CONSTITUTING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE THROUGH DISCOURSE

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3

Enacting "Puerto Rican Time" in the United States

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Through communication people constitute communities. Carbaugh (1994) describes this as the process of "linking individuals into communities of shared identity" (p. 24).[1] Various communicative forms are used to enact and enable the creation of communities and shared identities. Within communities, however, there is often competing cultural knowledge or symbols upon which participants draw to structure their activities. I will describe one such symbol, which can be said to have had competing, or at least disparate, cultural value as it occurred within two events at a Puerto Rican cultural center (PRCC). The symbol of communication described here is the use of "time."

I take as my base a perspective that stems from ethnography of communication literature: namely, that communication is primary, that communicative practices have cultural components, and that through communication a sense of what it means to be a "Puerto Rican" or any other type of person or group member is constructed. I used the following literature to form a conceptual framework through which to distinguish and explicate the particular components addressed in this study.

COMMUNICATION

Sapir (1931) describes communication as something that occurs day to day among individuals. Although it is a mundane process, Sapir tells us that "language is the communicative process par excellence in every known society" (p. 105). Through language, communication reaffirms society. Communication also varies in form and meaning depending on particular personal relationships.

Not only is communication an everyday process, it also symbolically produces, maintains, repairs, and transforms reality (Carey, 1975, p. 10). Based on the assertion that communication creates reality, communication researchers should ask questions such as how do we create, express,

and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality (Carey, 1975, p. 17). Expressed in another way, Carbaugh (1989) defines *communication* as "a spoken system of symbols, symbolic forms, and meanings" (p. 14). Carbaugh builds on the foundation established by Hymes (1972, 1974) and posits four components of communication, all of which are relevant to discourse at a PRCC: it is socially negotiated, individually applied, culturally distinct, and historically grounded. Many authors have defined and relied on symbols as a way to examine the communicative practices of a culture. For Geertz (1973), *symbols* are broad categories to describe social organization (p. 17). Schneider (1976) approaches culture as a large symbolic system. Given the importance of symbols, symbolic actions, and their meanings, one can attend to the significant symbols through and with which participants in a given speech community make meaning. These symbols can partially constitute membership[2] and can function to organize actions. In summary, the fundamental question in my ethnography of communication study is, what forms and meanings of communication related to time are used by Puerto Ricans in a particular site?

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Given the constitutive nature of communication, we can speak of communication as creating culture. Carey (1975) defines communication as the "construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world" (p. 6). While creating culture, communicative practices can also be described as cultural. Carbaugh (1994) refers to Philipsen (1992) when he states, "to speak is, fundamentally, to speak culturally" (p. 8). Therefore, communication in part constitutes culture and can be heard as a cultural phenomenon.

Culture in the United States has become a particularly salient area of investigation given current social attention to "multiculturalism" (Hilgers, Wunsch, & Chattergy, 1992; Lynch, 1989; Phelan & Davidson, 1993; Thompson & Tyagi, 1993). However, much writing about multiculturalism is "narrow and ethnocentric" (Lynch, 1989) and does not focus on the communicative construction of culture. Therefore, an examination of particular communicative constructions of culture adds to our knowledge of multiculturalism and diversity.

Understanding "native" (Geertz, 1973, p. 15) meanings, or those meanings particular to a specific group at a specific time and place, is an important starting point for developing intercultural or cross-cultural communication theories. Geertz (1973) defines *culture* as

> an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (p. 89)

This interpretation highlights the communicative creation of culture. As a communicative accomplishment, culture can be studied as "contested, temporal, and emergent" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 19). Juan Flores (1993) echoes this sentiment in his description of Puerto Rican culture. He describes culture as "the vibrant, living expression of the 'soul' of a people or an epoch" (p. 47). To research cultural communication conceived of in this way, one can examine the components of culture described by Philipsen (1987): code, conversation, and community (p. 249). These elements refer to the deeply held beliefs (code) that tie a culture together through various communicative acts (conversation) that compose a community. The description of cultural communication used in this study is also consistent with that of Carbaugh (1990), who proposed the usefulness of focusing on three important issues: "shared identity," "common meaning" (p. 5), and the role communication plays in the development of each.

A CALL TO STUDY PUERTO RICAN COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Flores (1993) calls for ethnographic research about Puerto Ricans when he describes current research as "missing . . . any resonance of the community's own language practice" (pp. 148-149). He describes Puerto Rican speech in the United States as an "intricate mixing and code switching" (pp. 148-149). Because the communicative practices are so richly complex, Flores (1993) advocates for the use of an "obvious source of evidence: the firsthand cultural production of Puerto Ricans in the United States and their linguistic practices" (p. 159).

Although this type of research is called for, Flores (1993) also warns us about trying to find the essence of Puerto Ricans. He believes that Puerto Rican identity is constructed through a dynamic process rather than through a researcher's or individual's quest for a "primordial *que somos?*" (who are we?). Flores (1993) indicates that the question of who we are and how we are is defined through a "relational, non-essentialist approach" that accounts for "diversity and complexity" (p. 100).

Morris's (1981) research points to the complexity of Puerto Rican identity, as his research methods have been an attempt to observe and understand the "sayings and meanings" of Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. According to his conclusions, the words Puerto Ricans use do not make clear and direct reference to places and things. Morris criticizes Puerto Rican language imprecision, and thus Puerto Ricans themselves, from an ethnocentric "ethnographic" study of discourse. Thus, he fails to attend to the significance of the usage for the people using the language (and how they would define themselves). His work, though perhaps missing the mark about cultural interpretations and understandings, does provide a useful background and analysis of certain cultural forms. For example, Morris (1981) concludes,

> In Puerto Rican society, one's place and one's sense of oneself depend on an even, disciplined and unthreatening style of behavior. Aggressiveness, open conflict, contradiction, or confrontation, or the appearance of any of these, breaks the tacit agreement of respect. Puerto Ricans must not appear to separate themselves from others, thrust themselves forward, or directly push others down. (p. 135)

This passage refers to the social norm of "respect" in the communal sense ("not . . . separate themselves from others"), which is quite significant to Puerto Ricans. However, this passage also illustrates Morris's emphasis on how Puerto Rican behavior is interpreted by others (what the behavior "appears" to be), rather than how behavior is given meaning by the participants themselves. Yet, despite its limitations, Morris's (1981) work does provide useful background information about some cultural beliefs that can be significant when interpreting the norms of time practices.

Although Puerto Rican identity can certainly be further examined on the island itself, Puerto Ricans occupy a particularly unique position within the United States. As Flores (1993) describes, the "uneven clash of cultures can only be understood in its full magnitude when account is taken of the political and cultural life of Puerto Ricans in the metropoli-

tan United States" (p. 55). Because Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth, Puerto Rican national identity includes the experience of mobility from the island to the states and back again. Consequently, Puerto Ricans identify with (and are constructed from) this blending of different experiences and contacts in both places (Flores, 1993, p. 98).

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

In order to demonstrate what is unique about the cultural symbols and meanings of one particular cultural group, it is often useful to make reference to the ways that other cultures communicate, enact roles, and attribute meaning to similar actions or ways of speaking. For example, Carbaugh (1989) describes "popular American"[3] talk as using key symbols such as *selves* and *individuals*. Persons in this culture vacillate between difference and commonality. He posits that when speaking this way, "Americans" act based on a code of dignity (respect for individual rights, autonomy, freedom, equality). The cultural premises include: (a) one is an individual, (b) everyone should be unique, and (c) cultural commonalities should be dispelled. If it is a group norm to be unique and yet one is supposed to give recognition not to group values but to individual ones, then the three premises seem contradictory. Yet they form the complex web of communication rules that persons follow nonetheless (Carbaugh, 1990, pp. 123-132). By examining personhood in this way, we learn not only that there are specific terms that "Americans" use to refer to persons, but also that these terms signify the roles and positions that these persons have (and can have) toward themselves and one another.

Another example is given by Weider and Pratt (1990), who explain personhood by the actions in which one engages. Weider and Pratt describe the problem of "recognition and being recognized" as a "real Indian" in the United States. The "real" Indian will know when and how to play the proper roles (p. 60). Knowledge and respect as a "real" Indian become evident in several courses of action, such as approaching strangers, razzing, face-to-face encounters, displaying modesty, recognizing quasi-kinship relationships, and public speaking. By recognizing these actions as culturally distinct and significant, one is better able to understand Indian "personhood." Weider and Pratt (1990) explain that "being a real Indian is not something one can simply be, but is something that

one becomes and/or is, in and as 'the doing' of being and becoming a real Indian" (pp. 49-50).

Carbaugh (1989) and Weider and Pratt (1990) have fruitfully explored different speech patterns to better understand "insider" meanings within "American" and American Indian groups in the United States. When communication occurs, it explicates and constitutes cultural order, social organization, and cultural meanings in the occasion (Carbaugh, 1990). It is particular with regard to persons, places, nature, function, and structure. The nature of the cultural communication practices helps to constitute a sense of what it means to be a person in that particular context within that particular speech community.

This study was undertaken to add to the literature about how members of a speech community enact practices that comment on and construct their sense of identity and membership through closely examining references to and uses of the concept of *time.* My analysis examines two speech events and the symbols and norms that help to form a way of speaking.

The general research questions guiding this analysis were as follows: How do the use and practices of communicative acts, related to time, help to shape what it means to be a member of this group? How do the members understand the practices that have intercultural implications (and differing meanings) that need to be negotiated among members in this group, a Puerto Rican organization within the United States, in ways that differentiate "members" from nonmembers.

SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

I began as a volunteer at a PRCC in August 1994. The center is located in the northeast United States in a city that hosts the fourth-largest population of Puerto Ricans in the United States (Rivera-Batiz & Santiago, 1994, p. 20). The cultural center is located in the north end of the city, a section that is demographically predominantly Puerto Rican. The cultural center was founded in 1976 to: (a) conduct educational and cultural activities, (b) facilitate the adjustment of Hispanic people into the mainstream of American society without sacrificing their cultural values, (c) promote and preserve the Puerto Ricans' cultural heritage, and (d) help develop a better understanding and improve the relationship between the Puerto Rican community and other ethnic groups in the city. The vision of the center is

to enhance pride and self esteem within the Puerto Rican and other Spanish speaking communities by promoting, maintaining, and sharing our rich cultural heritage, to promote community involvement and foster leadership development, to meet the diverse social and economic needs of a growing community by providing comprehensive services and to act as an advocate in shaping and influencing the issues that affect our people. (PRCC Vision Statement)

A board of directors, consisting of 13 members, defines the direction, goals, and tone of the organization. The staff includes an executive director, who runs the daily operations of the center. The executive director has an assistant. Each component of the center has a coordinator: There is an education coordinator, a cultural activities coordinator, and a youth leadership development coordinator. The Education component employs an assistant education coordinator, two General Equivalency Diploma teachers, a case manager, three English as a second language teachers, an adult basic education teacher, and a childcare provider; the Education component currently holds courses for local adults at the Young Men's Christian Association. The Cultural component employs a staff that consists of a folklore dance instructor, a gym instructor, a bridge-building instructor, and a drumming instructor; the Cultural component holds afterschool programs for middle school children. The other staff member is the program development specialist, who researches and writes grants for the center. Three volunteers, myself included, assist with communications, computer programming, and organizing the festival.

METHODOLOGY

During my first encounter with the director and the cultural events coordinator, I advanced a proposal to volunteer at the center to conduct ethnographic investigation in interpersonal communication. I described my research interest as trying to determine how interaction creates identity. The director of the center told me that he was interested in my expertise in communication and asked me if I would be interested in helping to promote upcoming events, beginning with the Annual Dinner. In this capacity, I began my fieldwork.

My interactions at the center were conducted in English, which is the language most participants at the center used (either as a first or second

language). I listened when Spanish was spoken by others and when I was addressed in Spanish, at which times I responded in English.[4]

After being in the field for two and a half months, I was elected to sit on the board of directors. This position gave me access to the monthly board meetings. I informed the other board members at our first gathering of my researcher position. Members of the board gave their permission for me to audiotape the board meetings.

DATA COLLECTION

In August 1994, my volunteer work took place during the morning on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Between September and December, I volunteered Wednesday mornings. From January through May 1995, I attended monthly board meetings, special meetings, and retreats. I also spoke weekly with members of the staff by telephone. Initially, I worked closely with the cultural activities coordinator. Over time, I had the opportunity to have conversations with all those employed at the center. I took field notes throughout my 10 months at the center. I videotaped the Annual Dinner and audiotape-recorded the monthly board meetings (which occur on the third Thursday of every month).

I recorded observational data of my weekly interactions at the center with the staff through written field notes. These notes were written according to the method proposed by Schatzman and Strauss (1973). This system includes indicating and differentiating "Observation Notes," "Methodological Notes," and "Theoretical Notes" (p. 99). Segments of the audio- and video-recorded material have been transcribed using a version of the system proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). I attended to the aspects of their coding system (as well as referencing Goodwin, 1990, p. 25) that were most relevant to my data and to the type of analysis I conducted. The amount of transcription detail used in each segment transcribed follows the analysis I make of each instance.

DATA ANALYSIS

The conceptual tools that I chose were derived from my theoretical attention to cultural communication. Following Hymes (1972), I attended to cultural scenes, communication activities, and norms. I based my analysis primarily on two scenes: an Annual Dinner Dance and monthly

board meetings. First, I will describe the theoretical premises and assumptions upon which each methodological tool is based; next, I will describe the procedure that I employed in the following analysis.

My basic unit of analysis, within which I examined the symbols, norms, and ways of speaking, was what Hymes (1972) referred to as a "speech event." A speech event is bounded by a beginning and an end, and it refers to activities that are governed by rules or norms for speech (Hymes, 1974, p. 52). Communication events provide focal activities for discovering what is of significance for a particular speech community. Discovering the boundaries of communicative events is the basis for understanding how members of a particular speech community communicate.

Hymes's (1980) definition of speech community includes the means and meanings of various symbols. Therefore, I began my analysis by documenting instances of the symbol *time*. Because Hymes (1972) describes the speech community as people who share "rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (p. 54), I examined the rules and norms of time use. Finally, Hymes (1974) states that for one to be counted as a member of a speech community, one must share at least one "way of speaking" with others. To describe how concepts of *time* can be considered a "way of speaking," I will present a summary of cultural practices as evidence that these components are constitutive features of the community of participants from the PRCC.

I looked for key symbols in the talk produced by participants at the PRCC. I located these symbols through their prominence, repetition, and co-occurrence with like words. I tried to further substantiate each key symbol by locating a form of enactment that relied, at least in part, for its coherence upon that key symbol. *Symbol,* then, is taken to be a prominent and recurring term; symbols form clusters of co-occurrence around the prominent terms, creating a galaxy in Schneider's (1976) analytical scheme. In this analysis, my focus was on the key symbol of *time*.

Time was a key symbol through which conversations occurred. This key symbol has been the target of investigation by other researchers, and a body of literature can be called on to describe other ways of examining time and chronemics. After locating several instances of this symbol, I reviewed the relevant literature and began to discriminate the ways in which the symbol was used in the PRCC scenes and the ways in which the literature constructs each symbol.

NORMATIVE AND CODE RULES

To get at beliefs and standards for action, I followed Hymes's (1972) suggestion to search for norms or rules. Carbaugh (1990) has proposed a refined way of analyzing and articulating beliefs about action. He distinguishes between two types of rules: normative and code. "They are alike in that they both refer to socially patterned communicative action, capture some consensual imperative for interlocutors, and have practical force in identifiable contexts" (p. 139).

Normative rules refer to standards for action. They describe appropriate behavior and imply an evaluation of actions. They answer the question, "what behavioral acts are appropriate in this context? ... Normative rules function to guide actions in social contexts" (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 141). When rules are violated, they may be explicitly stated. Normative rules follow the form: "in context C, if X, one should/not do Y" (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 142). It is important to note that "one cannot abstract normative rules ... without also abstracting codes" (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 142).

Code rules refer more specifically to patterns of meaning constructed by symbols and symbolic forms. Code rules function "in conversation to frame actions, to define contexts, to construct a coherent sense" (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 139). They are components of a belief system and can be stated in the form, "in context C, the unit, X, counts as meaningful on another level as Y" (p. 140).

Carbaugh (1990) notes that the idea that children should address elders with respect is an example of a normative rule for conduct (who *should* address whom). In addition, the statement of the norm includes terms for which one can formulate code rules about who counts as an elder and a child (those who so address and those who are addressed as such). Many times, code rules are intertwined with normative rules. Both kinds of rules operate within a particular cultural context.

I began searching for normative rules that governed each event. Next, I searched for the ways in which rules (of either type) were explicitly articulated. Usually, norms can be located by the presence of a normative force (Carbaugh, 1990), such as the terms *should* or *ought*. Frequently the norms that were explicated were of the "normative rule" type. After examining these two types, I began to use the form proposed by Carbaugh (1990) to restate my findings into both normative and code rules. Finally, when many of the rules began to form a pattern, I was able

to establish with more certainty the broader normative and code rules for each scene.

WAYS OF SPEAKING

In order to assess differences between speech communities, I relied on Hymes's (1972) broader category, "ways of speaking." Ways of speaking are distinct to particular speech communities and particular occasions (Hymes, 1972, p. 58). I identified PRCC ways of speaking by noting the way action was regulated and determined. Furthermore, I noted events in which particular ways were identified by participants. Throughout this study, I describe one prominent way of speaking, which uses and makes reference to the symbol *time.*

I relied upon Sacks's (1992) and Carbaugh's (1990) assumptions that sequences may be "doing something." In addition, I attended to the implications that when utterances were strung together, they formed some outcome. While keeping the question open as to what type of outcome certain conversational sequences might be leading toward, I carefully documented the ways in which participants strung together bits of utterances in conversations to form a kind of characteristic sequence. This type of documentation provides the details for enactments that may form a culturally based way of speaking, such as establishing quorum in a board meeting.

It was through this methodological procedure—an analysis of *time* as a key symbol, regulated by norms and rules, that characterizes a prominent way of speaking—that I began to unravel what it means to be a member of the community in the two primary scenes of the PRCC. The following description sets the scenes that were the basis of my analysis. I also explain the detailed analysis that I conducted based on these various methodological procedures.

TWO SYMBOL SYSTEMS: "PUERTO RICAN" AND "POPULAR AMERICAN" WAYS OF REFERRING TO AND USING TIME

The cultural symbol of time emerged as important in many speaking situations within the center, including two events, the Annual Dinner Dance and the monthly board meetings. A general Puerto Rican sense of

time has been described as a fluid sense of time (Morris, 1981). Edward Hall (1976) described "American" time as "monochronic" (MC), "emphasiz[ing] schedules, segmentation and promptness" (p. 17). In contrast, he considers Latin America and the Middle East to operate on "polychronic time" (PC), which is "characterized by several things happening at once" (p. 17). Hall explains that when people operating with different time orientations come into contact, there can be confusion and misunderstandings. Hall's (1976) definitions of time (PC and MC) are described through personal examples. However, the present study seeks to capture more detailed and descriptive evidence of "time usage" through analyzing naturally occurring discourse conversations in situations. Whereas Hall suggests that appointments are flexible in cultures that operate on polychronic time, the goal of this study it to examine the texture of recounting detailed evidence of when, under which conditions, and for which participants this flexibility is meaningful. Hall (1976) described one specific scenario, in which he suggested to American foreign service officers who were assigned to Latin America that they "should be out *interacting* with the local people" instead of "being cut off from the people with whom they should be establishing ties" because of the strict time regulations binding them to an office (Hall, 1976, p. 19). Hall (1976) suggested that in these types of situations, the officers would not be able to be "*effective*"—an "American" monochronic norm—by complying with the "American" norm for time (p. 19). Evidence is needed about how one sense of time is meaningful to other groups of participants and about the normative implications of not abiding by one group's time rules in other situations and scenes. The "Puerto Rican" sense of time does not rely on fixed boundaries but rather has more flexible boundaries.

To overview, I found that the way time is described and enacted by Puerto Ricans at the PRCC is distinct. Across situations, participants orient to time differently, abiding by different norms and rules in different contexts and for different purposes. Second, time references and practice appear to be based on certain historic and cultural roots, which, when enacted, demonstrate that the participants base their actions on some shared cultural knowledge.

The two senses of time—Puerto Rican and "popular American"—will be described before looking at each event in particular. There are at least two meanings for the symbol *time* that is operative in each event.

During the Annual Dinner Dance,[5] the following statement was made:

1 JG: hopefully we won't be operating on Puerto Rican time this evening, so we have more time to enjoy the social part of the program.

Puerto Rican time was also referred to directly during a board meeting.[6] Consider the following example:

245 JG: The parade doesn't start until twelve o'clock.

246 It doesn't get going until twelve thirty, probably:: one o'clock,

247 which is always Puerto Rican time.

248 Uh, by the time it finishes up,

249 and everybody gets downtown

250 and everybody goes through the reviewing stand, do their thing

251 It's three o'clock

252 On any given day, it's three o'clock. (March board meeting)

In Lines 1 and 247, "Puerto Rican time" is labeled directly. PRCC participants talk about a fluid sense of time as "Puerto Rican." They refer to this sense of time and define its recognizable characteristics. The "clock" time "twelve thirty" becomes "one o'clock" (Line 246) to "three o'clock" (Lines 251-252) in Puerto Rican time. Thus Puerto Rican time seems to start and end later, taking more time (two hours in this example) than what is indicated by a clock.

The reference to "any given day" (Line 252) indicates that this is a generalized sense of time that is not just specific to one occasion but to many, including the festival[7] (to which Lines 245-252 refer).

This sense of time not only is referred to directly by name but also is enacted. Further, this sense of time prominently factors into decision making, because participants are aware that others in the community will act with the cultural knowledge that Puerto Rican time is governing events. For instance, Lines 247-250 suggest that Puerto Rican time can be identified and that "everybody" will enact it by "doing their thing."

What distinguishes the references to time in these scenes from other "popular American" scenes is the distinction between two different kinds of time operating in these scenes. The first was referred to directly as "Puerto Rican time" (Line 1). When he first took the microphone, the master of ceremonies said that he did not want the dinner to be governed by Puerto Rican time. Labeling time as "Puerto Rican" recognizes the fact that it must stand in contrast to some other sort of time that is not