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Discourse and Culture

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Discourse and Culture Studies

In different societies people not only speak different languages and dialects, they use them in radically different ways. In some societies, normal conversations bristle with disagreement, voices are raised, emotions are conspicuously vented. In others, people studiously avoid contention, speak in mild and even tones, and guard against any exposure of their inner selves. In some parts of the world it is considered very bad to speak when another person is talking, while in others, this is an expected part of a co-conversationalist's work. In some cultures, it is *de rigeur* to joke and banter obscenely with some people but to go through life not saying a single word to others.

Describing and explaining such culture-specific ways of speaking is the task of 'discourse and culture' studies. It is a task which can be approached from many different directions, using many different methods, but most scholars agree that it goes beyond merely describing speech patterns in behavioural terms. The greater challenge is to show the links between particular ways of speaking and the culture of the people involved. To do this, of course, we have to be able to establish the relevant cultural values and priorities independently of the speech patterns themselves. Such evidence can come from many sources, including surveys or interviews about attitudes, observations of child-raising practices, the proverbs and common sayings of the culture, semantic analysis of cultural key words, and wider cultural analysis.

As in all cross-cultural research, the overriding methodological problem is ethnocentric bias, that is, the danger that our understanding of the discourse practices of other cultures will be distorted if we view them through the prism of our own culture-specific practices and concepts. There is a need to find a universal, language-independent perspective on discourse structure and on cultural values.

In this chapter we first survey a variety of different approaches to culture and discourse studies, then take a close look at cultural aspects of discourse in five unrelated cultures (Japanese, Malay, Polish, Yankunytjatjara, Ewe). In this way, we can draw out some of the main dimensions of cross-cultural variation in discourse.

An overview of the field

This section describes different approaches to discourse and culture studies, suggesting that they can be integrated within the 'cultural scripts' framework which has its roots in cross-cultural semantics.

The Ethnography of Communication

The most influential approach to discourse and culture studies is known as the 'ethnography of communication'. It was founded by Dell Hymes (1962) and was further developed by him, John Gumperz, and others in the 1970s (Gumperz and Hymes, 1986, first published 1972; Bauman and Sherzer, 1974). This was a time when linguistic theorizing was dominated by Chomsky's concepts of grammar and of linguistic competence, notions focused on the structural aspects of language rather than on language in use. Hymes emphasized that to be a competent speaker calls for much more than grammatical knowledge. It means knowing how to speak in culturally appropriate ways to different people about different things in different settings. He coined the term 'communicative competence' to take in all these things, along with the knowledge of language structure. (see Blum-Kulka, Chapter 2 in this volume).

As a way of studying communicative competence, Hymes suggested research should focus on what he called the 'speech events' of different cultures. These are culturally recognized activities involving speech; for instance, in English, a gossip session, a sermon, a job-interview, or a cross-examination in court. Actually, activities like these don't merely involve speaking, but are constituted by speaking in appropriate ways and settings to certain kinds of people. Hymes reasoned that part of being a culturally competent speaker is understanding the speech events recognized by that culture, and he laid out a framework of the dimensions of a communicative event. It is called the **SPEAKING** framework because the letters in that word can be used as a mnemonic; but note that the components don't follow in order of importance.

S setting and scene (where and when does it happen?)
P participants (who is taking part?)
E ends (what do the participants want to achieve?)
A act sequence (what is said and done?)
K key (what is the emotional tone, e.g. serious, sorrowful, light-hearted?)
I instrumentalities (what are the 'channels' e.g. verbal, written, and 'codes' e.g. languages, speech styles?)
N norms of interaction and interpretation (why 'should' people act like this?)
G genre (what kind of speech event is it?)

Ethnographers of communication have documented the patterning of speech events in a wide range of cultures. Their favoured methods of gathering data are participant observation and consultation with native speakers. Often they uncover striking differences from European norms. For example, among the Wolof of West Africa (Irvine 1974) exchanging greetings (*nuyyu* or *dyammantë*) is a highly-structured routine. Behind the formulaic salutations, the praising of God, the questions and answers about the whereabouts and health of family members, there are complex cultural assumptions about social rank and appropriate behaviour between unequals. A cultural outsider would never realise it, but each greeting exchange establishes the relative rankings of the participants. As a Wolof proverb puts it: 'When two persons greet each other, one has shame, the other has glory'.

Among the Apache (Basso, 1970), greeting behaviour takes a radically different form. Instead of a cascade of verbal formulae, the proper form is a long period of motionless silence. Silence provides an excellent example of the fact that similar verbal forms may have radically different functions in different cultures. Silence sounds the same in any language, but its interpretation differs widely.

To take another example, in Japan there is a belief that as soon as an experience is expressed in words, the real essence disappears. Thus, at any time of emotional climax, whether it be the death of one's parents, the happy news that one's son has passed his entrance university examination, or the sight of something extremely beautiful, the appropriate thing to say is nothing (Williams, cited in Saville-Troike, 1989: 167).

Though Hymes's work inspired many valuable studies, few actually use the SPEAKING framework to organise their descriptions. This is not really as strange as it might seem. What Hymes was trying to do was lay out a framework for gathering data on speech events across cultures (a so-called 'etic' framework). To explain discourse phenomena in cultural terms, however, the crucial components are the N (norms) components. In practice, most studies in the ethnography of communication devote most of their time to explaining these. 'Norms of interaction' refers to the rules for how people are expected to speak in particular speech events; often these are unconscious and can only be discovered by indirect means, for instance, by observing reactions when they are violated. All other cultural knowledge needed to understand a communicative event falls under 'norms of interpretation'. The main difficulty with the ethnography of communication approach is the lack of a principled method for describing cultural norms; in practice, each ethnographer falls back on his or her own devices.

Contrastive Pragmatics

Under this broad heading we can identify several research traditions directed toward understanding cultural variation in patterns of conversation. One tradition has been provoked by the proposal of the philosopher H.P. Grice (1975) that all human communication is mediated by universal principles

known as 'maxims of conversation'; for instance, 'be brief', 'be informative', 'be relevant', 'be clear'. The basic idea is that exchanging information is the prototypical function of conversation. It is now known, however, that Grice's maxims do not operate in the same fashion in all cultures. In Malagasy village society (Ochs Keenan, 1976), for instance, people are not expected to satisfy the informational needs of co-conversationalists because, firstly, withholding information brings a degree of status, and, secondly, there is a fear of committing oneself to particular claims lest any resulting unpleasantness bring *tsiny* ("guilt") to oneself and one's family.

Another seminal work is Brown and Levinson's (1978) on universals of politeness. They proposed that all cultures provide a speaker with two broad kinds of strategy to offset the imposition involved with any communicative act: 'positive politeness' strategies appeal to shared identity and common interests, while 'negative politeness' strategies emphasise the autonomy and independence of speaker and addressee. (see Blum-Kulka, Chapter 2 in this volume). It is clear, however, that any putative universal strategies of politeness must be culturally relativized.

Independently of such 'universals oriented' research, there is a strain of contrastive pragmatics which concentrates on the cultural realization of speech acts (see Blum-Kulka, Chapter 2 in this volume). One of the largest of such studies is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) which contrasted preferred modes of issuing requests and apologies (or their near-equivalents) in Agentinian Spanish, Australian English, Canadian French, German, and Israeli Hebrew (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989). A number of important studies in this vein have examined interlanguage pragmatics, that is, the discourse of non-native speakers in a second language (Blum-Kulka and Kasper, 1993), and a few (notably Clyne, 1994) have studied people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting in a lingua franca.

Research in contrastive pragmatics tends to use different methods to those employed in the ethnography of communication, such as questionnaires, surveys, role-plays, and discourse completion tasks. Such tightly controlled data elicitation techniques lend themselves to statistical analysis, though at the cost of under-representing (and possibly at times misrepresenting) spontaneous authentic speech.

Culture Studies

Two further approaches to studying the cultural aspects of discourse are linguistic anthropology and intercultural communication studies. Linguistic anthropology is conducted within the discipline of anthropology. It is directed toward understanding how language use fits in with, and indeed helps to constitute, the larger culture. This work often looks at cultural practices in superb detail, as for instance, in the works in Watson-Gegeo and White (1990) on conflict resolution in the Pacific, or those in Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) on socialization strategies.

Intercultural studies and cultural commentaries (for example, Mitzutani and Mitzutani, 1987) usually focus on national-level societies such as Japan or China, comparing them with mainstream Anglo-American culture. Often the motivation is a desire to reduce culturally based misunderstandings in business or international relations. The best of this work contains valuable insights for discourse and culture studies, albeit often in a somewhat anecdotal form.

The 'Cultural Scripts' Approach

Although the approaches described so far have turned up a wealth of evidence testifying to the importance of the 'culture-discourse' connection, the field as a whole continues to labour under some serious difficulties as to how cultural rules (norms, strategies, etc.) of discourse should be stated. The normal practice is to use technical (or semi-technical) labels such as 'direct' vs. 'indirect' and 'formal' vs. 'informal' as the descriptive meta-language, but it is not difficult to see that such terms are used with different meanings by different authors. For instance, when Japanese speech patterns are contrasted with English ones, the Japanese are described as 'indirect' and the English as 'direct', but when English is compared with Hebrew, it is the English speech patterns which are 'indirect' and the Hebrew 'direct'. Nor are these differences merely quantitative. They are qualitative. Cultures differ on what one should be 'indirect' about, on how to be 'indirect', and, most importantly perhaps, on why to be 'indirect'. A similar critique can be made of the notions of 'formality' (Irvine, 1979), 'politeness' (Janney and Arndt, 1993), 'involvement' (Besnier, 1994), and so on.

Another problem is that if our metalanguage for cross-cultural comparison consists of terms like 'directness', 'deference', 'face', 'politeness', 'hierarchy', and so on, our analyses can easily slip into ethnocentrism because the relevant concepts are not found in the cultures being described and usually cannot even be translated easily into the languages involved. Ethnographic studies often attempt to overcome this by incorporating indigenous terms into their descriptions, for instance, Malagasy *tsiny* "guilt", Japanese *enryo* "restraint", Yankunytjatjara *kunta* "shame" (we use double quotation marks to draw attention to the fact that these glosses are only approximate). But then the same difficulty of translation arises in reverse. Without a sound methodology for lexical semantic analysis, the ethnographer seldom succeeds in explaining the full conceptual content of the indigenous terms.

To a large extent, these problems can be overcome by using the 'natural semantic metalanguage' (NSM) developed by Anna Wierzbicka and colleagues over many years of cross-linguistic semantic research (cf. Wierzbicka, 1992; 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1994). This metalanguage consists of a small set of simple meanings which evidence suggests can be expressed by words or bound morphemes in all languages; for example, PEOPLE, SOMEONE, SOMETHING, THIS, SAY, THINK, WANT, KNOW, GOOD,

BAD, NO. These appear to be lexical universals, that is, meanings which can be translated precisely between all languages. They combine according to a small set of universal grammatical patterns, comprising a mini-language which is an ideal tool for cross-linguistic semantics. A large body of empirical semantic research has been conducted using the NSM approach, much of it focusing on cultural 'key words', speech acts, and discourse particles – all language elements with an obvious relevance to discourse and culture.

The metalanguage of lexical universals can be used not only for semantic analysis, but also to formulate cultural rules for speaking, known as 'cultural scripts' (Wierzbicka, 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c). Such scripts can capture culture-specific attitudes, assumptions and norms in precise and culture-independent terms. To take a simple example, the script below is intended to capture a cultural norm which is characteristically (though not exclusively) Japanese.

> if something bad happens to someone because of me
> I have to say something like this to this person:
>> 'I feel something bad because of this'

This describes the often noted tendency of the Japanese to "apologize" very frequently and in a broad range of situations, but it does not rely on the English speech-act verb 'apologize'. To do this would be both ethnocentric and misleading. A culture-bound concept like 'apology' is inappropriate as a descriptive and analytical tool in the cross-cultural field. The English term would also be misleading in implying a meaning component like 'I did something bad to you'. The so-called 'Japanese apology' does not presuppose such a component. One is expected to do it whenever one's action has led to someone else suffering harm or inconvenience, no matter how indirectly. The script above is therefore more accurate, as well as being readily translatable into Japanese.

The cultural scripts approach complements the other traditions in discourse and culture studies by providing an improved method for stating 'rules for speaking'. It is equally compatible with the search for broad generalizations about discourse strategies (contrastive pragmatics) and with a focus on the particularities of individual cultures (ethnography of communication and intercultural studies). It is compatible with data-gathering techniques of any kind. We will also see that the semantic basis of the cultural scripts approach enhances our capacity to articulate the links between speech practices, on the one hand, and culture-specific values and norms, on the other.

Case Studies of Discourse in Culture

We now look into discourse phenomena in five culturally different and geographically separated societies. Among the main phenomena we will see

are different discourse preferences in relation to the expression of desires, opinions, and emotions, different conventions for participating in the work of conversation, specialized 'speech styles', and culture-specific conversational routines and genres.

In terms of linguistic texture, recurrent differences include the frequency of imperatives and questions, forms of address and vocatives, special forms of self-reference, the acceptability of overt negation, use of imprecision and non-specificity, exclamations and discourse particles, and the use of vocabulary which is 'socially marked' in various ways.

Discourse Styles: Japanese, Malay and Polish

To some extent it is possible to speak of the preferred 'discourse style' of a culture as a whole, at least if we confine ourselves to the public sphere, that is to say, to situations where the participants do not know each other very well and are being observed by others as they speak. It is common in the literature to find terms like 'indirectness' and 'restraint' applied to whole cultures in this way. In this section we firstly compare two unrelated cultures (Japanese and Malay) which are often described in this way. How similar are they really? And what is the 'cultural logic' behind the discourse preferences? We then look at a culture (Polish) which can be said to actively encourage 'directness' of expression, at least in certain respects.

For good descriptions of yet other cultural discourse styles, see Schiffrin (1984) and Tannen (1981) on contemporary American Jewish culture, Wikan (1990) on the Balinese, Scollon and Scollon (1981) on the Athabaskan, Harkins (1994) on Australian Aborigines, Matisoff (1979) on traditional East European Jewish culture, and Kochman (1981) on Black Americans.

Japanese. Japanese culture is often characterized by its suppression or distrust of verbalism. For instance, Doi notes that

> Western tradition is suffused with an emphasis on the importance of words. In Japan, this tradition does not exist. I do not mean to suggest that traditional Japanese thought makes light of words, but it seems to be more conscious of matters that words do not reach. (1988: 33)

Other writers have pointed to the Zen Buddhist emphasis on the 'inutility' of linguistic communication and to the Japanese preference for non-verbal communication in traditional pedagogy and even in mother-child interaction.

One important cultural source of verbal restraint is the Japanese ideal of enryo, usually translated as 'restraint' or 'reserve'. As pointed out by Smith 'much of the definition of a "good person" involves restraint in the expression of personal desires and opinions' (1983: 44–5). *Enryo* inhibits Japanese speakers from saying directly what they want, and it also makes it culturally inappropriate to ask others directly what they want. Mizutani and Mizutani (1987: 49) explain that except with family and close friends it

is impolite to say such things as *Nani-o tabetai-desu-ka* 'What do you want to eat?' and *Nani-ga hoshii-desu-ka* 'What do you want to have?' A guest in Japan is not constantly offered choices by an attentive host, as in the United States. It is the responsibility of the host to anticipate what will please the guest and simply to present items of food and drink, urging that they be consumed, in the standard phrase, 'without *enryo*'.

The same cultural constraint prevents people in Japan from clearly stating their preferences, even in response to direct questions. Many Japanese, when asked about their convenience, decline to state it, using expressions like those in (1a) instead. A related phenomenon is the deliberate use of imprecise numerical expressions; when wanting to buy three apples, a Japanese person would prefer to ask for 'about three', as in (1b). And when making a suggestion, open-ended expressions like *demo* and *nado* (among others) are favoured, as in (1c). (Examples from Mizutani and Mizutani, 1987: 117–18.)

(1a)   *Itsu-demo kekkoo-desu.* 'Any time will do.'
        Doko-demo kekkoo-desu. 'Any place will be all right with me.'
        Nan-demo kamaimasen. 'Anything will be all right with me.'

(1b)   *Mittsu-hodo/gurai/bakari kudasai.* 'Please give me about three.'

(1c)   *Eiga-demo mimashoo-ka?* 'How about seeing a movie or something?'

As with one's wants, so with one's thoughts and feelings. It is not only a question of when to express them, but whether one should express them at all, a fact which has led some observers to describe the Japanese self as a "guarded self". Barnlund (1975) illustrates this restraint about self-exposure with statistical data showing enormous differences between Japanese and Americans not only about the range of topics they are prepared to talk about, but also in the range of persons to whom they are prepared to reveal their thoughts and intentions. If one is to speak, it is important to premeditate in order to avoid saying anything which could hurt or offend somebody or which could embarrass the speaker him/herself.

All these observations suggest that among the cultural scripts of Japan are the following.

(2)   often it is good not to say anything to other people

(3)   it is not good to say things like this to other people:
        'I want this', 'I don't want this'
        'I think this', 'I don't think this'
      if I say things like this, someone could feel something bad

(4)   before I say something to someone
      it is good to think something like this:
        I can't say all that I think
        if I do, someone could feel something bad

Another Japanese ideal relevant to discourse preferences is *omoiyari*, identified by numerous cultural commentators as one of the key personal virtues of Japan. Lebra describes it as follows:

> *Omoiyari* refers to the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure or pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisy their wishes . . . without being told verbally. (1976: 38)

Certainly it is not hard to find evidence to support Lebra's characterization of Japanese culture as a whole as an '*omoiyari* culture' (cf. Travis, 1992). For instance, in a reader's column in the newspaper *Shikoku Shimbun,* where readers place a photo of their child and state their hopes and expectations, one of the most common is *Omoiyari no aru hitoni nattene* 'Please become a person with *omoiyari*.' In education guidelines for teachers, the first one is *Omoiyari no kokoro o taisetsuni shimashoo* 'Let's treasure the mind/heart of *omoiyari'*. In the *sempai/koohai* "senior/junior" relationship in Japanese companies, *omoiyari* plays a key role: the *sempai* is expected to be able to anticipate the needs of the *koohai* and to satisfy them, for which he or she is rewarded with absolute loyalty.

It has also been observed that the ideal of wordless empathy is carried over into everyday interaction. For example, speaking of the 'ingroup' Nakane says:

> Among fellow-members a single word would suffice for the whole sentence. The mutually sensitive response goes so far that each easily recognises the other's slightest change in behaviour and mood and is ready to act accordingly. (1970: 121)

The high sensitivity to other people's feelings is linked with the often noted tendency for the Japanese to withhold explicit displays of feeling. Honna and Hoffer (1989: 88-90) observe that Japanese who cannot control their emotions are considered 'immature as human beings'. This applies not only to negative or unsettling emotions such as anger, fear, disgust, and sorrow. Even the expression of happiness should be controlled 'so that it does not displease other people'.

These complementary attitudes can be captured in the scripts below. According to (5a) and (5b), Japanese cultural attitudes discourage one from verbalizing about one's own emotions but at the same time encourage emotional sensitivity toward other people. A final, reasonably self-explanatory, script enjoins the Japanese conversationalist both to avoid overt disagreement and to positively express agreement.

(5a)   when I feel something
         it is not good to say anything about it to another person
         if I do, this person could feel something bad
         I can't say what I feel

(5b)   it is good if I can know what another person feels
         this person doesn't have to say anything to me

6.   when someone says something to me about something
       I can't say something like this:
           'I don't think the same'
       it is good to say something like this:
           'I would say the same'

Other aspects of Japanese discourse style also make sense in the light of these cultural scripts. For instance, turn-taking follows quite different patterns from those of Anglo-American society. Japanese conversation is expected to be, to a large extent, a collective work of the interlocutors and relies heavily on 'response words', known in Japanese as *aizuchi*. Mizutani and Mizutani explain that this term is built up from *ai*, meaning 'doing something together', and *tsuchi* 'a hammer': 'Two people talking and frequently exchanging response words is thus likened to the way two swordsmiths hammer on a blade.' (1987: 18–20) In line with this cooperative image of conversation, a Japanese speaker will often leave sentences unfinished so that the listener can complete them: 'always completing one's sentences can sound as if one is refusing to let the other person participate' (1987: 27).

Finally, there are devices like the ubiquitous particle *ne*, which according to Cook (1992) 'invites the conversational partner to become an active and emotionally supportive co-conversationalist'. For instance, *ne* occurs four times in the following brief passage, sometimes in the middle of a sentence in combination with the non-finite *-te* verb form. The speaker is talking about his experiences with his host family when he travelled to the United States.

(7)   *Boku wa sono inu o ne.*   *Eeto nan dakke?*
       'I, that dog NE   Well, what (am I) talking about?

       Omae shigoto suru katte kikarete ne   *Nan no shigoto ka wakannai to*
       omotte ne
       '(I) was asked if I would work and NE (I) thought (I) would not know
       what work it would be and NE'

       so-soto ittara ne   *Sono inu no sooji ya ara-*
       when (I) went out- outside NE   cleaning of that dog and wash-'

The literal meaning conveyed by *ne* (Wierzbicka, 1994b: 73–7) can be represented as follows: 'I think you would say the same'. By constantly repeating this message, the *ne* particle contributes powerfully toward forging conversation according to Japanese cultural norms.

Malay (Bahasa Melayu) The traditional culture of the Malay people places great emphasis upon 'proper conduct' and, as an integral part of this, upon speaking in the proper way. The norms of refined (*halus*) speech in Malay somewhat resemble those of Japanese, but on closer examination

the similarities turn out to be superficial (Goddard, 1996; 1997), making the comparison a valuable exercise in our exploration of cultural differences in discourse.

Observers generally describe Malay culture as valuing 'refined restraint', cordiality, and sensitivity, and Malays themselves as courteous, easy-going, and charming. Traditionally, they are a village people, relying on fishing, market gardening and rice cultivation, though present-day Malaysia is one of the most industrialized countries in South East Asia. The Malay people have long been Muslims, though Malay traditions (*adat*) nuance their Islamic practices considerably. The culture is richly verbal, with a large stock of traditional sayings (*peribahasa*), short evocative verses (*pantun*), and narrative poems (*syair*). The importance of speech (*bahasa*) to proper conduct is attested by the fact that *bahasa* has a secondary meaning of 'courtesy, manners'.

One concept fundamental to Malay interaction is the social emotion of *malu*. Though it is usually glossed as 'ashamed', 'shy', or 'embarrassed', these translations don't convey the fact that Malays regard the capacity to feel *malu* as a social good, akin to a sense of propriety. Swift (1965: 110) describes it as 'hypersensitiveness to what other people are thinking about one' (though note the ethnocentric perspective reflected in the prefix 'hyper-'). Desire to avoid *malu* is the primary force for social cohesion – not to say conformism – in the Malay village. Two related social concepts are *maruah,* roughly, 'personal dignity', and *harga diri* 'self-esteem' (*harga* 'value, *diri* 'self'), both of which are threatened by the prospect of being disapproved of by others, that is, by *malu*. Vreeland et al., emphasizes the importance of these concepts for Malay behaviour generally:

> The social value system is predicated on the dignity of the individual and ideally all social behaviour is regulated in such a way as to preserve one's own *amour propre* and to avoid disturbing the same feelings of dignity and self-esteem in others. (1977: 117)

As in Japan, one is expected in Malay society to think before one speaks. There is a common saying to this effect: *Kalau cakap fikir lah sedikit dulu* 'If you're going to speak, think a little first.' But the underlying cultural attitude is somewhat different to that in Japan. As well as wanting to avoid the addressee feeling something bad (cf. the saying *jaga hati orang* 'mind people's feelings'), Malay verbal caution is motivated by wanting to avoid the addressee's thinking anything bad about one.

(8)   before I say something to someone, it is good to think:
          I don't want this person to feel something bad
          I don't want this person to think something bad about me

Another difference is the value Malay culture places on verbal skill. A refined (*halus*) way of speaking is universally admired, bringing credit to oneself and one's upbringing. It is a skill learnt in the home, and not necessarily connected with wealth, noble birth, or formal education. As

Asmah remarks: 'A rice farmer with only six years of primary education may be found to speak a more refined language than a clerk in a government department.' (1987: 88)

Halus speech is especially valued in formal situations, or when talking with *orang lain* 'other/different people', that is, people outside the immediate family circle. One always feels such people are liable to be watching and passing judgment, ready to disparage those without verbal finesse as *kurang ajar* 'uncouth, (lit.) under-taught'. On the other hand, a cultivated way with words wins admiration. This complex of cultural attitudes can be captured as follows.

(9)   when people hear someone saying something
         sometimes they think something like this:
             'this person knows how to say things well to other people,
             this is good'
         sometimes they think something like this:
             'this person doesn't know how to say things well to other people,
             this is bad'

Aside from courtesy and considerateness, the linguistic features of *halus* speech include use of elegant phrases instead of mundane vocabulary, careful attention to forms of personal reference (for example, avoiding first and second person pronouns), and recourse to the large inventory of traditional sayings (peribahasa) to allude to potentially sensitive matters. A soft (*lembut*, also 'gentle, tender') voice is also important.

Before leaving the topic of *halus* behaviour, we should note that it applies not just to speaking, but to a whole range of non-verbal behaviour as well: for instance, removing the shoes before entering a home, consuming at least some of whatever refreshment is offered, adopting a specific posture when passing between people who are seated, using only the right hand in eating or in passing things, avoiding any physical contact with a member of the opposite sex, pointing and beckoning in a certain way.

In general, Malay culture discourages people from directly expressing how they feel, the ideal demeanour being one of good-natured calm (*senang hati* lit. 'easy heart'). It is preferable to express feelings with more subtlety, through one's facial expressions and other actions. There is an underlying assumption that people can be relied upon to be sensitive to such non-verbal manifestations. The cultural script can be written as below.

(10)   when I feel something
         it is not good to say something like this to another person:
             'I feel like this'
         if the other person can see me, they will know how I feel

The use of 'meaningful looks' (*pandangan bermakna*) is a favoured non-verbal strategy. For instance, the verb *tenung* (cf. *bertenung* 'to divine') depicts a kind of glare used to convey irritation with someone else's behaviour, such as a child misbehaving or someone in the room clicking

pen in an irritating way. Widening the eyes *mata terbeliak* (lit. 'bulging eyes') conveys disapproval. Lowering the eyes and deliberately turning the head away (*jeling*) without speaking can convey that one is 'fed up' with someone. Pressing the lips together and protruding them slightly (*menjuihkan bibir*) conveys annoyance. Non-verbal expression is critical to the closest Malay counterpart of English 'angry', namely *marah* "offended, angry", which is associated not with scenes of 'angry words' (as sanctioned by Anglo cultural scripts of free self-expression) but with the sullen brooding performance known as *merajuk*.

Polish To round out our picture of cultural variation in discourse style, we now turn to one of the many cultures which encourage the expression of emotionality and disagreement. The central place of warmth and affection in Polish culture (as in Slavic cultures generally) is reflected in many ways in the Polish language, for instance, in the rich system of expressive derivation. Terms of endearment are widely used in everyday speech, especially to children: *ptaszku* 'dear little bird', *kotku* 'dear little cat', *słoneczko* 'dear little sun', *skarbie* 'treasure', *złotko* 'dear little gold', and so on. Personal names can have as many as ten different derivates, each implying a slightly different emotional attitude and 'emotional mood'. For example, all the following could be commonly used with respect to the same person, *Maria: Marysia, Marysieńka, Maryśka, Marysiuchna, Marychna, Maryś, Marysiulka, Marycha, Marysiątko.*

      Warm hospitality in making an offer is expressed by the use of diminutives and imperatives together. Similarly, a good host will insist on leave-taking that the guest stay longer, showering them with 'you must's and with diminutives. Requests between intimates such as husband and wife, or requests directed to children, also typically use both diminutives and imperatives. Examples follow.

(11a) *Weź jeszcze śledzika! Koniecznie!*
     'Take some more dear-little-herring (DIM). You must!

(11b) *Ale jeszcze troszeczkę! Ale koniecznie!*
     'But [stay] a little-DIM more! But you must!

(11c) *Jureczku, daj mi papierosa!*
     'George-DIM-DIM, give me a cigarette!'

(11d) *Monisieńko, jedz zupkę!*
     'Monica-DIM-DIM, eat your soup-DIM!'

Wierzbicka (1991) argues that Polish culture values uninhibited expression of both good and bad feelings, and that it accords special value to communicating good feelings towards the addressee.

(12a) I want people to know how I feel
     when I feel something good I want to say something
     when I feel something bad I want to say something

(12b) if I feel something good when I think about you,
      I want you to know it

A similar complex of attitudes concerns the free expression of opinions, endorsing extreme frankness, 'saying exactly what one thinks', even at the cost of expressing a hurtful truth.

(13a) I want people to know what I think
      when I think that someone thinks something bad,
      I want to say it to this person

(13b) if I think that you think something bad, I want to say it to you
      I don't want you to think something bad

Needless to say, such communicative norms clash with those of mainstream Anglo-American society, which encourage a balanced expression of views and the pursuit of compromise and which discourage 'emotionality' (even the word has a perjorative ring) except in exceptional circumstances. The following comments come from the American writer Eva Hoffman, whose family migrated from Poland and settled in North America when she was a girl. The Polish teenager soon made certain discoveries.

> I learnt that certain kinds of truth are impolite. One shouldn't criticise the person one is with, at least not directly. You shouldn't say 'You are wrong about that' though you might say, 'On the other hand, there is that to consider'. You shouldn't say, 'This doesn't look good on you', though you may say, 'I like you better in that other outfit'. (Hoffman, 1989: 146)

Consistent with Polish cultural values, the Polish language contains a large number of discourse particles (such as *ależ skądże* and *przecież*) and exclamatory phrases (such as *ależ skądże*, *skądże znowu*, and *cóż znowu*) expressing disagreement, exasperation, and impatience with the views expressed by one's interlocutor. For instance, *ależ* signals violent disagreement and is often used in combination with a person's name, showing exasperation at the addressee's wrongness and dumbness. The particle *skądże* means something like: 'Where did you get such an idea from?! You are wrong!' The two are often combined, intensifying the message even further. The paraphrase in (14) gives some idea of the overall effect. Notice the presence of the component: 'I feel something bad when I hear you say this'.

(14) *Ależ*   *skądże!*
      but-EMPH   where-from-EMPH

      'But (how can you say that)!
      Where did you get such an idea from?
      You are wrong
      I feel something bad when I hear you say that'

It should be evident from this comparison of Japanese, Malay, and Polish that discourse preferences vary widely from culture to culture. What is an ordinary style in one culture may seem quite shocking and offensive, or

quite boring and colourless, from the standpoint of another. To understand such cultural variation it is necessary to go below the surface of the speech patterns themselves and uncover the values and norms which explain them. It must not be forgotten that speech patterns which are superficially similar (for instance, a preference for 'verbal restraint') may spring from different cultural values and be associated with different social meanings in different cultural settings. To bring these connections to light, and even to describe the speech patterns themselves without ethnocentric distortion, requires careful attention to the metalanguage of description and analysis.

Speech Styles in Traditional Yankunytjatjara Society

In this section we look at two specialized and very different 'speech styles' traditionally used by the Yankunytjatjara people of Central Australia. An 'oblique' style *tjalpawangkanyi* (*wangkanyi* 'talk') is used between people in highly constrained relationships, while boisterous 'joking' styles are used by people whose kinship standing implies complete mutual acceptance and a lack of any power relationships.

The Yankunytjatjara are Australian Aborigines whose traditional territory includes Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the area to the south-east of this well-known symbol of Australia. It is one of the many dialects of the far-flung Western Desert Language which is spoken over a vast area of the arid western interior of Australia (Goddard, 1986; 1992a; 1992b). The traditional economy was one of hunting and gathering, with small bands of people ranging widely around their territory. Like the other Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Yankunytjatjara have an intimate knowledge of the land and profound religious connections with it. Their society is small and kin-based; in the traditional lifestyle one would seldom encounter a complete stranger. Everyone is regarded as having some *walytja* ('kin') relationship to everyone else, through a system which extends the terms applying within the close family (such as *mama* 'father', *ngunytju* 'mother', *katja* 'son', *untal* 'daughter', *kami* 'grandmother', *tjamu* 'grandfather') to take in the whole social universe (a so-called classifactory kin system).

First let's see a few examples of ordinary, relaxed Yankunytjatjara speech between people who know each other well. If one person has come to the other's camp hoping to be given something to eat, the request may be made as in (15a). If the two are out driving through the country and one wants the other to stop to gather some firewood, this can be conveyed as in (15b). If one calls at the other's camp wanting to find a third person who lives there, the information could be sought as in (15c).

(15a) *Mai nyuntumpa ngarinyi? Ngayulu mai wiya.*
      food yours   liePRES   I   food NEG

      'Any food of yours lying around? I don't have any food.'

(15b) *Ngayulu waru wiya. Nyinatjura ka-na waru urara   utitjura.*
      I   wood NEG stopIMP   and-I wood gatherSERIAL loadIMP

     'I haven't got any firewood. Stop and I'll load some on.'

(15c) *Tjilpinya   nyinanyi?*
      old manNAME   sitPRES

     'Is the old man around?'

Corresponding 'oblique speech style' *tjalpawangkanyi* versions are shown in (16). These have a distinctive vocal delivery (softer, slower, and at a higher pitch than usual) and an exaggerated rising intonation, as if to give the impression that the speaker is just musing aloud.

16a.   *Aya, anymatjara kutu-na. Mai-nti   wampa   ngarinyi?*
     Oh   hungry   really-I food-maybe don't know liePRES

     'Oh, I'm so hungry. I wonder if there might be any food around?'

16b.   *Munta, waru-mpa-l.   Nguwan-ampa-na   mana-nyi.*
     oh   wood-INTEREST-I see almost-INTEREST-I   getPRES

     'Oh, some firewood, I see. I'd rather like to get some.'

16c.   *Munta, panya   paluru-nti   nyanga-kutu?*
     oh   that one   DEF-maybe   this-towards

     'Oh, could that one be around here somewhere?'

Direct references to the addressee are carefully avoided in *tjalpawangkanyi*, as are imperatives and vocatives. Overt expressions of denial, refusal, or disagreement are also scrupulously avoided. The particles *-nti* 'maybe', *munta* 'oh, sorry', *wampa* 'don't know', and *wanyu* 'just let' are sprinkled through sentences, expressing uncertainty, hesitation, and minimization. Also common is the particle *-mpa* whose full meaning is something like 'one could say more about this'; it acts as a linguistic marker of insinuation or implication. Another striking feature, reported also of respectful speech styles in many other places, is generality of reference: speakers avoid using specific forms which unambiguously indicate a person, place or thing, preferring vague locutions like *panya paluru* 'that one (person)' and *nyangakutu* 'around here', as in (16c).

    To understand the social meaning of *tjalpawangkanyi* calls for a knowledge of Yankunytjatjara culture and, in particular, of the socio-emotional concept *kunta*. This is usually glossed in bilingual dictionaries as 'shame', 'embarrassment', or 'respect', but *kunta* does not correspond precisely to any of these English concepts. Essentially, it involves a sense of social difference, discomfort with being in the other person's presence, and the

desire to avoid acting in any way which might cause the other person to think anything unfavourable about one.

The strongest *ku<u>nt</u>a* is evoked by the *uma<u>r</u>i* ('avoidance') relationship between a man and his father-in-law and mother-in-law, which has its basis in secret male rituals whereby a youth becomes an initiated man. Though this is a relationship of the highest respect, the individuals involved must strictly avoid personal contact. One must not speak to an *uma<u>r</u>i*; nor can one touch, sit near, or even look directly at him or her. Less severe *ku<u>nt</u>a* is felt in the presence of the siblings or cousins of *uma<u>r</u>i*, and in other relationships where propriety is important, for instance, between brother- and sister-in-law *inkani*, co-parents-in-law *inkilyi*, and unmarried cousins of the opposite sex *nyarumpa*. These are the very relationships for which *tjalpawangkanyi* is appropriate. *Tjalpawangkanyi*, in other words, can be seen both as a kind of partial avoidance and a way of giving voice to *ku<u>nt</u>a*.

By using the *tjalpawangkanyi* style, a speaker expresses the social messages summarised in (17a). Notice that these are framed in the 'third person', in accordance with the perspective of *tjalpawangkanyi* itself. Example (17b) summarizes some of the stylistic rules the speaker attempts to follow.

(17a) this person is not someone like me
     I don't want this person to think anything bad about me
     I don't want to be near this person
     I don't want to say anything to this person
     if I have to say something, I have to think how to say it

(17b) it is not good to say things like these to someone like this:
     'this person', 'this place', 'this thing'
     'I don't want this', 'I don't think the same'
     'I want you to do something', 'I want you to say something'

At the other end of the spectrum from *tjalpawanganyi* are *inka-inkangku wangkanyi* 'talking in fun', *wangkara inkanyi* 'joking around', *wangkara inkatjinga<u>n</u>i* 'teasing talk', and *warkira inkatjinga<u>n</u>i* 'teasing swearing'. These joking styles, largely reserved for kin whose relationship is genealogically distant, bend the normal conventions of interaction, or, in more extreme cases, flaunt or even parody them. Yankunytjatjara people find this a rich source of amusement.

Within this domain of 'fun-talk' flourish all the linguistic forms excluded from *tjalpawangkanyi* – including imperatives, vocatives, contradiction, exclamations, and sensitive vocabulary items. Example (18a) illustrates a joking approach for the loan of some sugar; notice how the person positively flaunts his personal wishes. In the response, given in (18b), there is mock hostility. Banter like this might continue for some time before the requester gets the sugar, if he ever does.

(18a) A: *Awai! Tjukaku-na ngalya-yanu. Tjuka-tja ngalya-yuwa!*
          hey   sugarPURP-I this way-came sugar-me this way-giveIMP

          'Hey! I came here for sugar. Give me some sugar!'

(18b) B: *Tjuka wanyu nyuntu yaalara payamilara nyangangka tjunu?*
          sugar just let you   when   buySERIAL here   putPAST

          'Just when did you ever buy any sugar and bring (put) it here?'

In joking styles the participants delight in making the most of any chance to playfully defy, challenge, or demean each other. The exchange in (19) illustrates good-natured teasing *inkatjingani*, in which the nominally senior kin chides or insults the junior, generating an amusing parry and thrust. The first speaker is an uncle agreeing to loan his nephew an axe.

(19a) A: *Uwa, kati,   punytjulwiyangku kati!*
          yes   takeIMP bluntNEG.ERG   takeIMP

          'OK take it, but don't blunt it!'

(19b) B: *Wati, nyaaku-na tjitjingku palku   punytjanma? Yuwa-ni*
          man   why-I   childERG not really bluntPOT   giveIMP-me
          ka-na   kati!
          and-I   takeIMP

          'Man, why would I blunt it as if I were a child? Give (it to) me, and I'll be off with it.'

Example (20) is a routine exchange between a pair of distant male cousins (nominally older and younger brother, *kuta* and *malany*, respectively) who have become *inkankara* 'joking partners'. Similar joking occurs between distant female cousins. The sexual innuendo and *risqué* comments consciously 'play' with kin-role expectations. Normally, older brothers and sisters are expected to monitor and regulate any sexual misbehaviour by their juniors.

20a. A: *Wati, nyangangi-na-nta! Wati, nyaa manti-n   yanu?*
          man seePAST.IMPF-I-you man what probably-you goPAST
          Kulakula-mpa,   kungka-kutu-mpa.
          randy-INTEREST woman-towards-INTEREST

          'Man, I've been watching you. Man, what would you've been after? Randy was it? Off to see a woman, was it?'

20b. B: *Wiya, wati ngayulu kungka wiya! Wantinyi-na   ngayulu,*
          no   man I   woman NEG   leave alonePRES-I I
          palu   nyuntu panya-nku watjanma, kuta,
          but of course you   ANAPH-REFL sayPOT   senior brother
          wati panya kurangku.
          man ANAPH badERG

'No man, I don't have any woman! I leave them alone, I do.
But of course you could be talking to yourself, big brother,
(you) bad one.'

Joking can also involve mock abuse with both mild and sexually explicit
epithets, e.g. *mamu* 'monster' and *kaḻutjanu* 'dickhead' (related to *kaḻu*
'prick'). But even when the language becomes blatantly obscene, bystanders
are far from offended. They just enjoy a good laugh.

Joking relationships, which exist in many societies in Aboriginal
Australia (Thompson 1935), are usually said to embody 'solidarity',
'intimacy', or the like, but the rich social meanings involved cannot really
be summed up in a few words. (21a) and (21b) state the social
assumptions and stylistic conventions, respectively, of light-hearted speech
in Yankunytjatjara.

(21a) I know you will not think anything bad about me
       I don't have to think how to say things to you

(21b) I can say things like this to you:
         'I don't want this', 'I don't think the same'
       I can say things like this about you:
         'you are bad', 'you do bad things'
       you can say the same things to me
       when we say things like this to each other, we feel something good

Yankunytjatjara *tjalpawangkanyi* plays much the same social role as the
specialized 'avoidance vocabularies' found in other Australian Aboriginal
languages such as Dyirbal (Dixon, 1972) and Guugu-Yimidhirr (Haviland,
1979). Good descriptions of speech styles in other societies can be found
in Grobsmith (1979) on the Lakota, Albert (1972) on the Burundi, and
Keenan (1974) on Malagasy.

Routines and Genres

So far we have looked at cultural variation in discourse at a fairly broad
level of description. In this section we look at two discourse phenomena
which are much more specific in their scope, namely, linguistic routines
and speech genres.

Linguistic routines in Ewe Linguistic routines are fixed, formulaic utter-
ances or sequences of utterances used in standardised communicative
situations, for example, greetings and partings as well as (to use potentially
misleading English labels) thanks, excuses, condolences, compliments,
jokes, curses, small-talk, and so on. They may range in size from a single
word to lengthy interchanges. The overall meaning of a routine cannot be
'read off' from the literal meaning of the individual words involved; to use

a familiar example, *How do you do?* is not a question about health. In general, routines are highly culture-specific both in form and in the way they relate to the sociocultural context. To illustrate, we will compare some fixed expressions in English and Ewe (Ghana and Togo, West Africa).

In many societies, when one realizes that something good has happened to another person, it is usual to say something expressing one's own good feelings at the news. In English, for instance, one would be expected to say *Congratulations!* to someone who has had a baby and *Well done!* (or something similar) to someone who has won an important and difficult contest. Both expressions imply that the addressee is responsible to some extent for the happy event. In Ewe, appropriate things to say in such situations are listed in (22a) and (22b). These data, and the analysis which follows, are from Ameka (1987).

22a. *Máwú sẽ́ ŋú!*   *Tɔgbéwó sẽ́ ŋú!*   *ŋúwò núwó sẽ́ ŋú!*
      'God is strong'   'Ancestors are strong!' 'Beings around you are
                                                  strong!'

22b. *Máwú wɔ dɔ́!*   *Tɔgbéwó wɔ dɔ́!*   *ŋúwò núwó wɔ dɔ́!*
      God has worked!'   'Ancestors have worked' 'Beings   around   you
                                                  have worked!'

These expressions reflect the religious belief system of the Ewe people (and many other African peoples), which holds that every aspect of the universe is permeated by the influence of the Supreme Being *Máwú* and other supernatural beings. As Ameka says: 'for the Ewes, anything that happens to you is the work ultimately of God who may work in diverse ways through the ancestors or other spirits and divinities'(1987: 308).

Ewe cultural values explain why the formulae for acknowledging good events are not explicitly focused on the individuals concerned. Even so, as with the comparable English expressions, the interpersonal function is to register my assumption that you are pleased by what has happened and to display my own happiness at the outcome. Similarly, it is recognised by all concerned that the particular words used comprise a set utterance, appropriate for such occasions. With all this in mind, the meaning of the Ewe fixed expression *Máwú sẽ́ ŋú!* 'God is strong' can be formulated as follows (adapted from Ameka 1987).

(23) *Máwú sẽ́ ŋú!*
       I now know this: something good happened to you
       I think you feel something good because it happened
       I feel something good because of this
       I want you to know this
       everyone knows good things like this don't happen to people
          if a being of another kind does not do something

because of all this I say:
  "God is strong" (God can do many things, people can't do these things)
everyone knows it is good if people say these words when something good happens

This formulation is consistent with the range of situations in which such Ewe expressions are appropriate. For example, they are not used at weddings, since getting married is not viewed by the Ewe as a good thing which happens to a person but as the beginning of a process aimed at something else, namely, procreation. On the other hand, they are appropriate for someone who has come through a dangerous situation, as when someone gets out of hospital.

Another significant cultural dimension emerges when we consider appropriate responses. An expected English response to congratulation is *Thank you!,* which focuses on what is happening between the speaker and addressee. In contrast, the Ewe responses shown in (24) portray the communality of the happy event.

(24) *Yoo, miawóé dó gbe ɖá!*   *Yoo, miatɔwó hã̌!*
      'OK, you all have prayed!'   'OK, yours (pl.) too!'

Such responses register the speaker's appreciation of the religious efforts or ancestor spirits of the addressee and of the whole community.

Another simple example of a linguistic routine which can only be understood in cultural terms is the Ewe exchange in (25).

(25) Speaker A: *Mia (ló)!*   Speaker B: *Asíé!*
                  'The left hand!'   'It is a hand'

The basis for this routine is the extreme social prohibition on using the left hand in social interaction. In Ewe society, as in many other African societies, one cannot pass an object to a person using one's left hand, nor may one point at or wave to another person with it. The reason is that this hand is reserved almost exclusively for the performance of ablutions. Using the 'dirty' hand in social intercourse normally implies an insult. Nevertheless, it is recognised that at one time or another, one might not be able to use the right hand to do everything. In such situations, it is permissible to use the left, but only after notifying the interlocutor and, so to speak, gaining an indemnity to violate the norm, as in (25).

It should be clear that the apparent simplicity of linguistic routines is deceptive. A proper communicative understanding of a routine involves knowing not only the words, but the cultural assumptions at work in daily interaction. It can even be argued that because of their standardized nature and very high frequency, routines are a good place to begin a study of cultural aspects of discourse. A number of interesting descriptions of linguistic routines can be found in Coulmas (1981).

Polish speech genres Bakhtin (1986: 81) defined speech genres as 'relatively stable and normative forms of the utterance', and stressed that the repertoire of genres available to a speech community changes according to social and cultural conditions. This important point can be readily illustrated with the Polish genres of the *kawał* and the *podanie*.

The *kawał* (plural *kawały*) is, roughly speaking, a kind of 'conspiratorial joke'. Most of them are political, expressing national solidarity *vis-á-vis* foreign powers: the Nazi occupation during World War II, the Soviet-imposed communist regime in post-war Poland, the foreign partitioning powers in the nineteenth century.

Kawały circulate widely, the anonymous creations of an oral culture. One values a *kawały* not for its ingenuity or sophistication (as one does *dowcipy* 'witty jokes'), but for the feeling it gives of belonging to an ingroup. The implication is: I can tell you, but there are people who I couldn't tell. Like English 'jokes', however, *kawały* are intended to promote pleasant togetherness, that is, they are meant to make the speaker and the addressee feel good together. Normally, a *kawał* requires some kind of introduction ('Do you know this *kawał*?'), reflecting the assumption that since they circulate so widely this one may already be known to the addressee.

The example in (26) comes from the period in 1981 when martial law had been imposed in an effort to suppress the Solidarity movement. Every new demonstration, strike or protest was ascribed to 'Solidarity extremists'. As with this example, a *kawał* always has an implicit and amusing 'point' which has to be grasped by the addressee.

(26)   The 'TV Dictionary':
           2 Poles: an illegal gathering
           3 Poles: an illegal demonstration
      10 million Poles: a handful of extremists

A semantic analysis of the meaning of the Polish genre term *kawał* would include the following components, some shared with the English genre 'joke' and others not.

(27)   I want to say something to you that many people say to each other
       I say it because I want you to laugh
       when I say it I want you to think of something that I don't say
       when you think of this you will laugh
       we will both feel something good because of this
       I can say this to you because we think the same about things like this

Our second example of a Polish genre is the *podanie*, which was one of the central written genres of communist Poland. It is a special, written communication between an ordinary person and the 'authorities', in which the author asks for favours and presents him or herself as dependent on their goodwill. Needless to say, the very existence of this genre reflects the dominance over ordinary people of a communist bureaucracy notorious for

the arbitrariness of its decisions. Hardly any aspect of people's lives in communist Poland, no matter how trivial, could be conducted without the need to write *podanie* – and to wait for the response, hoping that it might be benevolent. For example, a university student asking for an extension of the deadline for submitting a thesis, or an employee asking for permission to take annual leave at a particular time, submitted a *podanie*.

In Anglo-Saxon society these intentions might be pursued by way of a 'letter' or an 'application'. But the nearest Polish equivalent to 'letter', namely, *list*, could never be used to refer to a formal petition to an institution. And there is no Polish equivalent to the English 'application', which presupposes a certain standard situation with clear guidelines to be followed by both the institution and the applicant. The *podanie* typically starts with such phrases as *Uprzejmie proszę* ('I ask politely') or *Niniejszym zwracam się z uprzejmą prośbą* ('hereby I address you politely to request a favour'), which would be quite out of place in an 'application'.

The supplicant aspects of the Polish *podanie* can be captured in the following semantic formula:

(28)   *podanie*
      I say: I want something to happen to me
      I know it cannot happen if you don't say you want it to happen
      I say this because I want you to say you want it to happen
      I don't know if you will
      I know many people say things like this to you
      I know you don't have to do what people want you to do

Clearly, the *kawał* and the *podanie* are, or rather were, forms of discourse well-suited to the particular social and cultural conditions of communist Poland.

Other interesting genre studies include Abrahams (1974) on Black American rapping and capping, Basso (1979) on a form of satirical joking among the Apache, and Sherzer (1974) on Cuna chanting and speech-making.

Conclusions

Even from these five unrelated cultures (Japanese, Malay, Polish, Yankunytjatjara, Ewe), it is possible to draw out some conclusions about major dimensions of variation in discourse style, about the kinds of evidence which may help establish relevant cultural values and attitudes, and about methodological pitfalls involved in such research.

In terms of attitudes to the sheer quantity of words, there may be a preference for verbose as opposed to terse forms of expression, or even a preference for non-verbal expression. The cultural meaning of silence varies widely.

People everywhere adjust their speech according to how they view those they are speaking with, and although some dimensions of social identity (such as gender and age) are of near-universal relevance, the social construals involved vary enormously. In some societies, such as Yankunytjatjara, kin and ritual relationships are crucial. In Japan, the main social dimensions determining discourse style are 'in-group' vs. 'out-group' and status differences between interlocutors. In Malay society, the most important dimension is whether the individuals belong to the same household. In other places, clan, ethnicity, caste, or rank determine different discourse styles.

At the functional or illocutionary level of discourse, important parameters of variation include how often and in what fashion the speaker expresses his or her own wants, thoughts, and feelings, how often and in what fashion the speaker attempts to influence the interlocutor's wants, thoughts, and feelings, whether or not it is alright to draw attention to differences between speaker and interlocutor, and the place of spontaneous as opposed to regulated expression. Cultures also differ markedly in their conventions for how people participate in the work of conversation, for example by turn-taking, overlapping, or even joint construction of sentences, and in their range of linguistic routines.

One notable generalization is that there is almost always a correlation between patterns of verbal behaviour and patterns of non-verbal behaviour. Thus, where broad cultural preferences or the conventions of a specific speech style inhibit people from expressing interpersonal emotions, we can expect the interlocutors to 'keep their distance' from one another physically as well, for instance, to refrain from touching or directly looking at one another. Conversely, when there is little or no verbal etiquette at work more intimate and exuberant physical behaviour can be expected.

We have seen that many different kinds of evidence can be used to argue for cultural values and attitudes which can help make sense of discourse phenomena. These include semantic analysis of cultural 'key words', the proverbs and other embodiments of the conventional wisdom of a culture, common socialisation routines, direct or indirect elicitation of speakers' attitudes, and even the judicious use of literature.

The biggest methodological problem in discourse and culture studies is the need to find a framework for comparing discourse preferences and cultural values with precision, and one which is resistant, so far as possible, to ethnocentrism. The common practice of using labels such as 'indirectness', 'politeness', 'respect', and 'solidarity', as an informal metalanguage for cross-cultural comparison, cannot really meet this need. A promising approach illustrated in this chapter is the use of cultural scripts written in lexical universals. This provides a framework in which findings from anthropological linguistics, contrastive pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies can be integrated and synthesized. At the same time, the semantic basis of the scripts approach makes it possible to draw links between speech practices, on the one hand, and cultural values and

emotions, on the other, thereby facilitating the development of a genuinely cross-cultural pragmatics.

Recommended Reading

Duranti (1988): Surveys key concepts in the ethnography of speaking (ES), such as communicative competence, context, speech community, speech event and speech act. Considers the relationship of ES to sociolinguistics and to conversational analysis.

Gumperz and Hymes, (1986): A classic collection originally published in 1972. It consists of 19 empirical studies on a variety of European and non-European languages, and an influential introduction by John Gumperz. Though the dominant approach is ethnographic, other influences represented include ethnomethodology, sociology of language, and cognitive anthropology.

Kochman (1981): A study of clashes between the cultural communicative styles of African Americans and middle-class Anglo-Americans. Focuses on black speech acts and events such as argument, cursing, boasting, rapping, sounding and loud-talking.

Saville-Troike (1989): A broad-ranging textbook. Aside from introductory material, major chapters focus on varieties of language, ethnographic analysis of communicative events, attitudes to language use, and on the acquisition of communicative competence.

Tannen (1986): A popular exposition of linguistic analysis of conversational style, aiming to help the ordinary reader understand and improve communication in private and public life.

Wierzbicka (1991): A major collection of studies showing how the 'natural semantic metalanguage' approach can help achieve a universal, language-independent perspective on communicative styles and cultural norms. Describes discourse phenomena in many languages including Italian, Russian, Polish, Japanese, Chinese, and Hebrew, as well as different varieties of English.

Notes

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