competitive battle, sung, between different religious groups, parties alternate turns, purpose is to demean and insult, and so on. I attempted to identify all key features for each instance.[2] I then constructed an analytic scheme, guided by the specialized Hymesian vocabulary, that could embrace the cultural diversity reported in the features, and that subsequently provided the organization for this report (around levels of enactments and types of messages). Following this procedure, I discovered a tremendous variation in cultural terms for talk, which were variously described by ethnographers, enacted by participants, and conceptualized at several distinctive levels, sometimes simultaneously. My task was to propose a heuristic framework that should be of use in future, similar investigations. I will begin by describing a complex interplay of cultural terms for talk as they apply to distinctive theoretical levels, then move on to discuss the salient types of messages within and across these levels.

LEVELS OF CULTURAL TERMS FOR TALK

As I began reading about cultural terms for talk, seeking to order such cultural variety, I noticed that not all terms were operating on the same level. Some terms referred to things individuals do with words, others to moments of simultaneous speech and/or coparticipation, and still others to general cultural standards that were used to evaluate various moments of individual and/or collective verbal enactment. I was thus led to ask: On what levels are these terms operating?

What kinds of communication performances are being identified through cultural terms? Are these terms identified by ethnographers and laypersons alike?

There are at least three distinctive levels of use that characterize cultural terms for talk: terms that describe acts, terms that describe events, and terms that describe styles. The first two distinguish verbal performances fundamentally along a monologic-dialogic dimension. The last refers to a broader ordering of talk, itself consisting of a set of acts and events. All levels have been used in at least some cultural systems of communication, thus each occurs variously in studies of cultural terms for talk. While these three levels are of central concern to this report, there is a fourth functional level that is more peripherally related. I will discuss it after defining and illustrating the other three.

The Act Level

Several cultural terms point to *individual performances of communication*.[3] For example, among the St. Vincentians, when a person's words are annoying, loud, aggressive, and self-assertive, they may be labeled "getting on rude" (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971, p. 765). This native label is one of "a folk taxonomy of speech acts" deemed indecorous, bad, or rude (p. 765). In this community, these types of acts motivate much talk about talk, resulting in a refined lexicon about verbal acts of individuals that are disapproved, less pleasing stylistically, and unruly. Conversely, those acts warranting approval are stylistically pleasing and decorous and are expressed through a much less refined semantic field. Thus there is a more refined lexicon for discussing unfavorable acts than there is for discussing the favorable. The St. Vincentians identify speech behavior as consisting of individual acts distinguished along "three sets of oppositions" (approved or sensible versus disapproved or nonsensible, elevated, controlled style versus a broken, less controlled style, and decorous versus indecorous) (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971, p. 765). Thus we are led to see and hear what a St. Vincent individual is doing when labeling speech; he or she is identifying individual speech acts made intelligible through "oppositions" within a native semantic field.

Others have analyzed words about words similarly. For instance, Sherzer (1983, p. 98) describes the Kuna's *chief's speak* (*summakke*) as a formal speech-making conducted by a chief when there are no other

chiefs available for a ritual dialogue or when no (dialogic) chants are available on the topic of concern. Because this performance, identified by the Kuna as chief's speak, involves a monologue by only one speaker, it is an act. Brenneis (1978) describes how the Fiji term *parbachan* identifies that part of religious meetings when an individual gives a religious yet political speech. Bauman (1972) describes how the La Have Islanders identify "news" and "yarns" as artful acts where an individual discusses current events or "the supernatural," respectively. Recently, Wierzbicka (1985) had explored various native terms for acts of speech, and proposes a semantic metalanguage for their cross-cultural study. These reports discuss instances of speech conduct that are identified by natives, with each labeling monologic acts that an individual has done. On this level, cultural terms for speech refer to acts of speech that are talked about and performed by one person.

In each of these instances, a cultural term is being used to identify the verbal performance of an individual, be it a tuneful weep or religious speech. At this level, what an individual is doing with words is identified and culturally coded.

The Event Level

A second level goes beyond individual acts, indicating a type of speech performance that requires two or more speakers. On this level, persons are labeling enactments that are episodes, events, or *coenactments of communication*.[4] Through this labeling, indigenous terms are used to identify interactive and dialogic accomplishments. For example, Sherzer (1983) has described the Kuna *chanting* as follows:

> Chanting begins in the form of a ritualized dialogue between two "chiefs," in the presence of and for the benefit of the audience. The two "chiefs" straddle their hammocks in what the Kuna call the *nai* (hanging position), their feet barely touching the ground. For the entire duration of the chanting their arms are fixed at their sides; they stare into space and do not change their facial expressions. The "chief" designated to chant begins in a soft voice. After each verse . . . the second "chief," the *apinsuet* (responding chief), replies with a chanted *teki* (thus, it is so, indeed) . . . or *eye* (yes). (pp. 73–74)

Urban (1986) has described similar "ceremonial dialogues" in six South American societies. Other examples include contrapuntal con-

versations in Antigua (Reisman, 1975), interactive narratives in Yucatec, Maya (Burns, 1980), or a ritualized form of "communication" among some Americans (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981). Interlocutors identify each as a cocreation among multiple persons without which the event would lose force and integrity as a culturally identifiable form. These cultural terms identify forms of communication requiring coparticipation, sometimes in front of an audience. In each case, multiple speakers are necessary if the event is to be enacted efficaciously. These few examples help demonstrate a second level of cultural categories about speech, that is, cultural terms about coenactments of communication.[5]

The Style Level

Style here refers to a way of organizing native labels for alternative ways of speaking and the rules for selecting them (Ervin-Tripp, 1972).[6] Style becomes important in the study of cultural terms because it provides a sense of spoken enactment (act or event) as a selection of one rather than others. So, for example, the St. Vincentians use two phrases, *talking sense* and *talking nonsense*, to identify two prominent ways of speaking, with specific acts of "decorous and deferential language" instantiating the former while "being hesitant or indecorous . . . or being totally out of control" gives voice to the latter (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971, pp. 763–764). Similar dynamics appear among Fiji Indians, where *sweet talk* often employs a mode of indirectness in religious and political speeches (acts of *parbachan*) and *jungle talk* employs more direct, combative events such as those in *song challenges* (Brenneis, 1978). Among the Ilongot, acts and events deemed *crooked* are distinguished generally from those deemed *straight* (Rosaldo, 1973). Among the Cibecue Apache, three cultural terms distinguish three general styles of speaking, each made up of identifiable acts and events—*ordinary talk, prayer,* and *stories* (Basso, 1984). And among the Malagasy, a simple everyday style consisting of acts and events is distinguished from acts and events more ceremonial, for example, *kibary* and *rasaka* (Keenan, 1975; compare Sherzer, 1983, pp. 185–222).

These terms identify speech at a different level, as general ways of speaking, each consisting of a set of acts and perhaps events and scenes, thus labeling determinate varieties of communication. Below I will sketch some of the specific messages about communication that

are signaled variously through these varieties—message of mode, structure, tone, and force of agency. The major point here is simply that persons use terms for talk to identify a third level of communication, *native labels about ways of speaking*, for example, the act of *talking trupidness* is an instance of the style of *talking nonsense* (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971). These are elements of style (a general organization of verbal means and selections therefrom), itself including but raising distinctive concerns from those of acts (an organization of individual acts, and outcomes) and events (an organization of coenactments). The levels need to be understood as such.

The Functional Level

A fourth level, the functional shaping of speech, is frequently discussed in these studies, but is somewhat peripheral to the present concerns since it addresses an indirect outcome of cultural terms for talk, rather than a native organization of its means. Several ethnographers have identified social outcomes of acts, events, and styles that participants have labeled. For example, Urban (1986) describes native labels about "ceremonial dialogues" throughout South America. His finding is that speech so labeled serves a metacommunicative function, that is, the labeling identified for participants a "model for" conduct between those of "maximal social distance;" it educates participants to a kind of "dialogue" that can manage conflict. Thus Urban's analysis moves from native labels about speech, through the ceremonial performance of cyclical events, to what the events accomplish for participants. It is the last element of the performance that highlights a metacommunicative function (i.e., the identification and enactment of the event provides a model for its performance). Urban (1986) thus demonstrates how indigenous labels for speech identify powerful symbolic events in speech, in this case ceremonial forms, that communicate *indirectly* about speech as a model for social interaction. Similarly, any verbal and/or symbolic conduct could be interpreted to some degree as, to use Geertz's (1973) phrase, "saying something," with messages speaking at one level directly about acts, events, and/or styles, and at another more indirectly about common values, rules of conduct, and/or judgments of legitimacy.

The functional claim that cultural terms for talk accomplish various sociocultural ends, indirectly and reflexively, must be distinguished from the claim about explicit cultural terms for communicative acts,

events, and styles. The former responds to the question, What are the culturally identified verbal actions *doing*? The latter responds to a very particular kind of doing through the more fundamental question, What verbal actions are identified, and what does the act of identification indicate? Focusing upon cultural categories about speech acts, events, and styles makes the indigenous shaping of communication itself the topic of explicit concern. Identifying such social and cultural shapes is, of course, contingent upon the particular forms given speaking by natives. In short, the former question yields claims about the more indirect outcomes *of* speech, outcomes that are sometimes culturally identified; the latter, an organization *in* speech of its native means. That there are apologies and how they are used are related but distinctive concerns.

The distinction I am drawing here between what might be called direct lexical shaping and indirect functional shaping of speech can be further sharpened with two examples. First, consider someone's saying, "I've got to be honest with you." As a disclaimer, it explicitly labels *in* speech a subsequent act as an "honest" one, invoking a set of expectations about the kind of verbal performance(s) to follow (Carbaugh, 1988). Now consider the account, "At least she was honest!" It accomplishes a more indirect outcome *of* speech, identifying a previous act as such so as to praise its speaker, to promote another's face. Where a functional analysis of these messages holds some promise, especially with regard to cultural messages about the message, of special concern here are natives' explicit references to acts, events, and styles of communication. Rather than asking how the cultural category of "honest" speech is being used, I am asking, What is the category of speech deemed "honest"? Both the functions of speech and categories in speech (about speech) are similar in their social and interactive shaping of communication, but both differ in the degree to which the reference to communication is made relatively *directly in speech*, as with cultural categories about speech, or is *indirectly of speech*, as with the metacommunication of ceremonial dialogues or the interactive forces of "preindexes" (see Beach & Dunning, 1982). The main focus of this report is on the shaping of speech directly as it is labeled by natives, rather than its indirect shaping as the result of its social performance.[7]

In sum, ethnographic studies of cultural terms for talk identify verbal performances at four levels: (a) the level of act, cultural labels about individual acts of communication; (b) the level of event, cultural labels about coenactments of communication; (c) the level of style, cultural labels about general ways of speaking and selections therefrom; and (d) the functional shaping of speech, the various outcomes of identified speech (e.g., its social uses or value).

By distinguishing these levels, we can understand better both (a) native terms used directly to identify communication, as performances of acts, events, and/or styles, and (b) how such means of speech are used more indirectly by natives (e.g., as in providing models for social conduct).

SALIENT MESSAGES IN CULTURAL TERMS FOR TALK

As I examined cultural terms for talk, I noticed several cultural features were recurring across at least some of the cases. Thus I asked, What features of communication are being discussed with cultural terms for talk? In the end, I discovered that the cultural terms were being used by natives not only to refer to aspects of their talk itself, but further to refer to social relations and persons. As persons' cultural communication is talked about there are various types of messages conveyed. In what follows, I have tried to distill the general types of messages that get codified as natives label their communicative acts, events, and styles. Of main concern are the natural types of messages codified in indigenous terms like *tuydek, getting on rude, chanting, being honest,* and *sweet talk.*

The messages discussed here are of three general types: messages about communication itself, messages about sociality, and messages about personhood. These messages may be conveyed more literally, as are those about communication, or relatively metaphorically, as are those about sociality and personhood. As cultural terms for talk are used, persons may convey various messages simultaneously. Cultural terms for talk are multivocal, polysemic, and coherent. The most *salient* messages codified in cultural categories about speech are (a) messages about communication itself, (b) messages about sociality, social relations, and institutions, and (c) messages about personhood. The first message is getting done more directly (talk about talk is referring literally to aspects of the talk itself); the second and third messages may be getting done more indirectly (talk about talk is referring to present social relations and models of personhood).[8]

The general interrelation of the three message types is carefully

analyzed by Rosaldo (1982), who argues that for laypersons and analysts alike, ways of conceiving language are intimately linked to models of human agency and personhood. As much is also concluded by Sherzer (1983, p. 210). How can we classify the salient messages in cultural terms for talk? What are speakers telling each other as they use these terms?

Messages About Communication

It is no surprise that as speakers talk about their talk they talk about communication. One might ask, however, what aspects of communication gets talked about when cultural terms for talk are used. There are four messages, each of which is highly salient, but nonessential, when talk is identified culturally.[9]

One type of message concerns the *mode*, or the prevailing manner for the enactment. As persons identify and define streams of speech, they attend to its manner as direct or indirect. Toward the direct end of the continuum are the Israeli style of *dugri* (Katriel, 1986), the Fiji style of *straight speech* (Brenneis, 1978), and an American act and event of *being honest* (Carbaugh, 1988). Toward the more indirect end are the Kaluli style of *hard talk* (Feld & Schieffelin, 1981) and the Fiji style of *sweet speech* (Brenneis, 1978). Katriel (1986) has suggested that this mode may be further interpreted through the aspects of literalness, simplicity, assertiveness, and immediacy. What these studies and ways of speaking suggest is this: A mode of directness/indirectness is present in communication, codified in native terms, and forms one salient dimension along which native terms for talk are distinguished.

Identifying the mode of cultural terms for talk can be of value within, as well as across, cases. For example, Fijians identify *parbachan* as an act of sweet talk that is ostensibly a religious speech, but by using "coy reference" and indefinite pronouns the speaker indirectly broadcasts wrongdoings of particular others in order to provoke interest and attract third parties as mediators (Brenneis, 1978). The allusive mode displays standards to persons for communal membership and protects the speaker from retribution, since "he does not make direct accusations" (Brenneis, 1978, p. 165). This mode of *parbachan* contrasts sharply with the Fiji *song challenges*, in which social groups confront each other directly, through threats and insults, in order to do competitive battle. Through familiar forms of address (such as nicknames) and singular second-person pronouns, others are demeaned and insulted. In mode, the direct song challenge is like the American *being honest*, in which intents and purposes are spoken unencumberedly, or the Israeli dugri, in which literalness and sincerity are overriding concerns. Conversely, the indirect parbachan is more like the Ilongot *crooked language*, which is "rich in art and wit" (Rosaldo, 1973, p. 193). Thus the mode can serve within cases to distinguish one cultural moment from another, as well as across cases, to compare and contrast cultural modes of expressions.

A second message in cultural terms for talk concerns *the relative degree of structuring of the code*. Is the cultural talk that is lexicalized subject to extra rules and conventions? At the less structured end we have a more flexible and elaborate ordering of acts, such as "conversation" in "everyday Kuna," which involves "more informal, casual, and spontaneous verbal interactions" (Sherzer, 1983, p. 42). Similarly, the cultural terms *griping* among the Israelis (Katriel, 1985), *sharing* among Americans (Carbaugh, 1988), or *chat* among the Wolof (Irvine, 1979) refer to speech behavior that is more flexibly structured. The rules for these routines enable fluid exchanges among many participants. At the other end are more fixed kinds of talk, where participation is more restricted—in who should speak, how they should gesture and posture, what should be said, and how—such as the ceremonial dialogues in South America (Urban, 1986), the traditional Ilongot "meeting" (Rosaldo, 1973, pp. 204–205), and the "discussions" and "meetings" of the Wolof (Irvine, 1979).

In American English, virtually any person can be said to "share," so long as he or she has "feelings" or "thoughts" to express, and can do so in a way that supports those present and speaks to a purpose common to those present. Thus these few rules for the routine enable many kinds of contributions from anyone who happens to be present. The term thus refers to a more flexible communication event in which anyone may participate, in almost any way (Carbaugh, 1988). Perhaps the best demonstration of the fixed and restricted structuring of speech is the *Kantule language* of the Kuna (Sherzer, 1983). This type of speaking is especially difficult for the uninitiated to understand and is a central part of a girl's puberty rites. The pattern of speaking takes years to learn through an apprenticeship and involves a specialized vocabulary and parallel structures of grammar and meaning. The performance of Kantule language is usually shouted and accompanied by the playing of a special flute. The performance itself occurs

well into a multiday festival. According to Sherzer (1983), this way of speaking is

> the most immutable of all Kuna ritual discourse. It is repeated identically, including every single phoneme and morpheme, each time it is performed. The extremely realistic *ikar* [way of speaking, verbal text] precisely reflects the set of events in which it plays a central, organizing, and directive role. It describes in minute detail every aspect of the puberty rites and associated activities and festivities, from the preparation of the participants to the cutting of the young girl's hair to the eating of a special meal and drinking of the *inna* [a fermented drink which is made and consumed during the festival]. (pp. 144–145)

Thus as persons invoke cultural terms for talk, a salient message is the degree of structuring of the code. To what degree is this kind of talk restricted to classes of participants? To what degree is it conducted on special occasions, in particular places? To what degree is it conducted for very specific purposes? To what degree does it use a specialized vocabulary, grammatical structure, or semantic domain(s)? These are the kinds of questions sometimes responded to when persons use their cultural terms for talk. These specific aspects of messages—or, more precisely, these messages in cultural terms about the structuring of kinds of speaking—could be summarized along dimensions as relatively *fixed or flexible* (Sherzer, 1983), and as relatively *elaborated or restricted* (Bernstein, 1972). In either case, native terms for talk tend to codify messages about the degree of structuring of speech, indicating whether a kind of talk is more fixed and restricted or more flexible and elaborate.

A third message in cultural terms for talk refers to the *tone*, the emotional pitch, feeling, or key, appropriate to the act, event, or style. Take, for example, the St. Vincent case. Two general styles of communication are talked about, *talking sweet* and *talking broad* (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971). When speech is identified as sweet or ruly, part of what is referred to, especially in "tea meetings," is a climate of *control* over the verbal performance, so that acts occur in appropriate sequence and one's message content is proper. When speech is identified as broad or unruly, as some "pit boys" rancor during "tea meetings," it is identified as *less controlled*, thus less aligned with the traditional climate of the meetings. A second example of differing tones is the distinction drawn in American communication between "giving a lecture" and "giving a talk" (Wierzbicka, 1985). Both sets of labels draw attention to kinds of speaking that may be very similar in mode and structure but differ in tone, with the former phrase marking a *more formal* kind of talk and the latter a *less formal*. One might also overlay another dimension of tone onto these, highlighting the former as more *serious* and the latter as more *playful*.

Aspects of structuring of communication codes and the emotional pitch of social settings have been discussed as elements of formality in communicative events (Irvine, 1979). I separate them here as degrees of structuring, from fixed to flexible, or restricted to elaborate, and tone, from formal to informal and perhaps serious to playful, in order to classify distinctions speakers have made between highly structured formal events (e.g., "ceremonial dialogues") and highly structured informal events (e.g., "verbal duels"; see Garner, 1983), less structured formal events (e.g., the "tea meeting"; Abrahams & Bauman, 1971) and less structured informal events (e.g., "sharing" and contrapuntal "conversations"; Reisman, 1975).

The last message I will discuss is the *efficaciousness of communication as an action* (see Philipsen, 1986). The question addressed here is this: Is this culturally identified act, event, or style of speech a more or less substantial form of action? Some Americans identify talk as "chitchat" or insubstantial, and "communication" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981) and "being honest" as more substantial. The first identifies accomplishments that are heard to be relatively unimportant, such as passing time, while the last two are heard as culturally valued models of being, for example, "an individual" and "self," or bonding, in "relationship." Similar to "communication" in efficaciousness, if different in sociocultural accomplishment, is the Burundi *ubgenge* (Albert, 1972). This term for talk identifies a valued, necessary, and substantial way to speak in order to manipulate a hierarchical social order if one is to receive requisite goods and services. Conversely, in at least one Black American community, *talking shit* is considered relatively insubstantial as an action (Bell, 1983), as is *telling story*, which "lacks veracity" among St. Vincentians (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971), or *griping* among Israelis (Katriel, 1985). In these cases, as in the American chitchat, the forms of speaking are identified so as to mark relatively insubstantial moments of social action.

In at least two cases, talk is the subject of sets of proverbs or myths, where the efficaciousness of speaking becomes a central theme. Seitel

(1974) describes how specific Haya "proverbs for speech"—a genre of spoken texts that the Haya identify as talk about itself—help the Haya identify which acts of speech are substantial and which are not. Urban (1984) describes a similar dynamic of a Shokleng myth, identified as a "speech about speech," where the key theme is the efficaciousness of speech as an action. Thus as speech is identified by indigenous terms *and tropes*, one possible message conveyed is its relative status as a social action, marking some sayings as more substantial and/or efficacious than others.

Messages About Sociality

As persons use cultural terms for talk, they may also be talking indirectly about their society, their relations among each other, and the institutions in which they find themselves and through which they speak (see Briggs, 1984; Rosaldo, 1982). Take, for example, the St. Vincentian act of *making commess* (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971, p. 767). When acts are identified as *making commess*, a message is conveyed that says something like: the person is talking about him- or herself and his or her own problems and is not of any harm to you or I or our social life. This act contrasts with *making melee*, one type of making commess. When a person's acts are identified as making melee, the message is that he or she is making a kind of speech about others and their relations (what one might call gossip); that kind of speech act stirs up trouble and causes harm. It is no longer a personal identity at stake, but public reputations. As St. Vincentians so label their talk, they assess their *social relations* as stable to disrupted and their *social institutions*, where different norms carve out some identities for management over others, be it the speaker's dignity or others' honor.[10]

Consider another example, the song challenges of the Fiji. Identifying an event as such identifies a social scene where relations between religious groups are strained, a kind of contest is staged, and the institution of religion is heard as able to embrace such ritualized conflict. According to Donald Brenneis (1978, p. 162), the phrase *song challenge* identifies an event in which participants "attack and shame their opponents." Prodded by an audience, each group tries to make the opposing group "so mad they cry":

> The performers are groups of co-religionists, with a lead singer and a chorus. . . . The parties alternate turns, beginning with moderate songs about their own religion and escalating to increasingly abusive and personal attacks upon members of other groups. . . . The event ends when one group feels it cannot restrain itself from physical violence much longer and sends for outsiders to end the competition. (p. 162)

Clearly, to use the term *song challenge* to identify a kind of talk is to convey messages about the mode, tone, and so on of the communication, but it says more than that. It identifies a verbal scene where relations are strained, in conflict; participants are engaged in competitive battle. Further, such battle is linked intimately to religious institutions. Thus to use this cultural term for talk is to speak not only about communication, but also about social relations and institutions.

Regarding social relations, the messages may be characterized from *solidarity* (symmetrical we-ness), as in dugri and ceremonial dialogue, to *power* (asymmetrical ability to exercise formal controls), as in song challenges. Relational messages may be conveyed from *closeness*, as in "communication" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981), to *distancing and polarizing*, as in the stratification of speakers through the La Have "argument" (Bauman, 1972). About institutions, terms for talk may imply a general assessment from goodness to badness. Suggested here is an implicit meaning that may radiate from cultural categories about talk and comment upon institutions. For example, as North Americans discuss and praise "communication" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981), "being honest," and "sharing" (Carbaugh, 1988), they endorse those institutions that support such enactments. Families, self-help groups, and family-type businesses are valued because they express a caring institutional life, they support "sharing" and "close communication" better than, say, political parties or large corporations. Similarly, Kuna chants, arguings, and agreeings, especially grounded in the "gathering house," speak intimately of Kuna political institutions and authority (Sherzer, 1983, pp. 72–109).

Note how all of these cases, from St. Vincent to the Fiji to the American to the Kuna, are alike in their use of terms for talk to discuss social relations and institutions. But they vary in fundamentally important ways—whether relations are evaluated along dimensions of solidarity to intimacy, competitive to cooperative, close to distant, powerful to powerless. Messages about institutions vary likewise, be they more formally structured as in religion or politics or less formally structured as in community and self-help groups.

My general point here builds on the work of Sapir (1931) and the

above ethnographic cases, all of which suggest that cultural terms for communicative routines provide one possible point of access into sociality, its relations, and its institutions (see Briggs, 1984). As persons conceive of and evaluate their talk, they may be commenting upon social relations and institutions, the constituents of society. As talk is culturally identified and labeled, institutions, as well as social relations, are subjects in the commentary.

Messages About Personhood

As Rosaldo (1982) discusses Ilongot speech acts, she unveils the intimate links between the cultural shaping of languages and the types of persons who speak them. It is noteworthy that a Western ear, tuned to American English, is more ready to hear the phrases *nature of language* and *types of persons* and perhaps less ready for natures of languages and type of individuals. I am simply pointing to a ready cultural premise of "main essence" underlying studies of languages and the premise of "infinitive variety" underlying studies of persons. These intuitions should tell us something about the way English tends to construe language and persons, especially as we examine the links among language use, its native shaping, and personhood (see Briggs, 1984, p. 7).

Consider the Ilongot case. Rosaldo (1982, pp. 224–227) informs us that the Ilongot have an exemplary kind of act she calls a directive, including the cultural terms *tuydek* (commands), *bege* (requests), and *tengteng* (order, warning). According to Rosaldo, the Ilongot directive is a kind of act that is animated not so much by intentions of individual Ilongot speakers, but by exigencies of cooperativeness in social situations. The motives and meanings invoked through such acts are not as much intentional or individual as they are relational and communal. What Rosaldo suggests is an intimate link between the nature of speech performance and the senses of the persons who do them. In this case, directives are part and parcel of a sociocentric personhood, motivated by social concerns for cooperative movement, hierarchy, and bonding (see Shweder & Bourne, 1984). To be an Ilongot person is to speak less as an individual who makes private information public by negotiating with independent others, and more as an appendage within a socially organic membrane. So, when Ilongot identify their talk as tuydek and so on, they do not so much identify what individuals are doing with their words, but what a social conglomerate predicates.

Where motives in Ilongot are more relational, meanings more public, and persons more sociocentric, through others exemplary acts, such as "propositions," one might enact intentional motives, more private meanings, and more egocentric models of personhood. Rosaldo's (1982) study forces us to examine the intimate link between the ways speech is identified and used by natives, as in tuydek versus propositions, and the type of personhood enacted, sociocentric organic versus egocentric contractual.

The link between analytic frameworks about communication phenomena and cultural premises for communication and personhood is a complex one that I can do no more than sketch here. With regard to cultural terms for talk, the issues fall on at least three levels:

(1) *The cultural level:* What common premises about personhood are expressed as patterns of speaking are identified? Rosaldo (1982) suggests that premises of "psychology" and "individuality" run through the language of speech act theory, which thus results in a deep culture skewing, rendering sociocentric patterns of speaking, such as the Ilongot, as more egocentric than they rightly are.

(2) *The social level:* Within speech communities, are there types of persons associated with cultural terms for talk? Easy examples are the phrases *men's speech* and *women's speech* or *Black speech* and *White speech*, each suggesting acts, events, and styles of speaking that are distinct to each group, with each set, in turn, expressing messages about persons who are members of that social group.

(3) *The content level:* Some cultural terms for talk identify a kind of talk in which messages about persons are the main topics of discussion, for example, gossip and making commess among the St. Vincentians.

Talk, so identified, makes messages about personhood, preferred and dispreferred qualities, toward and untoward conduct, it's basic theme. All three levels suggest an intimate link between cultural terms for talk and models of personhood. They constitute cultural premises for being a person that are expressed through such terms for talk.

Elsewhere I have sketched four dimensions of personhood that may come to the fore as persons label their speech (Carbaugh, 1988). The first concerns the *loci of motives*, be they more relational, as with the Ilongot or Balinese (Geertz, 1973), or more intentional, as in North American "communication" or among the Paliyan (Gardner, 1966). The second concerns the *bases of sociation*, be they more

organically enmeshed, as evidenced in the Ilongot directive, the Balinese, or the Navajo (Witherspoon, 1977), or more contractually interdependent, as among the American and Paliyan. The third concern is for *styles of personhood*, be they more impersonal and positional, as in the Fiji song challenges, or more intimate and personal, as in American sharing (suggested by Hymes, 1972, following Mead). The fourth concern, hierarchically above the other three, may suggest *overall types of personhood*, enacted through cultural categories of speech, with the former poles creating a sociocentric organic model, and the latter a more egocentric contractual model (Shweder & Bourne, 1984).

When people label their speech, they invoke conceptions about personhood. We need to listen for these messages, especially as persons use them to construct their senses of communication acts, events, and styles. Listening this way will help bring common senses of personhood from the past into the present communication scene, so, in the performance, we may hear cultural messages about personhood and society as well as those about communication.

STRUCTURE OF CULTURAL TERMS FOR TALK: A LOOK AT INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

As a result of the above comparative study of particular cases, we may conclude that the variation in cultural terms for talk can be explained within an analytical framework that has intercultural utility. First, cultural terms for talk identify speech on several levels, as acts, events, or styles, and more peripherally as accomplishing several functions. Ethnographers have studied words that label speech on these various levels, and sometimes these levels have been discussed simultaneously. One way to develop our theory of these communication phenomena is to distinguish these levels, the qualities of each, and the relations among them.

A second observation is: three levels of messages are communicated prominently through indigenous terms for speech. That is, as persons label their speech, they are talking not only about communication (about its modes, degree of structuring, tone, efficaciousness), but also about sociality (social relations and institutions), and models of personhood (loci of motives, bases of sociation, styles, and types). Put another way, persons use cultural terms for talk as a way to speak directly and literally about words and as a way to talk more metaphorically about interpersonal relations, social institutions, and models for being a person.

This analytic framework suggests two basic questions for studies of cultural terms for talk: (a) What level(s) of performance does a given cultural term for talk identify? (b) What messages are conveyed in its use? Any given term for talk may refer to performances at one or more levels, by conveying messages of primarily one or several types. Thus the framework suggests a set of concepts that point to distinctive, but sometimes overlapping, levels, and to several aspects of messages, all of which are salient, but none of which is essential in any given case.

The framework has utility in several ways. First, the framework has a descriptive utility. It sensitizes one to important phenomena in speech, cultural terms for talk, providing a class of phenomena for study and a way to describe its levels and messages. Thus the framework has utility for developing cultural descriptions. Second, the framework has comparative utility. It can be used for further cross-cultural studies, testing its adequacy across more cases, revising when necessary, perhaps by refining what is meant by each aspect of messages and by adding additional dimensions such as the functional accomplishments of terms for talk. Third, the framework has theoretical utility. It gives perspective to a communication phenomenon by providing, in principle at least, a system of concepts the interrelations among which account for cultural variation. Finally, the framework has a practical utility, especially when applied to intercultural communication, for it sensitizes speakers to the radical and/or subtle differences that may underlie cultural conceptions (and enactments) of talk and suggests ways of unraveling such deep—or more surface—perplexities.

Intercultural communication undoubtedly involves persons who come together and act in ways they consider most appropriate. By now, it is of no surprise that some individuals consider a direct mode of communication of value with strangers, as would a Sabra who is speaking dugri or a North American wanting to "really communicate." This mode conflicts rather obviously with the more indirect and valued "crooked language" of the Ilongot or the communication acts of silence identified by western Apaches as proper for "meeting strangers" (Basso, 1970). The fact of such differences is one major finding of this report. Persons, as culture bearers, identify and use

highly particular and highly valued forms of communication. Part of the task of students of intercultural communication is to recognize that fact and build theories accordingly. As a practical matter, upon each moment of such recognition, various bases for social action could be laid bare, made more available for critical reflection and discussion, with the possibility for coordinated—if not cooperative—action enhanced.

Turning for a moment to two research programs in intercultural communication, I can demonstrate the kind of complementary insight gained by a comparative ethnography of speaking. Barnlund and his associates have recently been comparing the role of speech acts (compliments and apologies) in Japanese and American contexts (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Barnlund & Nagano, 1987). This is an important program of study, for it helps to explore the link between cultural premises and patterns of speaking. Such investigation could be grounded better, however, if it asked first: What is the nature of the verbal performances that are identified by Japanese or North Americans, as—for example—an apology? Is such a pattern salient in the society? If so, is it an act? Is it an event? What messages are associated with the form? What is its place in the local cultural system? Do Japanese invoke a sociocentric personhood when apologizing, thus marking "the social relations and scene" for interactional concern? Do Americans invoke a more egocentric personhood, thus marking speaker's face for interactional concern? The nature of the spoken pattern within a social and cultural life, the level of performance identified, and its cultural messages are critical information for conducting such cross-cultural studies.

A second program of research explores reports about moments of intercultural contact, and explains them with psychological (e.g., cognitive complexity, uncertainty, anxiety), social (e.g., expectations, similarity), communication (e.g., network, competence) and cultural (e.g., high- and low-context, masculine and feminine, individual and collective) variables (Gudykunst, 1983, 1985, 1988). This program has yielded many research reports by exploring interrelations among these variables and has continued its effort to identify a basic set of axioms that explain moments of intergroup and intercultural communication. It is important, however, to identify what is missing from these studies, such as analyses of *actual enactments* of talk during moments of intercultural and intergroup contacts and description of *cultural patterns of communication* that are used during such contacts.

Looking back to this program after examining the 11 societies and 50 terms for talk of concern to the present essay raises some questions, especially with regard to "the cultural variables." What do such variables tell us about actual communication performances, their cultural patterning, or moments of intercultural contact? Surely there is a need for discussion of these issues, with responses assessed in terms of both intercultural practices and communication theory. Discussing the links among the present study and these two prominent programs of research not only helps to demonstrate how a comparative ethnography can complement and contribute to already established programs of intercultural communication theory and research, but also suggests a general way to approach conduct in intercultural practices.

NOTES

1. The following analysis claims to include all of the major cultural terms for talk that were reported in each consulted work. A total of 11 societies were studied, with 6 reported in the Urban study (including the Kuna), yielding (rather incidentally) 50 cultural terms for talk and 211 cultural features. The 11 societies and 50 terms providing the central corpus of study are as follows: for the St. Vincentians (a total of 17), *talking sense, talking nonsense, talking sweet, talking broad, acting behave, getting on rude, calling name, calling out name, giving fatigue, making commess, talking nigger business, making commess* (a second type), *making melee, making vexation, getting on ignorant, telling story*, and *talking trupidness*; for the Kuna (a total of 10), Kuna language (*Tule Kaya* or *Kaya*), everyday Kuna, lullabies (*koe pippi*), *tuneful weeping, chief language* (or *gathering house language*), *chanting* (*namakke*), interisland ritual speech, chief's speak (*summakke*), *stick doll language*, and Kantule language; for the South American societies (a total of 8), the Waiwai *yes-saying*, the Trio *nokato, sipsipman*, and *tesmiken*, the Yanomamo ritualized conversation (*yaimu*), the Jivaroan Shuar and Achuar ceremonial *greeting* and *war dialogue*, and the Shokleng origin-myth telling (*waneklen*); for the Ilongot (a total of 7), commands (*tuydek*), requests (*bege*), orders (*tengteng*), *straight speech, nawnaw* (persuasion through fabrication), *crooked language*, and *purug oratory*; for the Fiji (a total of 4), song challenge, political speech (*parbachan*), *jungle talk*, and *sweet talk*; for American English (a total of 3), *being honest, sharing*, and *communication*; and for the Israeli Sabra (a total of 1), *dugri* (talking straight).

2. Following Hymes (1972), a cultural feature was identified as a basic component that, combined with others, provided the constituent parts of an indigenously named way of speaking. But, as is shown below, the cultural features analyzed for this study produced an elaboration of the basic Hymesian vocabulary. The elaboration consists mainly of my discussing the Hymesian component of "participant" as personhood and its identifiable parts, and further as social relations, adding institutions as a kind of

"scene," separating "key" into mode and tone, and discussing "norms" and their force as efficaciousness.

3. A total of 21 terms refer to the act level: the Israeli *dugri* (Katriel, 1986); the American *being honest* (Carbaugh, 1988); the Fiji *parbachan* (Brenneis, 1978); the Ilongot *tuydek, bege, tengteng*, and *purug oratory* (Rosaldo, 1982, 1973); the Kuna *lullabies, tuneful weeping*, and *chief's speech* (Sherzer, 1983); the St. Vincentian *calling name, calling out name, giving fatigue, making commess, talking nigger business, making commess* (again), *making melee, making vexation, getting on ignorant, telling story*, and *talking trupidness* [(Abrahams & Bauman, 1971). The act level consists of 38% of the total sample (n — 55), the 5 additional instances being the result of 3 terms (*being honest, dugri*, and *purug* oratory) that refer to performances at more than one level.] "Note that I use the term *act* to refer simply to things one person can do with words; I do not here intend to invoke the more special sense of "speech act" developed by John Searle."

4. A total of 18 cultural terms for episodes or events were recorded, constituting 33% of the sample (n — 55): the Israeli *dugri* (Katriel, 1986); the American *being honest, sharing*, and *communication* (Carbaugh, 1988; Katriel & Philipsen, 1981); the Fiji *song challenge* (Brenneis, 1978); the Ilongot *purung oratory* (Rosaldo, 1973); the Waiwai *yes-saying;* the Trio *nokato, sipsipman*, and *tesmiken;* the Yanomamo *ritualized conversation;* the Jivaroan Shuar and Achuar of Eastern Ecuador *greeting* and *war dialogue;* and the Shokleng *origin-myth telling* (all in Urban, 1986); the Kuna *chanting, ritual island gathering, stick doll language*, and Kantule language (Sherzer, 1983).

5. The distinction drawn here between act and event raises a question about those verbal performances that require, on the one hand, two persons speaking at the same time, such as the Mayan story-telling (Burns, 1980) and the Antiguan "contrapuntal conversation" (Reisman, 1975), and those that require sequencing of nonsimultaneous acts among participants such as the communication ritual (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981) and song challenges (Brenneis, 1978). The present framework suggests that both are events because both require coparticipation, albeit coparticipation that differs in structure, tone, social relation, and model of person. The latter are suggested by interpreting the types of messages, suggested below, in each cultural term for talk.

6. A total of 16 cultural terms for styles of speaking were recorded (29%, n — 55): the Israeli dugri (Katriel, 1986); the Fiji jungle talk and sweet talk (Brenneis, 1978); the Ilongot crooked speech, straight speech, and nawnaw (Rosaldo, 1973); the Kuna language, everyday Kuna, and chief language (Sherzer, 1983); and the St. Vincentian's distinctive but nonexclusive talking sense, talking nonsense, talking sweet, talking broad, acting behave, and getting on rude (Abrahams & Bauman, 1971).

7. The distinction I am drawing could be further developed by reference to identifiable means for speech, and ends of speech, both of which may be reported and labeled by participants. Thus "really communicating" identifies for some Americans a means for speaking, but it also identifies culturally identifiable ends—either in itself, "communication," and/or of "self" awareness, and/or a close "relationship" (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981). Since participants sometimes identify means as ends, and ends as means, cultural terms for speech are used polysemically to identify speaking and its outcomes. For analysts, the distinction between the two must be clearer so as to identify when cultural terms are used to identify an available means of communication, such as "communication" as a means of sociation, and when they identify other sociocultural accomplishments, such as "communication" as a type of sociation. One possible path for investigating the distinction is offered below through interpretations of salient messages.

8. A total of 211 cultural features were recorded. The present analysis accounts for 197 (or 93.4%) of these, distributed across the message types as follows: messages about communication (a total of 83), mode (13), degree of structuring (29), tone (31), and efficaciousness (10); messages about sociality (a total of 34), social relations (25), and institutions (9); and messages about personhood (a total of 80), loci of motives (23), bases of sociation (13), styles (22), and types (22). The 14 cultural features that were omitted cluster loosely into aspects of context such as public-private or audience size (4), nonverbal factors such as posturing and gesturing (7), and elements of pacing (3). Upon completing the analysis, it seems even these could be reinterpreted with the aspects of context serving as messages about tone/social relations, and the nonverbal factors and elements of pacing included as messages about structuring. However, these features were excluded from the present analysis. Limitations of space prohibit presentation of a grand table displaying which cultural features, of which terms, fall under which message type. A complete listing may be requested from the author.

9. The phrase *highly salient but nonessential* applies to each aspect of the analytic framework presented here, and suggests the necessity of testing each through an application to cultural practices. Thus at each moment a cultural term for talk is used, a theoretically and empirically grounded way of listening is suggested: Is the cultural term saying something about communication (its mode, degree of structuring, tone, or efficaciousness)? Is it saying something about sociality (social relations and institutions)? Is it saying something about personhood (loci of motives, bases of sociation, styles or types of personhood)? Any particular cultural term for talk may exploit some messages more than others, and they may rule in some messages while explicitly ruling out others (e.g., "straight talk" may indicate more about the mode of speaking than its technical structuring; see below). But any moment where cultural terms for talk are used, in principle at least, some aspects of the framework are ignited. The ultimate utility of the framework of course depends upon its future application to various cultural practices and making modifications that such application may require. Ultimately, the theory would enable the analyst to particularize from the general framework, pinpointing distinctive features in cultural terms for talk, thus addressing criteria of cultural adequacy, and to generalize from the particular case, demonstrating what is of general interest about the case, thus addressing criteria of cross-cultural adequacy through comparative study.

10. The term *social relations* refers here simply to the relations among participants. *Social institutions* refers to a system of norms (Schneider, 1976).

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6

Life Demands *Musayara:* Communication and Culture Among Arabs in Israel

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This chapter analyzes the folk-linguistic term musayara as it is used in the discourse of Arabs in Israel. The interactional ethos encapsulated in the notion of musayara is examined with reference to its cultural-historical underpinnings. An understanding of the interactional ethos of musayara compared to the dugri *ethos of native Israeli Jews (Katriel, 1986) is argued to provide some insights into the potential for miscommunication in intercultural encounters between Arabs and Jews in Israel.*

INTRODUCTION

The Arabic folk-linguistic term *musayara* (which refers to "going with" or "accompanying" one's partner in conversation) is associated with an other-oriented, "humoring," "conciliatory" attitude, with individuals' effort to maintain harmony in social relations. The term and its derivatives (e.g., *musayir*, a person disposed to doing musayara) carry many potent overtones for cultural members.[1] Our Israeli Arab respondents' talk was sprinkled with a variety of semiformulaic expressions that underscored the centrality of this cultural orientation in their lives, for example: "Musayara is in the blood of every Arab person"; "You drink it with your mother's milk,"; "It's in the air, you breathe it in."

The traditional notion of musayara can be traced to its historical roots in both religious Islamic doctrine and the high degree of interdependence that characterized the social relations of early Arab communities. Indeed, the art of comporting oneself with social delicacy was praised by pre-Islamic poets, who were keenly aware of the role of such stylized conduct in the maintenance of harmonious social relations within the close-knit tribal group. This cultural orientation received explicit religious legitimation with the advent of Islam, as expressed in the elaborate literary tradition of *adab* (the