Western Journal of Communication, 67(3) (Summer 2003), 315–334

A Family of Strangers: Metaphors of Connection and Separation in the Gesher Theatre in Israel

Olga Gershenson
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts, Bridgewater State College

Incorporating critical analysis into ethnography of communication theory and method, this study explores the metaphorical speech in Gesher, a bilingual and bicultural theatre, founded by Soviet immigrants in Israel. Conceptualizing metaphors as a culturally informed way of communication, the analysis offers insights into the system of cultural meanings active in the theatre. The metaphors used on site are organized along the semantic axis of connection-separation. Family metaphors emphasize connection, thereby contributing to cohesion among otherwise culturally and generationally diverse troupe members. However, other metaphors reflect alienation and ambivalence within the troupe, as well as isolation of the troupe from the larger cultural context in Israel.

The Gesher Theatre: Cultural Context

GESHER, THE BILINGUAL Russian-Hebrew theatre, appeared on the Israeli cultural scene at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, Israeli society was coping with an influx of mass migration from the collapsing Soviet Union. This migration changed Israeli society by diversifying the public sphere and hybridizing the private sphere, while calling into question hegemonic culture and language politics. The cultural phenomenon of the Gesher theatre exemplified these changes. Founded by a group of Soviet immigrants as a Russian-Jewish theatre in Israel in 1990, Gesher performed at first only in Russian. But already by 1992 Gesher was forced to switch to Hebrew since Israeli audiences and critics were not interested in shows with simultaneous translations. This transition was painful and arduous; most of the actors were new immigrants who did not know Hebrew and so had to memorize their parts by heart without any comprehension. This tremendous work was done while the company survived on a shoe-string budget, constantly struggling for public funding. Notwithstanding these great difficulties, Gesher proved to be both a box-

OLGA GERSHENSON, Department of Communication Studies and Theatre Arts, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA 02325. Telephone: 508.531.1348. Email: olenka@comm.umass.edu

office and a critical success, and it came to receive the recognition of the national and international theatre communities.

The Gesher troupe is comprised of Soviet immigrants and veteran Israelis.[1] In their everyday communication the troupe members use Russian, Hebrew, and English, sometimes with the help of a translator. Most of Gesher's shows today are performed in Hebrew, and only a few in Russian. However, in the Israeli public sphere Gesher is still perceived as a "Russian" rather than "Israeli" theatre. Thus Gesher is simultaneously inside and outside of mainstream Israeli culture. This ambiguous position complicates even further the multifarious dynamics within the multilingual and culturally diverse company. All this makes the Gesher community an interesting focal point for the study of cultural communication.

Theoretical Background

Ethnography of Communication and Critical Response. The research tradition of ethnography of communication (EC) is guided by the theoretical assumption that communication and culture are interconnected. Communication is conceptualized as "something radically cultural, as a patterning of practices among particular people in a particular place" (Carbaugh, 1995, p. 269). This cultural communication, according to EC theory, serves a communal function, i.e. links "individuals into communities of shared identity" (Philipsen, 1989, p. 79).

This theoretical claim is a point of controversy between EC and critical researchers who oppose it as theoretically naive and politically conservative[2] (Fiske, 1990, 1991; Taylor & Trujillo, 2000). The EC critics claim that the concept of communal function easily translates into the consensus model of communication that fails to account for social difference and conflict, and conceptualizes communication as a production of a uniform, homogeneous system of meaning. In response to this criticism, Carbaugh explains that EC views the communication of culture as "the interactional production of the sometimes paradoxical, sometimes contradictory, sometimes conflictual, polysemic, complex, multistranded system which alerts people to their common life" (1991, p. 338). Carbaugh emphasizes that the fact that cultural communication allows for the communal life does not eliminate the emergence of discordant meanings and conflicts. Thus, Carbaugh's response seemingly resolves the dispute between EC and cultural studies.

However, the problem arises because this view of cultural communication as contradictory and conflictual is not projected on the actual EC research. According to the EC research tradition, the polyphony of voices must be observed and reported "objectively" (Philipsen, 1991), without critical involvement with the site. Arguing

with this proposition, West asserts that "ALL discourses are enacted within relations of power" (1993, p. 213); therefore, ethnographic research has to examine the existing power relations at the site in which both participants and researcher are enmeshed. He concludes that it is important for ethnography to "focus on discourse as politically created" (West, 1993, p. 213). Responding to this criticism, I adopt an understanding of culture in which systems of meanings, comprised of multiple voices, some affirming and some resisting each other, are created and recreated in the "contact zone" where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). This hybrid outlook on culture and communication is especially important in approaching Gesher's discourse, woven from the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse company members. Therefore, in addition to the questions of cultural meanings, traditional for EC, I address the questions of power relations and local ideologies in Gesher.

The Theory of Metaphor. Metaphorical speech constituted an important part of the everyday discourse in Gesher company. Therefore, theory of metaphor is useful in this research. A large body of literature has been dedicated to the study of metaphor within the rhetorical tradition. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), I conceptualize metaphor as a culturally informed way of communication that involves thinking of one concept in terms of another, and that serves as a situational enactment of cultural forms and meanings. Typically, the metaphorical process "involves understanding less concrete experiences in terms of more concrete and more highly structured experiences" (1980, p. 486). Thus, metaphor draws together two domains, one less concrete and another more concrete. However, these domains have to share enough features in common to make metaphor possible: "the interpretation of a metaphor is ultimately grounded in an ability to form a concept . . . which serves to establish an equivalence between the metaphor's main constituents" (Basso, 1990, p. 57). Therefore, a metaphor can be analyzed in terms of the domains that constitute it and the commonality of their features. As Lakoff and Johnson show, the functioning of a metaphor results in highlighting some features of the domain and hiding others. Therefore, I analyze the metaphorical domains and compare their features.

Lakoff and Johnson also point to systematicity as an important aspect of a metaphor. Therefore, only metaphors that the Gesher troupe members used systematically enter the analysis of metaphorical domains and their features.

Basso (1990) notes that this ability of metaphor to impose order and meaning on the social world is deeply cultural. Metaphors reflect the local system of cultural symbols and meanings. Deetz and Mumby (1985) add that metaphors are not only cultural but also

ideological constructs: "Metaphor structures are appropriated ideologically and thus function to reproduce a certain ideology, serving particular, sectional interests" (1985, p. 376). By establishing a system of shared meanings, dominant metaphors "diminish the possibility of challenges to the existing meaning structures" (1985, p. 382), and thus have a conservative influence. Thus dominant metaphors can become "a prisonhouse of language" (Deetz, 1986, p. 172), which is shattered or destroyed only through emergence of "an alternative and noncoherent metaphoric structuring" (Deetz and Mumby, 1985, p. 382). Following the EC approach and taking into account its criticism, in this essay I am going to address both the questions of cultural meanings and the ideological functions of metaphor in Gesher, and connect them to the discussion of the communal function of communication.

Research Questions

The foregoing review of literature directs attention to the use of metaphor in the Gesher speech community. Four research questions specify the focus of the study. The first two questions are as follows:

RQ1: Which metaphors are active in the Gesher speech community and what are their interrelations?

RQ2: How do these metaphors function, that is, what are the domains that constitute the metaphors, and what are their features?

The diverse composition of the Gesher troupe suggests a third question concerning the way metaphors function to negotiate cultural tensions and differences operating both within the troupe and in the larger context:

RQ3: What are the cultural meanings and ideological functions of metaphors for the different social and cultural groups within the company?

And finally, the largest theoretical concern that emerges from literature review deals with the role of metaphorical speech in bringing the culturally and generationally diverse group of people (who literally do not have a common language) to be a cohesive ensemble. In terms of EC, and using Philipsen's (1989) terms, the question is:

RQ4: How does cultural communication within Gesher fulfill "a communal function"?

Methods

The data for this study comes from my fieldwork at the Gesher theatre in Tel Aviv (Israel), and in London (UK) in the summer of 1999. The primary data is derived from participatory observation (398 hours) and interviews (14 hours). In the course of participatory observation during rehearsals, breaks, tours, parties, and performances I took the fieldnotes (290 pages handwritten single-space and 20 pages typed

single-space). Whenever possible I wrote down entire conversations, word by word. Otherwise, I jotted the key-words during a conversation, and immediately after that (within half an hour) wrote it down entirely. In these notes, I focused on the descriptive as well as the interpretive and reflexive aspects of the fieldwork.

The interviews with actors and staff members were semi-structured (see Appendix for sample questions). I audiotaped and later, when the fieldwork was over, transcribed the interviews (82 pages handwritten single-space). In addition, I wanted to find out whether company structures and relationships between the troupe members at Gesher were characteristic of Russian theatre and could be interpreted within its traditions. Therefore, I conducted an e-mail interview with O.S. Loevsky, an established theatre figure in Russia, who throughout his career worked with various theatre companies, and thus was an authority on the history and practice of Russian theatre.

In addition to the primary data, I used specific instances of secondhand quotes that I conceptualized as part of the company discourse. This evidence enhanced my access to the site that was contingent on my personal relationships with the participants and on their willingness to volunteer. My own identity (a young female academic, a Russian-Israeli living in the US) was instrumental for the study, in respect to both my interaction with the participants in the field and my data analysis. My identity eased my acceptance with some troupe members, and made it difficult with some others. Thus, despite being a native Russian speaker, I was culturally removed from the older Russian-born actors, who perceived me as a "foreigner." They also disapproved of my ethnographic research because they thought that I should focus on the analysis of Gesher's productions instead of the company's life. As a result, these actors were somewhat reluctant to participate. On the contrary, other actors and staff members (especially Israelis and Russian-Israelis) found more commonality in our cultural and academic background. They supported my research, were eager to participate, and sometimes even used the interviews as an opportunity for safe venting (as they knew that I would alter their names in my analysis).

I analyzed the data in its original language (Russian or Hebrew), and translated the excerpts quoted throughout this essay into English. The analysis included three major stages. First, from the large body of primary data I selected 78 episodes that involved metaphorical speech referring to the social relationships of the Gesher troupe members. Second, each episode was coded according to the SPEAKING mnemonic (Hymes, 1972), paying especially careful attention to the categories of Setting (a description of physical environment, time, and place of interaction), Participants (who are present during an interaction), Ends (goals and outcomes of interaction), Act Sequence (the

order in which things occur), and Key (the tone and the spirit of an interaction).

Third, out of these episodes, I selected 31 metaphors for analysis based on the theory of metaphor discussed above. In order to map metaphor usage at Gesher, I described the metaphorical domains and the features that they hold in common. Then, I compared domain features highlighted and hidden by the metaphors. Finally, synthesizing the analysis of metaphors with the close reading of a situation through the SPEAKING mnemonic, I arrived at the cultural meaning of the metaphors and their ideological functions in respect to different cultural, generational, and status sub-groups of Gesher members.

The Evolution of Metaphor in the Gesher Speech Community

In the following section I take the opportunity to let my participants "speak" to the readers in order to introduce metaphors active in the Gesher speech community. The answers to my research questions will emerge gradually through the voices of my participants.

In the conversations and interviews, many company members described the life of the troupe using family metaphors. This finding was not entirely surprising. Indeed, it is common for members of a close-knit organization to see themselves as a family (Deetz, 1986). What was interesting, though, was that participants expressed different attitudes to the "family," ranging from admiration to resentment. Moreover, family was not the only systematic metaphor in Gesher.

Family Aficionados. In my data I found 22 family or family-like metaphors. It seemed, at first, that most company members admired the familial life style of the company. For instance, Amy, a young Israeli actor who joined the main troupe a few years ago and since then has become one of the leading actors, expressed deep emotional involvement with the Gesher company:

> I have some sort of subconscious attraction, some sort of connectedness to Russianness . . . something that, sort of, belongs to the other generation . . . I come from a half-Turkish family, and there is something in the family that is deeply engraved in my memory. I am longing for it not in the sense that I want it again, but it's like a part of me . . . this sensation that you are going to your kin people, these family feasts, my father was this kind of man—very strong, very warm, but tough as well, and something in Russianness is sort of familiar to me, you see? To come to the Israeli theatre—it is ordinary, it's not for real, you don't really feel attached to something, you are doing something here, something there, it's Israel, it's like I know myself to be. To come to Gesher is like to come back to this family, you know, to this once upon a time, and for me it is very precious, it's my roots. (Interview, July 15, 1999).

By drawing an analogy between Gesher and her *own* family, Amy established a cultural and temporal connection: she brought together Turkishness and Russianness, as well as her childhood and her adulthood. Instead of a work organization, Gesher for her was a mytholog-

ical family that induced feelings of belonging and significant personal ties. Amy also juxtaposed Gesher with the "defamiliation" (Brown & McCartney, 1996) of Israeli theatre.[3]

Another Israeli actor, Asher, who, like Amy, joined Gesher a few years ago, appeared in several Gesher shows as well as in popular Israeli TV serials. Asher also emphasized his deep connection to the company. Talking about his older Russian-born colleague Egor, Asher said: ". . . all the way we are together, all the shows, he calls me "bro," I am like a little brother of his" (interview, July 12, 1999). In this metaphor, Asher established the relationship of brotherhood between himself and Egor who helped him to find the place in the troupe both professionally and personally. Similar themes of connection and emotional attachment appeared in the interview with Meirav, a young Israeli actor:

> . . . there are many advantages to this theatre; there is something very home-like, family-like in this company, something that envelopes you, because they take care of all the details . . . I feel comfortable, and we spend a lot of time here, and there are wonderful people here, feeling people, good people. In the theatre I feel beloved, it's very pleasant to me . . . (Interview, June 28, 1999).

Talking about the theatre in terms of family and home, Meirav emphasized the best family has to offer: love, care, comfort, and connection.

Family Rebels. However, not everyone in the troupe was equally excited about familial life. Unlike Amy and Asher, who were eager to participate in this study, Sasha, a young Russian-Israeli actor who joined the company only a couple of years ago, was reluctant to be interviewed. When he did start talking, I realized that he was exasperated by the family pressure but didn't want to make it public. Finally, having been convinced that I will never mention our conversation to anyone in Gesher, and encouraged by a shot of scotch, he poured out his story:

> [being in Gesher] is like living in a big family in a position of the beloved youngest son. This big family has its own rules, say at seven everyone is seated for dinner and Grandma pours borscht for everyone. And I don't want borscht, or don't come home by seven, or want to get drunk. My conflict with Gesher is explained by this approach, i.e. the youngest son, after he was warmed and caressed, all of a sudden turns around and says: "I am going to Germany to do my project." And it is an offense. Zeev [the director] now explicitly does not love me. . . . I hope that he will be able to act as a wise father, that he will be ready to listen to what I have to say, how I see the world, maybe it is also valuable. (Interview, July 28, 1999).

Here Sasha voiced resentment and protest (*conflict, offense*) along with feelings of attachment (*beloved son*). By conceptualizing Gesher in terms of family, Sasha framed his work conflict with the director as a conflict of generations. Thus, Sasha turned a professional conflict into a quest for fatherly love and for recognition of his world-view.

Meirav, who expressed admiration for the loving and caring people in Gesher in the above quote, was also angry with the *family*. She was a member of the Gesher-2 troupe, defined as an acting school for young actors. According to Meirav, the familial hierarchy of the company worked against the Gesher-2 actors:

> Yes, I belong to Gesher-2, to the second-class actors. They took us as "young actors," but indeed they took people who have already acted . . . and now we have a contract that is not legal, we don't have real positions, that's why we don't have rights—only responsibilities: no vacations and no severance pay. I am terribly angry, we are fighting and fighting, but here—it is not like a normal place, when you come and you know the conditions [benefits], everything is unclear and one needs to wait . . . And if you are not content here— then you are a traitor, and if you are earning at another place—you are a traitor, everything is like a family, and in the family it is not nice to demand and to fight. (Interview, June 28, 1999).

Meirav bitterly described the rules imposed by the family with which she had to comply. Family mores rendered any business negotiation nearly impossible, since the detached legal language only induced feelings of betrayal and guilt.

Another critical point was voiced by Ania, a high-school student temping at the theatre as a technical assistant: "Here in Gesher, everything is going according to 'who knows whom', everybody here is related, one cannot break through, they are like a family" (field note, July 8, 1999). Ironically, Ania, disparaging nepotism, happened to be a daughter of a staff member. In her account, the family is presented as an entity that protects itself against outside intervention.

In addition to family metaphors, I also encountered metaphors that conceptualized the theatre in terms of a place of dwelling or household (e.g., *communal apartment*) or family-like social structure (e.g., *mafia*). All these family and family-like metaphors, whether positive or negative, presented the Gesher troupe as a locus of close-knit relations between its members.

In Isolation. However, the family metaphors were not the only ones used in the theatre. Two bodies of metaphors seemed to contradict the family metaphor: these metaphors emphasized, first, Gesher's isolation from the surrounding Israeli reality (5 instances) and, second, personal isolation within Gesher (4 instances). Most of these isolation metaphors conceptualized the theatre in terms of space or place. For example, one of the staff members quoted the Russian-born actor Elena, who in addition to her work at Gesher also appeared in several Israeli films: ". . . we all here [at Gesher theatre] are on an island, and I tried to leave—to swim away, I went to act in the movies, but I quickly came back" (interview, July 27, 1999). In her metaphor, Elena conceptualized Gesher in terms of an isolated place (*an island*) separated from the mainland by the open sea. In Gesher (the metaphoric island), Elena was a leading actor. In contrast, in Israeli films she was limited to the supporting roles of

foreigners and new immigrants because of her accent and Russian acting style. This put Elena into an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, she had reached the mainland of Israeli popular culture. But on the other hand, she was still drifting, unable to occupy the same leading position she held at Gesher. Therefore, Elena chose the safety and confinement of island-Gesher over the option of drifting or even drowning.

Asher, whose tribute to "brotherhood" was quoted earlier, brought up his own isolation within the theatre: ". . . I am basically a new immigrant in the theatre, I am the stranger" (interview, July 12, 1999). This metaphor refers to the time a few years ago when Asher was one of the first few native Israelis in Gesher. Despite the caring atmosphere, he felt lonely and found himself separated by linguistic and cultural barriers from the rest of the troupe. Therefore, Asher compared Gesher to a country of immigration to which he had to adjust.

Sigal, an Israeli-born staff member, used a striking metaphor in reference to the immigrant actors: "It is not like abroad [in Russia], when you are at your own territory, and if you don't like it—you get up and leave. Here they are in a trap, no one will hire them, they believe in no one in the country [of Israel]" (interview, July 19, 1999). Sigal's metaphor showed that the motifs of isolation and entrapment in Gesher speech exist alongside the motifs of familial connections.

In sum, the dominant metaphor presented Gesher as family or as a family-like structure, inducing contradictory feelings of the company members ranging from admiration to resentment. Alongside this dominant metaphor, I found metaphors depicting Gesher as an isolated place or a place of isolation. The metaphors of family and isolation among the Gesher members painted an ambivalent picture. Asher was simultaneously a stranger and a brother; Meirav felt beloved and cheated on at the same time; Sasha resented the family; yet, pined for his recognition within it. These voices simultaneously constructed the dominant discourse of family and subverted it (challenging its value, without though changing its structure). This finding resonates with Eisenberg's (1984) research on ambiguity in organizational communication, which shows that multiple world-views coexist within a single organization. Deetz (1986) also notes that a discourse within a single organization can combine several metaphors that form a coherent whole. He recognizes though, that "insufficient work has been completed to know . . . how coherence is accomplished in talk" (p. 177). Therefore, in the next section I will discuss how these sets of metaphors function side by side.

The Functioning of the Metaphors of Connection and Isolation

In order to answer the question of the functioning of metaphors, I explore the metaphorical domains and the features that they share in common. Then I discuss domain features highlighted and hidden by the metaphors.

Emphasis on Connection. Two domains, that of a theatre company and that of a family, are active in family metaphors. Theatre is a workplace, a public sphere. In contrast, family is a basic social unit, a private sphere. What do these domains hold in common? Contrary to the folk notion that workplace and family are dissociated, these two domains hold much in common. Brown and McCartney (1996) explain, that historically, both family and workplace were parts of the traditional household. In the past, families served as workplaces employing both parents and children. With industrialization, the household was diversified into a workplace that was the public sphere, and a family that was the private one. Still, even today, family, our primary experience in the private domain, provides the most basic terms for conceptualizing social relations at work, where people "will want to create if not the essence, at least the semblance of family life" (1996, p. 252). Therefore, Brown and McCartney argue that the work organization "is not only like a family, it is a family" (p. 254). Indeed, family is a common (though not exclusive) metaphor for work organization (Deetz, 1986).

In the case of Gesher, the domains of theatre as a workplace and family share several features in common. Both domains are (1) social structures that are characterized by (2) rules of conduct, (3) history, and (4) culture. The commonality of these features allows for the functioning of family metaphors. As the examples below show, the family metaphors portray the theatre troupe as a close-knit group of people connected by intimate and affectionate relationships nurtured over a long time.

The first common feature of the work and family domains is that both are social structures, with their own hierarchies and relationships. But unlike at a typical workplace, relationships in the social structure of Gesher are discussed in terms of closeness of kin connection. Amy, for example, referred to one of the older Russian actors as her uncle: ". . . he is one of my closest uncles, he is always connected with me, he cares about me, he explains things to me . . ." (interview, July 15, 1999). In her view of the theatre troupe, closeness is the defining factor in relationships between people. Amy's reference to her co-worker as *closest uncle* implied the existence of other kin-people in different degrees of closeness. Indeed, in this and other metaphors I found various kin-references: *father, son, brother*, and *uncle*, all of them referring to males. Amy explained to me that there was no one in a position of a mother:

"No, it's the father who is a mother. It's a family with a lot of fathers" (interview, July 15, 1999). Even though the number of men and women in the troupe are roughly equal, the Gesher family is structured around male kinsmen. The father-like figure of director presided at the head of the hierarchy; underneath him are uncles and older brothers; and finally at the very bottom are younger sons, brothers, daughters, sisters, and nieces. Thus, Gesher is structured as a traditional patriarchal family, where leadership is reserved for males.[4]

The second common feature of both the work and family domains is rules of conduct. In Gesher, the rules aim to emphasize the connection between people, demanding also loyalty and submission. Thus Sasha complained about strict rules imposed on him by *big family*. Meirav criticized the rule demanding unlimited personal commitment to the theatre. The familial tradition, with its rules, had a long pedigree in Russian theatre. Using a family metaphor, O.S. Loevsky explained how the rules were instrumental for maintaining traditions within theatre companies:

> Family has tradition, someone in the theatre always volunteers to become its voice . . . Younger people who are blending into a family can change the established balance of power. As a rule, every younger actor is taken care of by an older 'master.' (e-mail interview, November 18, 1999).

By maintaining tradition, the rules connected new and old company members without threatening the existing power structure. When Asher spoke about Egor as his *big brother*, he described such a connection. Egor, an older Russian-born actor became a *master* for Asher, thus socializing him into the theatre collective. The resulting brotherhood sealed the established balance of power and reaffirmed the value of connection.

The third common feature of both the work and family domains is history. Like in a family, relationships between people in Gesher have a history. Developed over a long period of time, the relationships become permanent and continuous. Asher, for instance, explained the affection and warmth between the troupe members by the long time they spent together:

> There are more examples of this togetherness, that I think is really pleasant. I'll tell you what I like to see in them [Gesher actors]—you can see that they love and respect each other. I mean these people are already eight years together, one is really in the ass of another, and they have this affection for each other. (Interview, July 12, 1999).

Using the Hebrew idiom *one in the ass of another*, Asher humorously described close, literally organic bonds between company members. Sigal also emphasized the link between time and family: "When you build the troupe for eight years, you are its father . . ." (interview, July 19, 1999). She referred to Zeev, one of the founders of Gesher and its artistic director. According to Sigal, Zeev's leadership position in the

troupe over a long time gave him a father-like status, with the implications of responsibility and authority.

The fourth common feature of the work and family domains is culture. It is interesting that despite the fact that the Gesher troupe is multicultural and bilingual, most of the participants identified Gesher as Russian. For example, Amy referred to the *Russianness* of family life; Sasha brought in ethnic food (*borscht*); Asher mentioned language (*Russian*). The Russianness of Gesher also emerged in the metaphorical speech of Alex, an older Russian-born actor who has been in Gesher since its foundation. In Moscow, Alex used to be a leading actor at one of the theatres; in Gesher, he appeared in every production, but always in supporting roles. Despite his somewhat marginal status, he was a devoted troupe member, and often served as a mouthpiece for the older generation. Once, waiting for his turn to shower, he commented ironically, "We live here like in a communal apartment" (field note, July 1, 1999). His metaphor is deeply cultural. A trademark of Soviet life, *communal apartments* were shared by several families, often with two to three generations in the same room. With such density, kitchens and bathrooms often became contested territories. Life in communal apartments produced intimate bonds as well as hatred, intrigues, and scandals. Using *communal apartment* as a metaphor, Alex emphasized the close connections between people in the circumstances of oppression and lack of privacy.

Like in a communal apartment, the close connections between the Gesher troupe members induced a range of emotions from love, sympathy, and respect, to anger and frustration. The family metaphors highlighted close connections and affectionate, long-term relationships within Gesher. Simultaneously, the family metaphors deemphasized the features of Gesher as a workplace with legal, ethical, and financial consequences. The family metaphors dissociated the theatre from a typical workplace, and required a special kind of professionalism and dedication from the staff members. Thus, Sarah, an Israeli-born staff member, describes the special kind of professionalism at Gesher:

> ... It's true, we are professionals, it's a great theatre, but it's a very dramatic kind of professionalism. It is a way of life, it is dedication, It's not a profession, not a job, that you go to and come home, it is your life ... Everyone in Israel is used to more freedom and more space, and more time for yourself, in Gesher it does not exist. Time, your life—everything belongs to the theatre. (Interview, June 23, 1999).

In sum, the family metaphors, whether they present family in positive or negative terms, highlight the connection and closeness between people in the site, thus hiding the fact that the theatre is a work organization.

Emphasis on Separation. Isolation metaphors bring together two metaphorical domains, that of the theatre as a workplace and that of a place of isolation. These two domains hold in common features of (1) geographical and (2) social/cultural boundaries. The commonality

of these features allows for the functioning of isolation metaphors. Consider Sasha's account:

> The thing is that I am the fifth column in Gesher. It is very confusing for them that I speak Russian, seemingly I am of their own kind, but I am not indeed. Gesher is a kind of Island of Crimea that is cut off from the mainland. It is not a secret that Gesher stands on the people of the older generation—after 50. I have a conflict of generations with these people. (Interview, July 28, 1999).

The idiom *the fifth column* referred to people who secretly collaborate with an enemy invader in their own country. In this metaphor Sasha emphasized his ambivalent position: he simultaneously belonged in the Gesher community and contested it. His metaphor *the Island of Crimea* had a rich cultural meaning. This idiom came from the utopian novel by the Russian-Soviet writer Vasilii Aksenov (1983). The main premise of the novel is that Crimea (in reality a peninsula) was an island, which unlike the real Crimea, kept its independence from the USSR and maintained the authentic Russian culture. In conversational Russian, the idiom *Island of Crimea* stands for cultural separatism. Using it, Sasha critiqued the cultural separatism of Gesher. Sasha's metaphors highlighted both his difference from the rest of the troupe, and the difference of the troupe from its cultural environment in Israel.

Sasha continued his protest against *family* by separating himself from the troupe, and emphasizing his different cultural identity. His hybrid identity of a Russian-Israeli placed him in an ambivalent position of simultaneously belonging to the Gesher troupe and dissociating from it:

> It is very confusing for them [older Russian-born actors] that I speak Russian. Seemingly I am of their own kind, but I am not indeed. . . . in my life I am a western person. I don't need this closeness of relationships that Gesher offers. I have two close friends and twenty acquaintances; I don't need any more. I want to keep a certain distance at my job. (Interview, July 28, 1999).

Another Russian-Israeli, Sveta, was also frustrated by Gesher's cultural position. Bicultural and bilingual herself, and having worked in other Israeli troupes before joining Gesher, Sveta opposed the idea of cultural segregation: ". . . it's a ghetto here . . . try to say something in Hebrew to anyone—they won't answer, only younger actors . . ." (interview, July 9, 1999). By using the powerful and oppressive metaphor of *ghetto*, Sveta expressed her disappointment with the linguistic and cultural isolation of the older immigrant actors. She was angry about their choice to stay within the familiar framework of Russian language and culture, thus remaining oblivious to the Israeli cultural context. Seemingly, Sveta just wanted to be able to speak Hebrew at her workplace, but within the context of the dominant Zionist ideology, her position calls for commitment to the Hebrew language and a subsequent unconditional assimilation of new immigrants into Israeli society.

In this and in other metaphors, the Gesher theatre is identified as "Russian." The Russianness of Gesher became a source of connection for some, and isolation for others. For instance, for Asher, Russianness was interesting, but alienating: "A lot of times this place looks to me like a trip abroad" (interview, July 12, 1999). Asher's metaphor revealed his fascination with travel as well as his feeing of estrangement. Here Asher positioned himself as a stranger in a strange land.

In sum, metaphors presenting Gesher as culturally different (*ghetto*) and geographically remote (*island*) stress its separation from the Israeli environment. Thus, the isolation metaphors deemphasize the multicultural and bilingual character of the company, and its inclusion in the Israeli cultural and media scene.[5]

The analysis shows that the two sets of metaphors, family and isolation, coexist in the speech of troupe members. Are these metaphors part of the same meaning system, or not? I would argue that connection and isolation are two expressions of the same cultural system of meanings. In fact, isolation is necessary for understanding connection: family makes sense in contrast to strangers. The metaphorical speech in Gesher is organized along the semantic axis of connection-separation: the family metaphors highlight connection, or being inside; whereas the isolation metaphors emphasize separation, or being outside. However, this system of meanings is not unitary and fixed, but rather fluid and ambivalent. The troupe members are simultaneously complicit and resistant to the family mode; some of them feel simultaneously inside and outside of the Gesher community. Yet, the semantic axis of connection-separation (inside-outside) provides an overarching frame of reference for sense-making in Gesher. Thus, contradictory voices form a coherent whole.

The Cultural Meanings and Ideological Functions of Metaphors at Gesher

What are the cultural meanings and ideological functions of the connection and isolation metaphors in respect to different subgroups of the troupe? All the subgroups, the Russian-born and Israeli-born actors, the younger and older generations, the main troupe and Gesher-2, see Gesher simultaneously as a home exuding love, safety and meaningful connection, as well as a place of oppression, alienation, and isolation. However, the particular meanings of connection and isolation differ by subgroup.

Family Metaphors. The association between theatre and family in Gesher has rich cultural meanings. O.S. Loevsky put this association into historic-cultural perspective within the Russian theatrical tradition: "Theatre-home is an ideal of the Russian theatre, of the repertoire theatre. This model, permanent troupe and father-God director, was established in the early Moscow Art Theatre, and

was a result of the Stanislavsky's theatre reform"[6] (e-mail interview, November 18, 1999). Following this tradition, the Russian-born actors conceptualized the social structure of a troupe in terms of family.[7]

In contrast to the Russian-born actors, the comparison of theatre to family for the Israeli actors is not obvious. Most Israeli theatres do not have permanent ensembles, and family-like relationships do not develop between cast members during short production periods. Family for Israelis is a prominent value defining traditional Jewish culture. In contemporary Israel, a country of immigrants, family also becomes a site where generational and cultural boundaries intersect, where the older generation does not speak Hebrew and identifies mostly with the culture of their origin, whereas the younger generation is completely integrated into Israeli culture. Thus, for Israelis, family connects people of different generations giving the young ones a feeling of roots, and the older ones a sense of continuity. Therefore, the use of family metaphors helps Israeli actors make sense of the linguistic and cultural situation in Gesher.

The family metaphor is paralleled by non-verbal communicative practices that the troupe members use in order to compensate for the lack of shared linguistic resources (e.g., smiles, hugs, kisses, gags, and laughter). The atmosphere of *gemutlichkeit* created by such compensatory practices evokes a family. In sum, the family metaphor is so successful because its hybrid nature manages to invoke both Russian-Soviet and Israeli cultural meanings, thus helping to reconcile generational and cultural gaps, making relationships between people meaningful, and bringing cohesion into an otherwise disparate system.

The family metaphor also has oppressive meanings. Brown and McCartney warned about the possibility of using family mores for the purposes of manipulation: "family relationships have a special moral force which are a product of family history and that other spheres borrow to their advantage." (1996, p. 253). That's exactly what happens at Gesher. Serving as a basis for manipulation, the family metaphor emphasizes the family-oriented values and undermines the legal, financial, and ethical aspects of work. Meirav states this clearly in her account while discussing the underprivileged position of Gesher-2 in contrast to the main Gesher troupe. This familial mode creates a particular structure and ethics, seemingly inherent in the theatre, that are difficult to oppose. Any negotiation of one's contract and benefits in the family context (where *it's not nice to demand and to fight*) puts an actor in the position of a *traitor*. The older actors and the director benefit most from the family metaphor since its paternalistic character establishes and reaffirms their authority and the existing power structure. As Deetz explains, in the case of a dominant family

metaphor "paternalistic hierarchies may maintain as much control, but in a very different, more personal fashion than "machine" or "military" organizations" (1996, p. 176).

Isolation Metaphors. Isolation metaphors also have rich cultural meanings. The immigrant status of the Russian-born actors is a key factor in understanding the cultural meanings of isolation metaphors for them. Full members in the Gesher family, the immigrant actors are excluded from artistic activity in the larger Israeli context outside Gesher. Their lack of Hebrew proficiency, their accent, and their Russian acting style impede their entrance into mainstream Israeli theatre.[8] For them, Gesher is *an island.* This island is a Russian-Soviet ghetto, separated from the Israeli cultural mainland. Thus, for the older immigrant actors, the island Gesher, where they came of their own free will, turned out to be a trap. For them, staying "inside" and living this family life is not a matter of choice, but rather the lack of one. Their attachment to the family along with the frustration of entrapment results in ambivalent feelings, as Sasha put it: "... they love it, they hate it ..." (interview, July 28, 1999). Thus, the cultural meaning of the connection-isolation metaphors for immigrant actors unfolds as follows: they are trapped in Gesher by family ties, which render life "inside" the Gesher family friendly and safe, while simultaneously rendering life "outside" it unfamiliar and inaccessible.

The Israeli actors do not find themselves in such a difficult position. For them, being "inside" Gesher is only a matter of choice. Therefore, like Amy, Asher, and Meirav, they appreciate the advantages of the "family." From their vantage point the family style, including permanent ensemble, the emotional ties between its members, and a passionate attitude towards theatre production, distinguish Gesher from other theatre companies in Israel. Israeli actors who do not have an accent (or other linguistic or cultural constraints) do not have to stay at Gesher. Indeed, unlike the older immigrant actors, they leave when the Russian familial style clashes with their professional or personal norms.

The Russian style of life in the company can be alienating for young Israeli actors. While they feel beloved and accepted (*enveloped* within the family), this "envelope" also isolates them from their usual environment, and they miss their familiar communication style and working relationships. As Amy points out: "It's hard to be with the family all the time; sometimes you want to hang out with your peers" (interview, July 15, 1999).

Russian-Israeli troupe members, such as Sasha and Sveta, see themselves as a *fifth column* in Gesher. They are neither "authentic" Russians of the older generation, nor young Israelis completely immersed in Israeli reality. Their internal conflict with Gesher puts

them into the duplicitous state of "neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25). Neither fully connected to Gesher, nor completely isolated from it, Russian-Israelis vacillate between being "inside" and "outside." They become the *fifth column*—subversive elements in their own province. Thus Gesher becomes not only a site of hybrid artistic production, but also of hybrid cultural identities.

Conclusions

As for the first research question (RQ1), the ethnographic analysis of metaphorical speech in Gesher shows that two sets of metaphors, those of family and of isolation, are active in the Gesher speech community. As for the question of metaphor functioning (RQ2), the analysis of metaphorical domains and commonalities of their features shows that the metaphors are organized along the semantic axis of connection-separation: family metaphors highlight connection, and isolation metaphors highlight separation. With that, the metaphor usage is not fixed. Company members of different cultures, generations, and status within the theatre may simultaneously speak like family aficionados and complain about isolation. The fluidity of metaphor usage is an important feature characterizing the hybrid nature of the company.

As for the question of the cultural meanings of the metaphors (RQ3), the analysis shows that the cultural meanings of both connection and isolation metaphors vary across cultural and generational sub-groups of the company. For the Russian immigrant actors, the Gesher family becomes a golden cage, a place of both incarceration and survival, producing ambivalent feelings of love and hate. Gesher for them is both a family home and a trap. The young Israeli actors value the affectionate connection emphasized by the family metaphor in juxtaposition with the "defamiliation" of Israeli theatre. Yet, simultaneously, they become estranged from the familial life by the same cultural differences that attracted them in the first place. For the young Russian-Israeli company members, the metaphors invoke the most ambivalent meanings: they feel neither fully connected, nor completely isolated.

The analysis also shows that the metaphors of connection and isolation serve important ideological functions in the company. The metaphors of connection are crucial for communication in the multicultural and bilingual community of Gesher. Conceptualizing a culturally and generationally diverse group of people as "family," these metaphors build cohesion within the troupe and help to organize different and at times contradictory voices into a meaningful discourse. The isolation metaphor and the family metaphor are parts of the same system of meaning. In this system, connection (being inside) is highly valued and separation (being outside) is viewed as undesirable. In this sense, the value-laden semantic axis constitutes a local ideology at Gesher, which "absorbs" alternative metaphors. In addition, the family

metaphor serves for manipulation, by proscribing legal or financial discussion in the theatre; whereas the isolation metaphor serves for manipulation by deemphasizing Gesher's inclusion into the Israeli cultural context.

Finally, my approach, incorporating critical analysis into EC's theoretical and methodological apparatus, allowed me to arrive at an answer to the overarching question of this research (RQ4): What turns the diverse Gesher members into a cohesive, and yet not uniform, ensemble? In other words, how does communal function operate within Gesher? Gesher theatre provides an example of a site where metaphorical speech (which is a form of cultural communication) serves a communal function. However, instead of shaping the uniform "shared identity," it creates a complex system of localized meanings revolving around the semantic axis of connection-separation, the local ideology. This example complicates our understanding of communal function. The localized system of meanings brings coherence into the hybrid and ambivalent discourse at the site, thus allowing for the successful functioning of the company; yet, it contributes to maintaining the existing social relations within it, including those of dominance and oppression.

As for the theory, in this essay I used the EC approach critically, borrowing instruments and concepts pertinent to my research and broadening the scope of questions traditionally addressed in EC research. Thus, I followed EC theory in emphasizing a deep connection between culture and communication and in adopting an understanding of communication as a "bricolage of common life" (Carbaugh, 1991, p. 339). Yet, arguing with the EC commitment to "objectivity" (Philipsen, 1991) and "natural criticism" (Carbaugh, 1989/90), I took a critical approach attending to the ideological functioning of metaphor in the context of power relations at the site. In doing that, I emphasized the importance of including this approach within the EC perspective. Thus, in this research, understanding of the local ideologies at Gesher would be incomplete without close attention to power relations and conflicting voices at the site. By way of conclusion, my approach points to future uses of EC in which the connection between culture and communication remains on center stage but power relations and conflict play major roles as well.

NOTES

[1]In 1999, during my fieldwork, the main troupe included 23 Russian-born and five Israeli-born actors. The minor troupe Gesher-2 consisted of 12 young Israeli-trained actors born in Israel (6), Russia (3), Uruguay (1), Argentina (1), and Germany (1), and the other staff (20–24 people) was largely of Soviet origin.

[2]For other conceptual critiques of the teleological and epistemological commitments of EC, see for example Neumann (1994), Lannamann (1994), and West (1993).

[3]Many Israeli theatres assemble a different cast for each specific production. Since

the production period is relatively short, the family-like relationships do not develop.

[4]The only exception from this rule appeared in Sasha's account: "... Grandma pours borscht for everyone..." The image of an elderly woman preoccupied, apparently, with providing domestic services to other family members in the Russian-Soviet cultural context is endowed with power. Because of the lack of housing, the usually widowed grandmother lived with her son or daughter's family. Even though she spent most of her time in domestic chores, her status within the family was very high. As such, the grandmother became a matriarch of the family, and ruled it by making important decisions, establishing and monitoring norms of behavior, and controlling the upbringing of her grandchildren. Therefore, Sasha's reference to "Grandma" in the context of family rules is meaningful.

[5]Gesher has a public presence in Israeli popular culture. The director is often interviewed, and every premiere receives extensive coverage in all major papers. Yet, Gesher's media reception is biased by ideological factors. For further reference see Gershenson (in press-a).

[6]The Moscow Art Theatre, established by Stanislavsky in 1897, was based on new theatrical principles that contributed to the *theatre-home* model; among them the harmonious work of a permanent ensemble, a dedication to art, and lengthy systematic rehearsals.

[7]The familial model of Russian theatre has been implemented in the Israeli theatre once before. Habima, the national Israeli theatre, actually grew out of a Russian Jewish troupe. Originating in one of Stanislavsky's studios, the Habima troupe immigrated to Palestine in 1928, and established the first Hebrew theatre in Tel-Aviv. The traditions of Russian art were so strong in the Habima troupe that its life was organized as a commune; the members of the troupe became family in a literal sense (Levy, 1979).

[8]Absorption of the immigrant artists in general and of actors in particular was a burning question in Israel. Out of hundreds of actors who arrived to Israel in the early 1990s, only a few integrated into the Israeli theatres. Even though, unlike actors, immigrant directors were less limited by language, very few of them could actually find professional work. For further reference see Gershenson (in press-b).

REFERENCES

Aksenov, V. P. (1983). The Island of Crimea. (M. H. Heim, Trans.). New York: Random House.

Basso, K. (1990). *Western Apache language and culture*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Brown, R. B. & McCartney, S. (1996). A home from home: The organization as family. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Society 2*, 241–255.

Carbaugh, D. (1989/90). The critical voice in ethnography of communication research. *Research on Language and Social Interaction 23*, 261–282.

Carbaugh, D. (1991). Communication and cultural interpretation. *Quarterly Journal of Speech 77*, 336–341.

Carbaugh, D. (1995). The ethnographic communication theory of Philipsen and associates. In D. P. Cushman and B. Kovacic (Eds.), *Watershed research tradition in human communication theory* (pp.269–297). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Deetz, S. (1986). Metaphors and discursive production and reproduction of organization. In L. Thayer (Ed.), *Organization—communication* (pp. 168–182). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Deetz, S. & Mumby, D. (1985). Metaphors, information and power. In B. D. Ruben (Ed.) *Information and Behavior*. Vol. 1. (pp. 369–386). New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books.

Eisenberg, E. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs 51*, 227–242.

Fiske, J. (1990). Review of D. Carbaugh, Talking American: Cultural Discourses on Donahue, *Quarterly Journal of Speech 76*, 450–451.
Fiske, J. (1991). Writing ethnographies: Contribution to a dialogue. *Quarterly Journal of Speech 77*, 330–335.
Gershenson, O. (in press-a). Politics of identity and critical judgment: Gesher theatre in Israel. In S. M. Dasgupta (Ed.), *Transnational culture and the politics of identity*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
Gershenson, O. (in press). Bridging theatre: Gesher's transition from Russian to Hebrew. *TEATR: Russian Theatre Past and Present.*
Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication* (pp.35–71). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 77(8), 453–486.
Lannamann, J.W. (1994). The problem with disempowering ideology. *Communication Yearbook 17*, 136–147.
Levy, E. (1979). *The Habima: Israel's National Theater 1917–1977: A study of cultural nationalism.* New York: Columbia University Press.
Neumann, M. (1994). The contested spaces of cultural dialog. *Communication Yearbook 17*, 148–158.
Philipsen, G. (1989). Speech and the communal function in four cultures. *International and Intercultural Communication Annual, 13*, 79–92.
Philipsen, G. (1991). Two issues in the evaluation of ethnographic studies of communicative practices. *Quarterly Journal of Speech 77*, 327–329.
Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routlage.
Taylor, B. & Trujillo, N. (2000). Qualitative research methods. In F. M. Jablin and L. Putnam (Eds.). *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication.* (pp. 161–194). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
West, J. (1993). Ethnography and ideology: The politics of cultural representation. *Western Journal of Communication 57*, 209–220.

Appendix
Interview Guide

The opening question:

"How did you come to Gesher?"

This question was followed only with clarifying questions or questions that stemmed from an interviewee's narrative, for instance:

"You said your contract was terrible. What was terrible about it?"

The concluding questions:

"Who are the closest people to you in Gesher?"

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"

"What do your friends say when you tell them that you work at Gesher?"