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**Author**

Tannen, Deborah

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Processes and Consequences of Conversational Style

By

Deborah Frances Tannen  
A.B. (State University of New York, Binghamton) 1966  
M.A. (Wayne State University) 1970  
M.A. (University of California) 1976

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Approved:

*Robert J. Carroff* ..... *5/21/79*  
Chairman ..... Date

*John A. Langford* .....  
*Wallace J. Chase* .....

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## ABSTRACT

### PROCESSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CONVERSATIONAL STYLE

Deborah Frances Tannen

The study examines the linguistic devices which make up conversational style, and the effects of their use in interaction with others whose styles differ and with others whose styles are relatively similar. All speakers seek to fulfill the universal human wants to feel connected to other people and to be left alone. The application of broad operating principles (conversational strategies) in the service of these goals results in clustering of devices which yield co-occurrence expectations associated with particular styles.

Based on two and a half hours of conversation taped at a Thanksgiving dinner, the speech of six participants is analyzed. The devices making up each person's style are isolated and shown in operation in interchanges with the other participants. When habitual use of and expectations about the intentions of particular devices are shared, communication is rhythmically smooth and demonstrably satisfying. However, when such use and expectations are not shared, conversation breaks down rhythmically, and participants show evidence of discomfort, confusion, or dissatisfaction.

Dimensions along which devices differ include: relative personal focus of topic; paralinguistic features such as pitch, loudness, pauses, voice quality, and tone; pacing through overlap, timing of

utterances with respect to preceding utterances, and rate of speech; choice of lexical items and syntactic forms. Devices employing these features include: the use of questions; expectations about overt demonstration of enthusiasm; methods for getting and keeping the floor; topic cohesion; telling of narratives in conversation; and irony and humor.

An integral part of the analytic method is playback, during which participants individually listened to the tape and explained their understanding of what was going on. This made it possible to ascertain the impressions the conversation made upon each participant; how such impressions compared to the conscious intentions of the other speakers; and how their use of conversational devices contributed to those impressions.

While each speaker in some sense exhibited a unique style, there were patterns within the group by which some participants used many devices in similar ways, while others clearly differed, with the result that devices were more "successful" when interactants shared expectations about their use. In a broad sense, one subgroup was operating on a strategy which placed the signalling load on interpersonal involvement rather than honoring first others' need not to be imposed upon (hence a "rapport-based" strategy). In the others' system, the signalling load was often on the "considerateness" (or defensive) function, with frequent resultant focus on objective rather than personal matters (hence a "decontextualized" strategy).

The three whose strategies were most similar and whose styles tended to "dominate" the interaction were from similar cultural backgrounds, having grown up in New York City. Two whose styles

differed were from Los Angeles, while the speaker whose style differed most noticeably had grown up in England. Although there is no inherent disposition toward particular stylistic devices associated with cultural background, yet ethnic, national, or class identification often involves one, while growing up, in social networks in which particular linguistic devices are regularly exercised and thereby learned. Thus an understanding of conversational style explains in part what often appears as clannishness among members of certain groups or prejudice on the part of others. Similar conversational styles contribute to the pleasurable sense of "harmony," of "being on the same wave length," that often accompanies conversation with speakers of shared background, while disparate styles create a sense of dissonance which can lead to mistaken judgments about others' attitudes, abilities and intent.

*Robin Lakoff*

To  
my friend Karl  
who participated on every level  
my most cherished co-stylist.

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CHAPTER ONE  
THE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATION

John. You do lecture in English, don't you?

Philip. Yes, but in philology, not literature.

John. Philology? Don't you find that incredibly tedious?

Philip. No, it's exactly the right subject for me. I'm  
fascinated by words.

John. Only one at a time, not in a sequence.<sup>1</sup>

(Christopher Hampton, The Philanthropist)

Linguists in recent years have concerned themselves increasingly with words spoken "in a sequence" -- the language of conversation. This emphasis reflects the conviction that, in the words of Fillmore (1974): "The language of face-to-face conversation is the basic and primary use of language, all others being best described in terms of their manner of deviation from that base." The study of language in conversation is not new in linguistics; it is faithful to the holistic view of language which characterized the work of Jespersen, Bloomfield, and Sapir. For example, Sapir (1921): "Again, language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" (p. 207).

The field of linguistic pragmatics represents the attempt to incorporate social knowledge in formal syntactic analyses of sentences. The bulk of work in indirect speech acts (Cole & Morgan 1975) falls in

this category. However, it soon became clear that social information could not simply be mapped onto a static model of sentence structure. As Fillmore (1972) put it, "when an analysis requires that much use of brute force, the facts that led to the analysis are much more interesting than the theory which got reshaped to incorporate them."

The zeitgeist extends beyond academic disciplines as well. A recent issue of The New Yorker contains an article about family therapy (a movement inspired by Gregory Bateson whose work will be discussed presently). In an extended interview reported in this article, family therapist Salvador Minuchin points to this very concern with context as the reason for a recent shift of interest from psychoanalysis to family therapy:

"Psychoanalysis is a nineteenth-century concept," Minuchin said. "It's a product of the romantic idea of the hero and his struggle against society; it is about man out of context. Today, we are in a historical period in which we cannot conceive of non-related things. Ecology, ethology, cybernetics, systems, structural family therapy are just different manifestations of a concern for the relatedness of our resources. Family therapy will take over psychiatry in one or two decades, because it is about man in context. . . . Family therapy is to psychiatry what Pinter is to theatre and ecology is to natural science." (May 15, 1978, p. 76).

One might add to Minuchin's list, "as pragmatics and sociolinguistics are to linguistics."

Thus "context" is part of and inseparable from the meaning of any sentence in discourse. This organic notion of context is made explicit in the work of Wallace Chafe (1970) and John and Jenny Cook Gumperz (1976) and underlies the work of Charles Fillmore (1976) and Robin Lakoff. Lakoff (1974), for example, puts it this way: "It is sometimes argued that pragmatic phenomena . . . are indeed out of the purview of linguistics, since they are not, strictly speaking, grammatical phenomena, but rather reflect all sorts of non-linguistic facts about the speaker, his environment, and the real world. My position is that this is, technically speaking, balderdash. If two sentences are apparently synonymous, and an addressee reacts one way to one, and another way to the other, he is discriminating between them on linguistic grounds."

A concomitant of this holistic approach to language is the rejection of the structuralists' distinction between core and marginal features of language. In fact, it is often the case that analysis focuses on the features which would have been dismissed as marginal (see for example Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1976 and Labov and Fanshel 1977). In precisely this vein, R. Lakoff has shown repeatedly that the Chomskyan distinction between competence and performance is untenable (a clear argument for this hypothesis is found in Lakoff 1978). Numerous studies in pragmatics have led to this conclusion. Just one example is Deborah James' (1972) study of interjections, which concludes that hesitation phenomena which had been looked at as clear examples of performance must in fact be considered part of speakers' competence. Close examination of phenomena previously

ascribed to "mere" performance consistently results in the discovery that they are not random but, as James found for interjections, systematic and hence part of the underlying structure of language.

Moreover, the movement within linguistics to examine the language of everyday conversation reflects a trend which can be seen in other fields as well. Philosophers (Wittgenstein, Heidegger) began to study the language and actions of everyday life. Speech act theory (Austin 1962) furthered this tradition of seeing meaning as language use, and Grice (1975) demonstrated that the language of conversation is governed by systematic principles. (Searle 1975 discusses the nature of such principles and their relation to syntactic rules).

While language philosophers thus advanced the theory of conversational analysis, anthropologists began to feel that in analyzing the behavior of people of other cultures, perhaps the best way to approach them was to study their use of language in everyday interaction. Hence the flourishing of studies in ethnography of communication, associated with Gumperz and Hymes (1964, 1972), with its numerous studies of speech events (for example Basso 1972, Fraake 1972).

Thus recent work in speech act theory and cognitive anthropology has made crucial contributions to the understanding of language in conversation. Language philosophers and speech act theorists have laid the groundwork for a theory of meaning in conversation. Ethnography of communication has given us the speech event as the unit of study, and a cross-cultural perspective.

### Studies in Conversational Analysis: Ethnomethodology

Some of the most systematic and voluminous work in conversational analysis has been done by sociologists called ethnomethodologists, who were among the first to go out and record and carefully transcribe large bodies of natural conversation. Students of Garfinkel (1964), Goffman (1959) and Cicourel (1973), ethnomethodologists chose conversation as an exemplary locus for the sociological study of human behavior, with a view toward demonstrating that everyday behavior is systematic and rule-governed. In particular, Sacks and Schegloff and their colleagues and students (Sudnow 1972, Turner 1974, Schenkein 1978) have focused on the sequencing of conversational contributions.

It is hard to imagine that in 1970 Yngve could write: "No one has made any kind of a systematic study of how turn changes in dialog" (p. 567). Sacks and Schegloff made "turn-taking" a household (or at least a departmenthold) word.<sup>2</sup> With this as their main site of study, they have amply demonstrated that conversations are "accountable," by which they mean "describable" (i.e. "one can give an account"). They have shown this to be the case for sequencing (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), telling puns (Sacks 1972), choosing a word to refer to a place (Schegloff 1972) or a person (Schegloff and Sacks 1974), beginning to close a conversation (Sacks and Schegloff 1974), and so on. In all these analyses, the authors attempt to find order in surface mechanisms without reference to meaning. The syntax and paralinguistic features of sentences are considered, not the content or semantic postulates nor situational context operating. Herein lies both the beauty and the fatal flaw of this approach. By ignoring meaning, they are able to amass an impressive array of evidence for

the structural systematicity of conversation, their express purpose. However, the neglect of meaning and context limits the scope of their analysis. It should be noted that, in fact, Sacks' work includes extremely perceptive interpretive insights. (This subjectivity is a source of complaint by Labov and Fanshel, 1977). But the main theoretical thrust of ethnomethodology is to locate structural order.

Moreover, in seeking to discover what is systematic in conversational control mechanisms, ethnomethodologists are concerned with ways in which speakers operate similarly. They are not concerned with, and therefore have not taken account of, ways in which speakers systematically differ from each other in their use of such mechanisms. This is not to belittle the significance of the work they have done, but rather to point up the need for further work -- such as the present study.

Adrian Bennett (1978) points out a problem which arises from the ethnomethodologists' approach. In his paper on interruptions (a phenomenon which will figure prominently in the present study), Bennett quotes the following passage in which Schegloff tells how he distinguishes between "overlap" and "interruption."

By overlap we tend to mean talk by more than a speaker at a time which has involved that a second one to speak given that a first was already speaking, the second one has projected his talk to begin at a possible completion point of the prior speaker's talk. If that's apparently the case, if for example, his start is in the environment of what could have been a completion point of the

prior speaker's turn, then we speak of it as an overlap. If it's projected to begin in the middle of a point that is in no way a possible completion point for the turn, then we speak of it as an interruption. ("Recycled Turn Beginnings," public lecture, LSA Summer Institute, Ann Arbor, 1973).

Prior to this, of course, Schegloff has defined "possible completion point" as a function of syntactic and prosodic features of talk.

Bennett shows that the notions "overlap" and "interruption" are not so easily distinguished; they are in fact two different orders of things (cf Bateson 1972 following Bertrand Russell), "logically different types." While overlap is essentially a descriptive term referring to the observable phenomenon of speech coinciding in time, we cannot know when an interruption has occurred unless we look at the content of the utterances and the reactions of the participants. Is thematic progression maintained? Is the overlap intended and interpreted as cooperative or obstructive? Does it echo, build on, contradict or have nothing to do with the preceding comment? Surface phenomena alone yield pragmatic ambiguity. An overlap may or may not be intended and/or perceived as an interruption.

#### Linguistic Studies of Conversation

A major breakthrough in the study of conversation within linguistics was The First Five Minutes: A Sample of Microscopic Interview Analysis by Pittenger, Hockett and Danehy (1960). This work pioneered the close analysis of a short segment of natural dialogue, recorded and carefully transcribed and annotated, with focus on

paralinguistic features such as voice quality, intonation, pitch, amplitude, and phonological details of pronunciation. Hockett and his collaborators thus established the value of microanalysis, and the significance of contextual information in understanding language in interaction. Finally, they drew heavily for their theoretical framework on the work of Gregory Bateson.

A major recent contribution to the linguistic analysis of conversation is Labov and Fanshel's (1977) Therapeutic Discourse. The authors acknowledge the overriding influence of ethnomethodologists in conversational analysis, but note that Sacks and Schegloff do not attempt to give a complete account of any single body of data, preferring to scan large bodies of data in order to show how they reflect the single phenomenon under study. Labov and Fanshel attempt to arrive at an approach which does give a complete account of fifteen minutes of a therapeutic interview with Rhoda, a 19-year-old anorexic patient.

The authors note that they began with the assumption that Labov's (1970) previous research on sociolinguistic variable features of New York City speech would yield insights into the conversational process between Rhoda and her therapist. They found that this was not the case.<sup>3</sup> The approach that did turn out to be useful, instead, was that of Pittenger, Hockett and Danehy.

Labov and Fanshel begin their own analysis with a summary of the major findings of Hockett et. al. These bear repetition here as well, for they form the basis of an interactive approach to conversation:

1. Immanent reference. " . . . No matter what else human beings may be communicating about, or may think they are communicating about,



they are always communicating about themselves, about one another, and about the immediate context of the communication."

2. Determinism. "The only useful working assumption . . . is that any communicative act is, indeed, culturally determined: the indeterminate or 'accidental' residue is non-existent."

3. Recurrence. ". . . Anyone will tell us, over and over again, in our dealings with him, what sort of person he is, what his affiliations with cultural subgroups are, what his likes and dislikes are, and so on . . . . The diagnostically crucial patterns of communication will not be manifested just once."

4. Contrast and the Working Principle of Reasonable Alternatives.

There is no way to understand a signal that does not involve recognizing what the signal is not as well as what it is."

5. Relativity of Signal and Noise. "We can communicate simultaneously in many channels, via many systems. Sometimes we may choose to focus attention on one channel, and as long as this focus is maintained, certain simultaneous events in other channels can validly be regarded relatively as noise."

6. Reinforcement: Packaging. "Most of the signals that people transmit to other people are packages: but in the normal course of events we are apt to respond only to some of the included ingredients, allowing others to pass unnoticed or to register on us only out of awareness. The phenomenon . . . is clearly related to what psychiatrists have traditionally called over-determination. . . . One observer may hear anger in a patient's delivery of a passage, while others detect remorse or depression or self-pity. They may all be right, in that the actual signals may reflect all these contributing

factors in a particular varying balance . . . . The wise working assumption then is that always no matter how many possible contributing factors we have itemized, there may still be others that we have overlooked."

7. Adjustment. " . . . Continuous recalibration of communicative conventions is always to be expected in transactions between human beings -- . . . communicating and learning to communicate always go hand in hand."

8. The Priority of Interaction. "A man knows what he is doing, what emotions he is feeling, what 'choices' of response he is making, only by observing his own behavior via feedback. This input via feedback is subject to the same kinds of interpretation as is the input from the communicative behavior of other people."

9. Forest and Trees: The Dangers of Microscopy. "There are important properties of things and events that are not invariant under change of scale . . . . Lengthy concentration of attention on the one event can easily blow up in significance far out of proportion to its original duration and its actual setting. One must not mistake the five-inch scale model for the fly itself."

This last finding is the subject of emphasis by Labov and Fanshel (and is germane to my own study as well) in their discussion of the co-existing overwhelming benefit and great danger of this approach: "the paradox of microanalysis." At the same time that expanding details of interaction for close scrutiny yields an enriched picture of what is going on, it simultaneously changes that picture and gives an unrealistic vision of the proportions of the details within the whole. Thus, Labov and Fanshel, in their analysis, offer "expansions" of what

is "meant" by each utterance in the conversation that makes up their data. They realize, nonetheless, that any statement of what was "really meant" sounds, in a basic way, different from what was actually said. "Mitigation," for example, in the form of hedges, indirectness, hesitations, and so on, not only makes a statement sound less hostile or aggressive, it yields a sentence which is less hostile than its paraphrase without mitigation. Form and content are one; paraphrase does not yield identical sense.

In their microanalysis, the authors rely heavily upon paralinguistic features such as intonation, hesitation, voice quality, and so on -- and in this their focus is reminiscent of the work of Gumperz. Certain key utterances are analyzed by use of acoustic displays. Hesitations and pauses are illustrated with a variable-persistence oscilloscope, and pitch contours with a real-time spectrum analyzer. However, many significant aspects of utterance quality are describable only by use of such descriptive terms as "exasperation" (p. 150) and "tension" (p. 269 and elsewhere).

Another important insight reported by Labov and Fanshel is their working hypothesis that "the fundamental coherence of conversation is reflected in connections between actions rather than connections between utterances" (333). Thus they necessarily depart from a purely linguistic analysis of sentence meaning in order to take into account what speakers are doing interactionally by their talk.

Finally, Labov and Fanshel's analysis is much enhanced by the method they call "playback" (a term I will adopt for my own method), in which the researchers play back the taped conversation in the presence of the therapist, asking her to respond to and explain, from

her point of view, what transpired. It is unfortunate, however, that playback was carried out with only one of the participants in the dyadic conversation -- the therapist. It is understandable that the authors did not deem it appropriate to engage the patient in playback, since that would have provided input into the therapeutic process. Yet insofar as the analysis is intended to reflect on conversation in general (viz. the subtitle, "Psychotherapy as conversation"), the fact that playback yielded insights into the point of view of only one participant makes for skewed data.

This drawback calls attention to what is perhaps the most significant weakness of Therapeutic Discourse: the therapeutic bias, which is not examined. The assumption that the therapist is psychologically well while the patient is not, yields biased views of their linguistic devices. For example, throughout the analysis, the therapist is seen as exhibiting intentional behavior, while the patient is described as exhibiting expressive behavior. Moreover, the analysis often seems defensive of the therapist's behavior. Thus at one point, her utterances are described as "the therapist's precautions"; we are told she is "pressing quite hard" (307). Her hesitations are justified on rational grounds: "Rhoda's resistance to the interpretations already made is a sufficient warrant for this uncertainty. The therapist knows that Rhoda resists direct suggestions, and she is searching for a way of leading Rhoda to interpretations of her own behavior that are natural and acceptable to her" (308). Such fealties are inescapable, perhaps, for a therapist (such as Fanshel), but linguists would be better served by an analysis of a conversation in which both partners could be interviewed after the fact, or by a

balanced assessment of the impact of the conversation on both parties. For example, there is ample linguistic data that goes unexamined which might give insight into how the therapeutic situation itself affects participants: the very fact that Rhoda has a name, but the therapist is merely "Therapist"; what is the significance and effect of the therapist referring to Rhoda's mother as "Mother" rather than "your mother"? What kinds of questions and statements is each participant allowed to make within the therapeutic paradigm?

The weakness of the therapeutic bias in terms of linguistic analysis can be seen in the confusion which arises between the intentional and the expressive nature of paralinguistic phenomena. In discussing the crucial verbal devices of hedging, hesitation, vague reference, indirectness, and so on, the authors employ the term "mitigation" -- which focuses on the intentional aspect of such devices. Its simultaneous role as an expressive device is much less discussed -- that is, the fact that speakers produce speech marked by mitigation not only because of the effect they wish to create but also (perhaps more) as an involuntary response to the emotion they feel about what they are saying.

This expressive function of mitigation is invoked at times, in accounting for Rhoda's speech, but not the therapist's. Whereas the therapist "pauses," Rhoda "hesitates." Thus, in describing the therapist's mention of Rhoda's weight problem, Labov and Fanshel say she "uses many mitigating devices to reduce the impact of her inquiry. She approached the question indirectly, using such vague reference as two things, which she does not expand. She continues with another vague reference, it, which is equally unclear. . . . At the same time

the tempo slows, and she pauses for almost two seconds after with and pauses again after your, before presenting the loaded word weight" (300). This account attributes intentionality to the therapist's speech. Not only does she "pause," but she "approaches the question" and "presents" the loaded word. The authors do not take into account the fact that the issue of Rhoda's weight is loaded for the therapist as well as the patient; she may be nervous about broaching this subject, just as much as Rhoda is. It is likely that the expressive and intentional functions of mitigation generally dovetail -- that is, the same need which would prompt the therapist to feel nervous about the subject would also make it useful for her to mitigate, in terms of Rhoda's nervousness. The analysis offered, however, does not see this dual process.

Note how different the account of Rhoda's verbal behavior is. When Rhoda broaches a difficult subject, she "stammers, chokes, interrupts herself, and then bursts forth with extra heavy stress on the first available verb" (252-3). The words "stammer," "choke," "burst forth," and "first available," are all skewed to portray Rhoda as behaving unintentionally. Yet again, the authors tell us that Rhoda "interrupts herself" but when the therapist exhibits the same surface phenomenon, we are told, "the therapist begins with one approach and changes midstream to another" (300).

An interesting theoretical question arises as an effect of this interpretive bias. At one point in their analysis, Labov and Fanshel describe Rhoda's response to something the therapist has said as "more negative than anything we have seen so far: an eloquent silence of 13 seconds" (313). This silence is bounded by a comment made by the

therapist. Therefore, the length of Rhoda's silence was determined not by her, but by the therapist. In other words, the biased view of the therapist/patient roles obscures the cooperative nature of conversation.

Despite these weaknesses, Labov and Fanshel break new ground in conversational analysis. Although they make an attempt, in an early chapter, to sketch out some preliminary "discourse rules" to account for the derivation of meaning in conversation, their own illuminating insights in actual analysis are based not on these "rules" but on the interpretations made in the "Expansion" and "Interaction" components of their analysis, where they employ their knowledge of social norms and their observations about the interaction. The principles underlying interpretations, then, are those of Hockett, et. al.: micro-analytic attention to paralinguistic features of speech. My own approach in the present study proceeds in the same tradition.

### Conversational Style

Paralinguistic features of speech, then, are the linguistic means by which meaning is encoded in language. Particular use of such features in particular ways constitutes conversational style -- that is, all the subtle and not so subtle linguistic and paralinguistic devices by which speakers convey meaning in language, as a result of which listeners form impressions not only of the message thereby communicated but also of the personality, attitudes, and abilities of the speaker.

Robin Lakoff (to appear) notes that "style" in its largest sense refers to all the aspects of a person's behavior that are popularly

thought of as "character" or "personality." She observes, moreover, that, based on the perception of some elements of a person's behavior, we draw conclusions about that person as a whole and develop expectations about what other behavior they might exhibit. An example Lakoff cites elsewhere (1977) is that "we are surprised if one affects Victorian manners and dresses in tie-dyed shirts and cut-offs" (p. 222). That is, people expect "coherency" and "consistency" among elements of others' behavior, including their dress, mannerisms, and speech. The codification of these "co-occurrence expectations" (Gumperz 1964; Ervin-Tripp 1972) amounts to a grammar of style.

Perception of style operates in the way Bartlett (1932) hypothesized for memory: in sweeping over a newly perceived person or scene, one grasps a small number of elements, associates these with a familiar schema and postulates the existence of the entire schema which is reconstructed in recall. In this sense, a grammar of style assumes a "frames" or "schema" approach which underlies much recent theoretical work in linguistics (for example Chafe 1977 and Fillmore 1976) as well as other disciplines (see Tannen 1979b for a summary and discussion of theories of frames, scripts, schemata and related notions in a variety of disciplines).

Speech -- the use of language in all its phonological, syntactic and paralinguistic variety -- is one element of the schema of behavioral characteristics which make up personal style. It would be ideal, ultimately, to link an analysis of language use with a comprehensive analysis of other elements of behavior. At the very least, a linguistic analysis should correlate verbal with proxemic, kinesic, and other non-verbal communicative channels such as facial expression



and use of gesture. Robin Lakoff (to appear) has begun to relate linguistic with personality style in the psychoanalytic paradigm. In the present study, however, I will concentrate on the linguistic channel per se -- and, specifically, on language use in a single circumscribed context: informal talk at a dinner gathering. I will seek to explicate the linguistic devices which make up what is perceived as speakers' styles, and show the processes by which they operate in interaction with those whose styles are relatively similar and with those whose styles clearly differ widely.

As has been pointed out by Bateson (1972) and his interpreters (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967), one cannot not communicate. When others are present, silence itself is an act of communication. (Linguists and anthropologists have long noted the communicative uses of silence among American Indians, cf for example Basso 1972). Similarly, it is impossible to talk in no style at all. When people speak, as when they dress and move, they must do so in some way; what that way is contributes to the impression others derive of their intentions and personalities -- in other words, constitutes their style.

Before proceeding to the background of relevant research and then to the analysis of conversational data, it would be well to say something about how style is learned. It is not a sophisticated skill learned late or superimposed on already acquired linguistic forms. Rather, it is learned as part of linguistic knowledge in the course of interaction in the family and home and in what Gumperz (1964) has shown to constitute speech communities: the network of speakers with whom one regularly interacts.

Certainly style is a combination of social influence and individual differences (see Gumperz and Tannen [in press] for an analysis of the levels of signalling which tend to characterize individual and social differences). Social differences account for the phenomenon that a person from a certain ethnic or social background can "remind you" of other people you have met from similar backgrounds, but it is individual differences which account for the fact that that person sounds somehow unique, so that you may remark, "That sounds just like Harry."

There has been much recent research on how children learn to use devices which constitute style (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977; Ochs and Schieffelin in press). Anderson (1977) has shown, for example, that children by the age of four use stylistic variables (syntax, lexical choice, politeness forms, and so on) in role-playing characters of different social status. The research of Schieffelin (in press) on the acquisition of language by Kaluli children in Papua New Guinea, consistently demonstrates that children acquire social knowledge simultaneously with language structure. That is, as they learn what to say, they also learn how to say it (i.e. voice quality, pitch and amplitude, pace, and so on). Schieffelin's findings for first language acquisition correspond to those of Wong-Fillmore (1976) for second language acquisition, showing that newly arrived Spanish-speaking children in a California bilingual classroom learned English through acquisition of formulaic phrases, complete with intonation patterns and associated with use in a social context. In other words, style is learned as part of the intrinsically social process (Cook-Gumperz 1975) of language learning.

### Conversational Cooperation: Nonverbal Components

The concept of style becomes crucial in tackling the question of what knowledge is necessary to establish conversational cooperation. How do people achieve conversation? Recent work in inter-ethnic communication has been successful in establishing independent measures of conversational success by analysis of non-verbal aspects of interaction.

Frederick Erickson (1976) has shown that successful conversation is rhythmically synchronous, to the extent that it can be set to a metronome. Both physical movement and verbal contributions are carried out in time to the beat. In studies of dyadic counseling interviews in junior college settings, Erickson found that 1) rhythmic synchrony is greater when interactants share ethnic and subcultural background and 2) the amount of usable information actually communicated in the interviews corresponds to the degree of shared background and rhythmic synchrony. This synchrony, then, is concrete evidence for what is experienced as a sense of "harmony" in successful conversation.

Rhythmic synchrony is made possible by coordinated use of conversational control mechanisms in listenership and speakership. Erickson (in press) shows that when participants in the counseling interviews were of different ethnic backgrounds, they regularly misjudged each other's intentions as a result of differing ways of signalling that a listener response is expected or given. Erickson notes that speakers have subtle ways of signalling to listeners that they would like reassurance that the listener is still with them, that is, ways of signalling LRRMs (Listener-Response-Relevant-Moments). He found (as researchers before him had found too) that black conversants tended to

look steadily at their listeners when speaking, and to make eye contact only intermittently when listening. In contrast, white conversants tended to look steadily at their interlocutors when listening and make eye contact only intermittently when talking. In communication between members of these two cultures, the white counselor, when speaking, often got the feeling that the black student was not paying attention, because the expected steady listener gaze was not effected. Similarly, the student often missed the counselor's LRRM signal and therefore did not give the expected back-channel response (cf Duncan 1974) to reassure the speaker "I'm with you." The counselor then typically began to repeat what he had said in increasingly simplified form, until the student responded. Hence the student concluded, rightly from his point of view, that the counselor was "talking down" to him -- although neither the student, who had been paying attention in his accustomed way, nor the counselor could have known what subtle conversational control mechanisms were throwing them off.

As if Erickson's findings of rhythmic synchrony were not astounding enough, other researchers have discovered that there exists as well micro-synchrony (The following research is summarized in Kempton 1979). Condon (1963) discovered that speakers exhibit self-synchrony. That is, if conversation is filmed and played back on a time/motion analyzer (i.e. stop-motion projector), physical movements and verbal contributions are synchronized at the micro-level: speakers begin to speak, move their heads, blink, raise their eyebrows, move their bodies and limbs, in the very same film frame -- within the same twenty millisecond interval. Condon later discovered interactional synchrony. That is, if the conversation is proceeding successfully,

Listeners are also in perfect synchrony with speakers, their own coordinated movements having onset times in the very same film frame! Such microsynchrony cannot be the result of the listener's perception of the speaker's movements and speech. It can only be effected by the listener's anticipation of the speaker's speech and movements, based on shared rhythm.

Interactional synchrony is found in newborn babies (Condon 1974) and in non-human primates (Condon and Ogsten 1967). In monkeys, for example, a microsynchronous interaction begins to break down in synchrony just before the interactants depart from each other. These findings seem to suggest that at least the disposition to achieve interactional synchrony is innate. However, as with the ability to speak a language without an accent, research indicates that the ability to synchronize with speakers of a particular language becomes solidified, while flexibility wanes. Condon has found that microsynchrony can be discerned only in the interaction of speakers who share cultural background; in cross-cultural communication, dyssynchrony prevails -- just as it is observed in pathological interactions, such as those involving people suffering from autism, retardation, schizophrenia, Parkinsonism, and so on. This finding is intriguing as an indication of the reason one may get the feeling, in communication with speakers from other backgrounds, that there is "something wrong with them." Erickson has shown that the failure to achieve rhythmic synchrony contributes to breakdown of communication. He has been able to isolate climaxes of such breakdown in what he calls "uncomfortable moments."

### Stylistic Strategies

Non-verbal components of interaction are particularly receptive to systematic study by virtue of their observable nature. They are correlated, however, with linguistic phenomena which simultaneously contribute to the fact that conversation with some people is "satisfying" while conversation with others is strikingly less so. The theoretical paradigm which most comprehensively accounts for the ways in which speakers differ stylistically is Robin Lakoff's scheme of communicative rapport. Lakoff's system, which had its beginnings in her *Rules of Politeness* (1973), goes far to explain how language choice operates in the larger context of human interaction.

Philosopher H. P. Grice (1967) postulated the existence of a cooperative principle: that utterances in conversation are designed to fulfill a purpose. He then devised four specific maxims which determine how utterances are to serve the cooperative principle. These are:

1. Say as much as necessary and no more. (Quantity)
2. Tell the truth. (Quality)
3. Be relevant. (Relation)
4. Be clear. (Manner)

The violation of one or more of the conversational maxims, then, can be assumed to be serving a purpose. The process of determining that goal (or meaning) is conversational implicature.

Noting that speakers in fact violate Gricean maxims more often than they observe them, Lakoff hypothesized that they do so in service of the higher goal of politeness in its broadest sense -- that is, to

fulfill the social function of language. She devised a system which represents the universal logic underlying specific linguistic choices (i.e. indirectness, preference for particular lexical or syntactic forms) in the form of three principles originally called "Rules of Politeness" (later called "Rules of Rapport").

1. Don't impose. (Distance)
2. Give options. (Deference)
3. Be friendly. (Camaraderie)

When violating Gricean maxims, and hence cuing meaning through conversational implicature, speakers observe one or another of these "rules." Furthermore, each of these rules, when applied in interaction, creates a particular stylistic effect, as indicated by the terms in parentheses. That is, preference for honoring one or another of these politeness principles results in a communicative strategy which makes up style. Or conversely, conversational style results from habitual use of linguistic devices motivated by these overall strategies. Distance, Deference, and Camaraderie, then, refer to styles associated with particular notions of politeness. (Note that these terms are part of Lakoff's system and do not necessarily have the connotations associated with their use in popular parlance).

In this system, then, Distance (resulting from application of R1, Don't impose) prototypically applies in a formal situation. It governs the use of technical language. In addition, it is the principle by which one would choose an indirect expression of preferences, so as not to impose one's will on others. When I ask my guest, "Would you like something to drink?" the person who replies, "Thank you, that

would be nice," may be seen to employ such a strategy. The reply is depersonalized, in a sense. It should be emphasized, incidentally, that the characterization "Distance" is not meant to imply that those who employ this strategy are "aloof," "standoffish," or "distant" in their personalities -- or at least that they do not necessarily intend to be so, although they may seem so to some observers (particularly those who prefer a different strategy). The term "Distance" refers to the separation that exists between interactants or between speakers and their subject, which results from the application of R1, "Don't impose." Such behavior can nonetheless seem quite friendly in interaction, to those who expect devices associated with this strategy.

Deference characterizes a style that seems hesitant, since its operating principle is R2, Give options. It governs, for example, the use of euphemisms, which give the interlocutor the choice of not understanding their referent. Use of this principle in interaction may give the impression that the speaker does not know what s/he wants, since s/he is giving the option of decision to the other, although, as with Distance, the use of the strategy may be merely conventionalized. Lakoff (1975) points out that women often (and certainly stereotypically) employ this strategy, resulting in the impression that they are fuzzy-minded and indecisive (Subsequent research has corroborated Lakoff's hypothesis). When asked "Would you like something to drink?" a person employing a Deferent strategy might reply, "Whatever you're having," or "Don't go to any trouble."

Camaraderie conventionalizes equality as an interactive norm and honors the principle R3, Be friendly. This is the strategy typified by the stereotype of the back-slapping American, or the car salesman



who first-names his customers. The person who walks into my house and says, "I'm thirsty. Do you have any juice?" is employing such a strategy. As with preceding examples, the impression made by such a linguistic choice will depend upon the extent to which I share the expectation that it is appropriate to employ this principle in this situation. My friend may be assuming I will be pleased by the testament to the closeness of our relationship. If I share his/her strategies, I will agree. If not -- if I feel, for example, that a little RI (Don't impose) might have been nice -- then I may get the impression that this person is "pushy."

Lakoff's system applies to linguistic choices on all levels. For example, in making lexical choices in talking about sexual activity, technical language such as "copulation" maintains Distance between speaker and hearer and between both of them and the emotional content of the subject. It is formal and is appropriate for scientific discussions. Euphemisms such as "doing it" deny not the emotional overtones but the actual subject being referred to; the hearer has the option of not confronting the subject directly. Thus such a choice is associated with a Deferent strategy. Finally, the use of colloquial language such as "getting laid" would be appropriate only among equals in informal settings. The association of these various lexical choices with particular settings then yields the possibility of stylistic variation created by usage in other settings. The shared social knowledge of expectation of one register rather than another, in other words, makes it possible to signal metaphorical meaning about the relationship and the situation at hand. For example, the use of colloquial language in a public setting is associated with a particular

style: it is a way of communicating the image "I'm just folks," and "We're all equals." At the same time, however, such usage of in-group language in a public situation may offend some listeners -- those who do not honor camaraderie as the highest goal, but would appreciate distance more.

An example of just such style shifting is found in a scene in the movie Georgie Girl. A woman (Lynn Redgrave) has an affair with her roommate's lover (Alan Bates), while the roommate is in the hospital expecting Bates' baby. When she discovers that the roommate gave birth just at the time that Redgrave and Bates were in bed together, Redgrave is suddenly repelled by the thought of what they were doing. In talking to him about it, she waves her hand vaguely toward the bedroom and says, "We were ... in there ... rolling around." Her vague gesture, her hesitations, and her use of euphemisms ("in there," "rolling around") are all part of what Lakoff terms a Deferent style, her use of which, in the context of at-home talk with a lover, serves to dramatize her wish to dissociate herself from what she is talking about. The point is not that she is actually "being deferent," but that the use of linguistic devices associated with one setting, when applied in another, has metaphorical significance.

In her recent work, Lakoff (in press) envisions the strategies of Distance, Deference and Camaraderie not as hierchically ordered but rather as points on a continuum of stylistic preferences. One end of the continuum represents the application of Gricean maxims, which for her purposes Lakoff refers to as Rules of Clarity. In this style, only the content of the message is important; speakers evidence no involvement with each other or with the subject matter. At the other

end of the continuum is Camaraderie, governing situations in which the emotional involvement between speakers and between them and their subject matter is maximal.

Each person's decisions about which strategy to apply, to what extent, in a given situation, results in her/his characteristic style. That style, then, is made up of a range on the continuum, the particular degree of camaraderie or deference, for example, shifting in response to the situation, the people participating, the subject at hand, and so on. Each person's notion of what strategy is appropriate to apply is influenced by a combination of family background and other interactive experience.

As Lakoff points out, unalloyed clarity (a situation governed entirely by Gricean maxims) almost never obtains. People prefer not to make themselves perfectly clear because they have interactional goals served by the Rules of Rapport which supersede the goal of clarity (Lakoff 1976). Those higher interactional goals may be broadly subsumed under the headings defensiveness and rapport. They correspond, respectively, to a camaraderie strategy and a distance/deference strategy. Thus I may prefer not to let you know just what I mean, so that if you don't like it, I can deny (even to myself) that I "meant" any such thing. If I don't tell you what I want directly, and you prefer not to give me what I want, I need not feel rejected and you need not feel guilty, because I never really asked for it. This is the defensive benefit of indirectness. On the other hand, if you do give me what I want, how much sweeter (for both of us) if it appears that you gave it to me of your own choice, not because I asked for it. As I have discussed elsewhere (Tannen 1975), people like to

feel that they are understood WITHOUT explaining themselves. Indirectness then can be a testament of love, proof that "we speak the same language" in the deepest sense. This is the rapport function of indirectness.

Brown and Levinson (1978), building on Lakoff's work, identify two aspects of politeness semantics as negative and positive face. Their notion of negative face corresponds to Lakoff's defensiveness function, and to her Distance strategy: "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others." (Hence the Lakovian operating principle, Don't impose). Brown and Levinson's positive face corresponds to camaraderie and to the rapport function: "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 67). Negative and positive politeness strategies then grow out of these wants.<sup>4</sup> Brown and Levinson's terms on record and off record correspond to what linguists refer to as direct and indirect speech.

In a now classic study, Brown and Gilman (1960), discussing the significance of pronoun choice, focus on "two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life -- the dimensions of power and solidarity" (p. 253). These dimensions are yet another reflection of the binary distinction of Lakoff's two functions of indirectness and Brown and Levinson's face wants. Solidarity is another way of expressing rapport; it is the goal of positive face. Power, on the other hand, is the dimension the exercise of which provokes defensiveness and negative face. Power is associated with nonreciprocal T--V pronoun use, with the possessor of power using T. Solidarity is associated with reciprocal pronoun use (Lakoff's camaraderie, a

situation of equality).

It has been suggested (Dreyfuss 1975) that indirectness is the strategy of choice of those in a position of powerlessness. According to such a hypothesis, this would explain why American women are characteristically more "indirect" than American men (my own research [Tannen 1976] provides some evidence that this is so). Such an analysis is implicit in Lakoff's (1975) original work as well. Dreyfuss suggests indirectness is the only way a one-down person can manipulate within a relationship without redefining the relationship in a Batesonian sense (Bateson's notion of metacommunicative framing will be discussed later).

Thus, a number of different strands of research converge to elucidate a crucial bipartite dynamic in the form of defensiveness/rapport, negative/positive face, power/solidarity, all reflecting the overriding human goals of interpersonal connection and independence. These universal goals then motivate the use of indirectness and other linguistic devices in conversation. Preference for serving one or the other of these goals, and ways of serving both of them, determine speakers' conversational styles. The fact that these goals are universal makes communication possible. However, the fact that the two goals are conflicting, and that there are a great variety of ways of serving them, makes for widely varying styles, and hence for imperfect communication.

#### Processes of Conversational Style

Lakoff (1978) shows that the basic transformational functions (addition, substitution, deletion, and permutation) operate in

personality as in language. For example, she points out that the psychological process of repression is a form of deletion by which an element present in underlying structure does not appear in surface structure. The psychoanalytic process of reaction formation corresponds to substitution; an element present in underlying structure appears in a different form in surface structure. Through these processes, Lakoff demonstrates, verbal strategies exhibit ambiguity and paraphrase functions. Just as one sentence may have two different deep structures (e.g. Visiting relatives can be a nuisance), so behavior can be ambiguous. I may continually flick my hand across my face because there is an elusive strand of hair in my eyes or because I have an obsessive delusion that there is something obstructing my vision. Similarly, just as two different sentences may have the same deep structure (e.g. active and passive forms), so behavior can be paraphrastic. Feelings of insecurity can be expressed by habitually putting oneself down or by habitually putting others down. (Examples are my own).

These basic grammatical relations, then, function in conversation and contribute to the dissonance which prevails in interaction between speakers with differing styles. This process has been analyzed in detail in the dialogue from Ingmar Bergman's Scenes from a Marriage (Lakoff and Tannen 1979). Pragmatic synonymy (paraphrase) can be seen in the way the husband, Johan, and the wife, Marianne, use different linguistic devices to achieve similar ends. In order to avoid unpleasant topics (for example, their marital problems), Marianne characteristically uses excessive verbiage about trifling details or a barrage of questions, both associated with a camaraderie strategy. Johan

employs the distancing strategies of sarcasm, pontification, and pomposity. Pragmatic homonymy (ambiguity) is the phenomenon by which they use the same linguistic devices to achieve different ends. For example, Johan and Marianne both employ rhetorical questions. However, Marianne's questions attempt to draw Johan into her idealized vision of how their life should be, while Johan's function as taunts, hence to drive her away.

Whenever a speaker in interaction uses a device which the interlocutor understands as intended, a situation of pragmatic identity obtains. This is the ideal, the goal, of communication. In as many cases, however -- perhaps more often than we would like to believe -- misunderstandings arise as a result of pragmatic homonymy and synonymy. (The distinction between understanding and misunderstanding is an idealized one. In actual interaction, speakers and listeners achieve varying degrees of understanding of each other's intentions. That is, a listener may form an impression that corresponds more or less closely to the model the speaker is operating from. It is probably the case that precise fits -- the experience of having one's listener perceive precisely what one intends, with all its associations, connotations and overtones -- are relatively rare (if not impossible), and that complete misunderstandings -- the experience of having one's listener perceive quite the opposite of one's intentions, or something utterly unrelated to one's intentions -- are equally rare).

An example of pragmatic homonymy can be seen in the following example. A first-year graduate student (Mary) arrived at a meeting attended mostly by experienced graduate students. While waiting for the meeting to begin, Mary introduced herself to the others present.

When one of the other students, Sue, told Mary her full name, her fellow students remarked on the fact that she had given a new last name. Mary asked Sue whether the name change was the result of marriage or divorce. On hearing that Sue had gotten divorced, Mary offered the information that she herself was recently divorced and had recently resumed use of her maiden name. She then asked Sue a series of questions, such as when she had gotten divorced, how long she had been married, and so on. Years later, Mary had occasion to learn that Sue had been offended by her barrage of personal questions, which she had taken not as an expression of interest but as imposing, intrusive, and overbearing. Mary had been operating on a camaraderie strategy, seeking to make herself and her new acquaintance feel good by behaving as if they were friends and could talk freely about their common personal experiences. Sue, however, expected RI to apply (Don't impose), so Mary's approach did not make her feel good at all. Instead, she concluded not that Mary was friendly but that she was nosy. In other words, a situation of pragmatic homonymy prevailed by which the verbal device "offer and ask for personal information" had different meanings for speaker and hearer.<sup>5</sup>

An example of pragmatic synonymy has been presented and analyzed (though not in these terms) in Gumperz and Tannen 1979. The conversation took place between close friends, as A was preparing dinner for them both:

- (1) A: What kind of salad dressing should I make?
- (2) B: Oil and vinegar of course.
- (3) A: What do you mean "of course"?



(4) B: Well, I always make oil and vinegar, but if you want we could try something else.

(5) A: Does that mean you don't like it when I make other dressings?

(6) B: No. I like it. Go ahead. Make something else.

(7) A: Not if you want oil and vinegar.

(8) B: I don't. Make a yogurt dressing.

[A prepares yogurt dressing, tastes it, and makes a face.]

(9) B: Isn't it good?

(10) A: I don't like yogurt dressing.

(11) B: Well if you don't like it, throw it out.

(12) A: Never mind.

(13) B: What never mind? It's just a little yogurt!

(14) A: You're making a big deal about nothing!

(15) B: YOU are!

This interchange resulted in both speakers feeling that the other was being uncooperative and difficult. Discussion of the incident with both parties after the fact revealed that when A asked (1) "What kind of salad dressing should I make?" he expected B to say something like, "Oh, make whatever you want," or, at most, "Why not make something creamy?" In other words, A was operating on a deferent strategy (giving options) by asking (1) and expecting B to reply in a way that returned the options to A. The use of such verbal devices associated with one strategy or another is conventionalized. A speaker does not consciously refer to the operating principles, but rather instinctively expects or utters verbal forms that correspond to them.

A was not intending to be deferent. He simply spoke in a way that seemed obviously appropriate.

Expecting, therefore, to be given the option of what salad dressing to prepare, or at least a negotiation ("Make something creamy"), A was thrown off balance by B's reply (2) "Oil and vinegar of course." Yet B later explained that his reply meant precisely "Make whatever you want." He intended "of course" as a self-mocking ironic comment on his own unimaginative eating habits, implying therefore that it would be best for A to decide what kind of dressing to make. It might be paraphrased as, "Well if you ask me I'm going to say oil and vinegar because I'm so dull, that's what I always make; since you're more imaginative, why don't you decide for yourself and make whatever you like." The situation is one of pragmatic synonymy: different ways of saying what amounts to the same thing.

The yogurt dressing example also illustrates the phenomenon Gregory Bateson (1972) has identified and dubbed complementary schismogenesis. This is a dynamic in which two interactants exercise clashing behavior, such that each one's behavior drives the other into increasingly exaggerated expressions of the incongruent behavior, in a mutually aggravating spiral. A classic example is that of a couple, one partner of which tends to exhibit dependent behavior, while the other tends toward independent behavior. The "dependent" partner tends to cling out of fear of losing the other. This clinging aggravates the "independent" partner's claustrophobia, and incites him/her to seek more independence. The resulting drawing away gives evidence to the other partner that s/he had better cling more tightly lest the other drift further away, and so on, in an ever widening gyre. (Note

that the process does not necessarily begin with the behavior of one or the other partner but is a spontaneous outgrowth of their mutual behavior). Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) give numerous examples of this dynamic in interaction.

In the yogurt dressing example, one speaker, A, becomes increasingly adamant in his determination to honor B's preferences, and consequently in his conviction that B is bossing him around, as he sees expressions of B's preferences in his speech. B, on the other hand, tries harder and harder to convince A that he is not expressing his preferences at all, with the paradoxical result that he appears more and more demanding. He goes from the ironic "of course" (2) to a suggestion "we could try something else" (4) to a general imperative "Make something else" (6) to a specific imperative "Make a yogurt dressing" (8). This last was intended as proof of good faith, to make it abundantly clear that B is willing to eat any kind of dressing. In other words, "yogurt dressing" stands for "something other than oil and vinegar." A, however, takes it literally, as a demand for yogurt dressing.<sup>6</sup> Thus A and B were caught in the grip of pragmatic synonyms.

#### Frames and How They Are Signalled

Another Batesonian concept operating in the yogurt dressing example is that of frame. (See Tannen 1979b for a discussion of how Bateson's use of the term relates to its use in other disciplines). Bateson shows that no message can be interpreted except by reference to a superordinate message about how the communication is intended. "Play," for example, is a frame within which a bite or a slap is not

intended as a hostile action. The metamessage "this is play" signals the context within which a bite or slap does not stand for what it is known to mean: aggression.

This explains the process of irony by which B's comment "oil and vinegar of course" in the yogurt dressing interchange, while sounding peremptory, was not intended to be so. B's metamessage, "this is irony," is cued by a combination of intonation, voice quality, facial expression, gesture, plus the expectation that such usage is appropriate in the situation. These subtle signals, however, are opaque to A (or to anyone unfamiliar with their conventionalized usage), who is not attuned to the signals and not expecting use of irony in that way. In other words, A does not recognize the frame.

The way in which frames operate in interaction has been the focus of much excellent research in ethnography of speaking and cognitive anthropology (Gumperz and Hymes 1964 & 1972). This research tradition emphasizes the merging of linguistic and social phenomena, seeing language as an integral part of social activity. The unit of study isolated by these scholars is the speech event, and they are interested in how speakers use language to create those events.

In a sense, the focus on speech events is parallel to developments in philosophy of language, insofar as both trends contribute to a theory of meaning as use. Van Valin (1977) explains that Wittgenstein's notion of meaning as use entails that even what might be considered purely referential meaning has no substance without an understanding of use. He demonstrates, using Wittgenstein's own example, that the word "hammer" can have no "meaning" to someone unfamiliar with the way in which a hammer is used. This amounts, in

effect, to a frames approach to semantics (Fillmore 1976). The name "hammer," like the object "hammer," can be understood only by reference to a "frame" or set of expectations about human behavior which includes the use of a hammer. This insight is substantiated over and over in ethnography of speaking research. For example, Agar (1975) shows that it is impossible to understand the language used by street junkies unless one understands the event structures which give rise to it.

The question remains, however, for linguists, of how the dynamic notion of frames operates in language, given an interactional model of speech events. The interface between macro sociolinguistic theory and micro linguistic analysis is to be found in the work of John Gumperz and his associates.

Gumperz (1977) demonstrates that speakers signal what activity they are engaging in, i.e. the metacommunicative frame they are operating within, by use of paralinguistic and prosodic features of speech -- i.e. intonation, pitch, amplitude, rhythm, and so on. Gumperz calls these features, when they are used in signalling interpretive frames, "contextualization cues."

Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, Gumperz has developed a method for investigating the operation of contextualization cues by examining situations in which they fail to work: specifically, situations of culture contact in which participants interact with others who do not share their conventions for signalling meaning. At the same time that the culture contact situation provides the theoretician with a heuristic device for analyzing the operation of contextualization cues, the theory provides a way of understanding the breakdown of

communication which occurs in such situations. In other words, in addition to addressing the theoretical question of the nature of social knowledge in language use, the method also offers an invaluable tool in the understanding of practical and ubiquitous social problems arising out of culture contact situations such as are found in modern urban environments.

Gumperz' method involves isolating the operation of contextualization cues by comparing conversational interaction among in-group members with cross-cultural interaction. One example Gumperz (1978) discusses at length is a public address in which a black activist alienated his primarily white audience and got himself arrested for threatening the life of the United States president. At a Sproul Plaza rally (at the University of California, Berkeley), the speaker repeatedly intoned, "We will kill Richard Nixon." Gumperz shows that the speaker was using rhetorical devices of black preaching style as well as a black colloquialism, "kill," to convey the meaning of destroying Nixon's influence, not his life. Had the intended meaning been to assassinate the president, the appropriate colloquialism would have been "waste," or another appropriate metaphorical term. The rhetorical strategies employed in this speech are shown to operate in an example of black preaching taped from a radio broadcast, and interviews with members of the black community testify to the fact that in-group members made the same interpretation that the speaker later professed to have meant.

Gumperz has done considerable research as well in comparing the contextualization systems of speakers of Indian English with those of speakers of British and American English. He shows that speakers of

Indian English consistently have trouble getting their ideas listened to and appreciated in conversations with speakers of British or American English. In one study Gumperz (1978b) reports on research in an on-the-job culture contact situation which shows how contextualization cues operate. Indian women newly hired to serve meals to employees at a London airport cafeteria were considered surly and uncooperative by both customers and supervisors. The employees themselves felt that they were being mistreated and discriminated against. Taperecording interaction and playing it back in a workshop setting revealed that use of language was playing a large part in the trouble. For example, when offering gravy to customers who had chosen meat, the Indian women said: "Gravy." Their falling intonation was quite different from the rising intonation with which British women, when serving, offered: "Gravy?" Listening to the tapes in mixed groups of Indian and British employees, the Indian women expressed their feeling that they were saying "the same thing" and couldn't account for the negative reaction they were getting. The British women then pointed out that the different intonation patterns yield different meanings. Whereas the question, "Gravy?" uttered with rising intonation is understood to mean, "Would you like gravy?" the same word uttered with falling intonation sounds like a statement and is understood to mean, "This is gravy. Take it or leave it."

In this way Gumperz' approach accounts, in part, for what may otherwise be ascribed to "prejudice" or "discrimination," but may in fact be attributable to the systematic misjudgment of the intentions and abilities of those from other cultures or subcultures who employ contextualization cues in different ways. This is not to adopt the

polyanna stance that discrimination and prejudice do not exist, but simply to note that they are aggravated by concrete differences in language use.

The degree to which cultural background is shared is reflected, then, in the degree to which use of contextualization cues is congruent -- that is, whether speakers can gauge when others have made their points; when interruption is appropriate; what interactive frame is operative; what is the relationship between comments. Members of similar "cultures" but different "subcultures" may be able to manage these conversational control mechanisms, but yet misunderstand others' uses of such devices as irony and indirectness, as seen in the yogurt dressing example. (See Gumperz and Tannen 1979 for further discussion of this phenomenon).

The ability to participate appropriately in a discussion of any sort depends upon the ability to signal and comprehend the relations between elements within utterances and across utterances -- in other words to tell what someone else's main points are as distinguished from background material, and to make clear one's own main points and their relations to background material -- in other words, to maintain thematic progression (Gumperz 1977). The crucial nature of this ability can be sensed from the feeling of discomfort that arises when you can't tell what someone else "is getting at," and therefore cannot determine what your response should be. Keenan and Schieffelin (1975) discuss this phenomenon in conversation as the function "topic." Their notion of topic corresponds to Gumperz' thematic progression. In fact, it is thematic progression that is at issue in many linguistics papers dealing with "topic" as a syntactic phenomenon, as



well as in recent studies of "cohesion" (Halliday and Hasan 1977). The crucial distinctions made by Chafe (1974) between given and new information and between new information and contrastiveness, are also concerned with this matter of tying things together and cuing the relationship between elements within uttered material.

Michaels and Cook-Gumperz (1979) illustrate what can happen when thematic progression in narratives is signalled differently by members of interacting groups. They have studied narratives told by black and white children in a first grade classroom in Berkeley, California. The teacher expects a "topic-centered" narrative strategy which corresponds to that employed by white children in the class. Hence she is able to identify their talk as narrative and understand the point of their stories. In contrast, the black children employ a "topic-chaining" strategy which the teacher is unfamiliar with. Therefore she does not recognize their talk as narrative; rather she gets the impression that the children are "just rambling," and she cuts them off before they make their points. The black children use intonation to cue topic shifts within their talk, but like the contextualization cues used to signal irony in the yogurt dressing example discussed earlier, the signals of topic shift in the black children's talk are lost on the teacher who is unfamiliar with the devices. In this setting, the results of differences in ways of building and signalling thematic progression can be tragic indeed.

### Coherence Principles

The process of contextualization includes the cuing of expectations about what meaning is likely to be communicated and organizing

principles by which meaning is made into discourse. Both these phenomena seem, on first glance, to be "basic" and "given" aspects of the world, but comparative research quickly shows that they are among the most relative of phenomena.

The work of Alton Becker demonstrates that the arrangement of information in discourse varies greatly for speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He has shown that many of the textual constraints considered basic to Western notions of coherence are not operative, or less compelling, in the rhetoric of Malaysian languages he has studied, while other constraints obtain. He has shown, moreover, that such coherence principles operate on every level of discourse and contribute to, at the same time that they grow out of, people's attempts to achieve "coherence" in the world.

For example, Becker (in press a) shows that the constraints of temporal unity and causality which are basic to Western textual coherence are *not to be found in Javanese shadow theatre*. Rather, Wayang plots hinge on coincidence. While events need not be presented in the temporal sequence in which they occurred, they must begin, end and pass through certain places which are determined by convention.

Becker (in press b) has shown too that coherence on the sentence level and on the textual level within a given language adhere to similar constraints, developing from related "coherence principles." He shows how a single sentence in Classical Malay carries the hearer grammatically (through clause structure) and rhetorically (through sentence structure) from its actor outward to the landscape through which s/he moves, that is, from language to nature, as well as (seemingly paradoxically) from generality to particularity. Thus, "the

figure a sentence makes is a strategy of interpretation filling in subjectivity, temporality, referentiality, and intersubjectivity which . . . helps the people it is used by understand and feel coherent in their worlds." It is for this reason that communication with speakers who speak the same language is necessary for mental health, and again -- on a less extreme plane -- communication with those who use the language somewhat differently makes people doubt their "coherence" in the world.

Polanyi (to appear) shows that not only how a story can be told is dependent upon cultural constraints, but what a story can be about is equally constrained by cultural convention. Polanyi's hypothesis recalls C. Wright Mills' (1940) classic analysis of "vocabularies of motives." Mills points out that people feel the need to give reasons for their actions (to themselves as well as others), and that what "reasons" are possible, while appearing inherently logical, are actually agreed-upon conventions. In other words, one learns what kinds of explanations are regularly offered by others and will be accepted by others as "reasonable." In following a conversation -- any conversation -- hearers must share with speakers concepts of what is appropriate, logical, and reasonable, in order to understand what they are getting at.

Such an inherently social view of language is found most systematically and eloquently explicated in the writings of Erving Goffman. Goffman (1959) identifies the kernel unit of interaction not as the individual but the team: "a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained." Thus, the ways in which people organize their

experience of the world for talk, and what they choose to say about it, is conventionalized and culturally-determined.

Culturally-influenced appropriateness judgments have been the focus of cross-cultural research in a number of fields. Much recent work in the area of cognition has prompted a shift in emphasis from the postulation of differences in cognitive processes to the concept of "functional cognitive systems" (Cole & Scribner 1974) -- that is, what people consider appropriate to do with perception. In the same vein, Bruner (1978) questions the conclusions of Russian psychologist Alexander Luria, in a review of a recently-released study which Luria conducted in 1932. Examining differences in cognitive style between illiterate and educated peasants, Luria indicated that his illiterate subjects employed functional and concrete reasoning rather than abstract reasoning. After examining Luria's data, Bruner notes that the peasants' reasoning, though different, is "abstract" in its own way. He observes: "Most of what has emerged from studies of Africans, Eskimos, Aborigines, and other groups shows that the same basic mental functions are present in adults of any culture. What differs is the deployment of these functions: what is considered an appropriate strategy suited to the situation and the task" (p. 88).

A similar conclusion is drawn by Ekman (1979) in his studies of facial expressions. In an experimental situation, Ekman exposed Japanese and American nurses to grisly and disturbing photographs, under dual circumstances: first when they were alone, and then in the presence of an investigator. He found that when they were alone, members of the two groups showed comparable facial expressions. However, in the presence of an investigator, the American subjects continued to

display the same expressions while the Japanese subjects masked their disgust with smiling. Based on these and related experiments, Ekman concludes that facial expressions of emotion are universal, but members of different cultures differ with regard to display rules: that is, when they deem it appropriate to allow others to witness those expressions. (It is easy to imagine the effects on cross-cultural communication of the use of different display rules -- for example, in a situation in which one considers it appropriate for a person to show distress and finds instead that the other person is smiling).

My own research on cross-cultural narratives (Tannen 1978 and to appear) furnishes examples of the same phenomenon. In connection with a project directed by Wallace Chafe, twenty American and twenty Greek women viewed a short movie (of our own production) and then told, one by one, what they had seen in the movie. The resulting narratives demonstrated that what the Greeks and the Americans considered a task appropriate to answering the question "What happened in the movie?" were quite different.<sup>7</sup> The narratives produced by the Americans evidenced the fact that they were performing a memory task. They included as many details as possible (with the result that their narratives were significantly longer), and they fussed over temporal sequentiality and accuracy of detail. In contrast, the Greeks seemed to be trying to tell satisfactory stories. Their narratives were often structured around a theme, and they tended to omit details that did not contribute to that theme. They furnished "interpretations" about characters' motivation and judgments about their behavior. On the whole, both groups succeeded in their apparent goals: the Americans proved themselves able recallers, and the Greeks proved

themselves able story-tellers.

The Greeks and Americans differed as well with regard to how their narratives reflected the fact that they were telling about a film. The Americans showed themselves to be media-wise. They used jargon associated with cinema ("camera angle," "soundtrack," and so on) and were preoccupied with criticizing the film-maker's technique. The Greeks, on the other hand, made a point of finding the film's message. Both groups, then, were performing the narrative task in ways that were triggered by their "frames" or "structures of expectations" (R. N. Ross 1975) about what was appropriate. Having seen the same movie, they differed in what aspects of the film they deemed appropriate to verbalize, and by what coherence principles they organized those elements into narrative. I have shown elsewhere in detail (Tannen 1979b) how such expectations influence verbalization on all levels of discourse.

#### Oral/Literate Tradition

Related research findings which bear strongly upon the results of this cross-cultural narrative study emerge from work on the rhetorics of oral and literate tradition. (For a summary of recent research in this area see Rader [to appear]). A number of investigators have hypothesized that strategies associated with one or the other of these rhetorical traditions can be employed in either mode. For example, Walter Ong asserts, in an interview with Altree (1973), that as a result of literacy:

You get a highly developed linear, sequential thinking that goes on only in a very limited way in oral culture, not in this protracted way. Oral cultures typically organize thought in "sayings": formulas, proverbs, aphorisms, and the like. Once you get writing, this earlier organization is slowly phased out or minimized.... Once you had writing, you could become familiar with the kind of sequential thinking that you do in writing. Then your talk could reflect the kind of thinking that writing enabled you to do. (p. 18)

In other words, the kind of organizing principles that yield "sequential" or "linear" rhetorical structure is associated with literacy but can be found in oral language as well.

Others have come to similar conclusions. Goody (1977) notes that writing, and formal schooling with which it is inextricably intertwined, made possible and placed value upon the skills of repetition, copying, and verbatim memory, all of which are unnatural as well as unoral. In contrast, memory in oral culture is creatively reconstructed according to a known schema. (In this Goody is building upon the work of Lord 1960). Goody, like Ong, notes that oral tradition is not replaced by literate; rather, the two modes coexist in modern society, a fact which causes a certain amount of confusion, since there arises a "gap between the public literate tradition of the school, and the very different and indeed often directly contradictory private oral tradition of the family and peer group" (Goody & Watt 1962). Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1978) point out that American and

western European societies have conventionalized literate rhetorical strategies for oral use in many public situations.

This distinction between oral and written rhetorical strategies is not absolute, but is useful as a heuristic device. It corresponds to what Bernstein (1970) called "elaborated" and "restricted" codes. It is a great misfortune that Bernstein's hypothesis was misinterpreted to imply linguistic deficit in lower class speakers and egregiously misapplied. In fact, the "elaborated" code which he found to characterize the speech of upper class members may be seen as the "decontextualized" rhetorical style of written tradition. The "restricted" code of the lower classes is then the ingroup-associated rhetoric of oral tradition -- highly dependent upon familiar contextual information.

This last distinction is made by Olson (1977) who suggests that written statements, while depending upon prior agreement as to rules of argument, present the bulk of meaning in the text itself. In contrast, oral statements appeal to common experience for meaning; that is, the meaning is in the context. Both Robin Lakoff and Margaret Rader (personal communication) point out that Olson's hypothesis that "the meaning is in the text" of written language is idealized. Anyone looking closely at any written text can quickly see that there is a mass of social knowledge the reader must have in order to make sense of written statements. It is true, nonetheless, that the degree to which unstated assumptions and references underly arguments is greater in spoken language (that is, casual spoken language, not the formal rhetorical styles which have been influenced by literate tradition).



It is clear that not all spoken language adheres to the rhetoric of oral tradition, while not all written language is governed by the rhetoric of literate tradition. This phenomenon is at the heart of research by Keenan (1977) on planned and unplanned discourse. Keenan questions the view current in child language studies that communicative strategies acquired later in a child's development replace earlier strategies. She suggests instead that strategies learned later are simply added to the child's repertoire. In verbalization, then, adults continue to use the full repertoire, but when called upon to engage in unplanned discourse, they rely more heavily on structures and skills acquired in the first three or four years of life.

Keenan's observations explain Labov's (1969) at first jolting assertion that "the highest percentage of well formed sentences are found in casual speech, and working-class speakers use more well formed sentences than middle-class speakers. The widespread myth that most speech is ungrammatical is no doubt based upon tapes made at learned conferences, where we obtain the maximum number of irreducibly ungrammatical sentences." The mode of verbalization called "written" by Goody, Olson and others is clearly planned written discourse, while the mode called "oral" is unplanned oral discourse. It seems likely that the highly grammatical nature of casual speech which Labov attributed to working-class speakers corresponds to oral unplanned discourse -- hence making use of structures and skills learned early in life and used constantly in casual talk. The ungrammatical speech of "learned conferences" which Labov refers to reflects the attempt by highly literate speakers to create the complex structures of written planned discourse in an oral mode, making use of structures learned

later in life and used only in circumscribed and specialized situations: hence their imperfect realization.

Yet another strand of research whose findings correlate with these is that of Beatriz Lavandera (1978a) who has found that speakers of Chicano Spanish as well as speakers of Cocoliche (a variety of Spanish spoken by Italian immigrants in Argentina) avoid use of complex conditional tenses by using discourse strategies which do not require them. For example, they habitually employ direct discourse in telling stories rather than indirect discourse (e.g. "He says, 'What do you want?'" as opposed to "He asked me what I wanted.") Lavandera's research shows that it is not the case that such speakers do not know the conditional forms. When asked to construct sentences which require them, they are quite able to do so. It is simply that they prefer the strategies which do not require them.

#### Rapport vs. Decontextualized Strategies

Considering findings by all these scholars, I have hypothesized the following phenomenon: users of in-group or localized speech varieties such as Cocoliche, Chicano Spanish, or certain New York City dialects (perhaps also speakers of Bernstein's "restricted code") may be employing verbal devices associated with family and home in more settings than do speakers of standard linguistic dialects -- in other words, the rhetoric of oral tradition rather than literate tradition. For example, the structures which Lavandera has found to be preferred in such "dialects" build on a strategy of camaraderie -- that is, they evoke interpersonal solidarity. Direct discourse is more evocative of emotional involvement and interpersonal immediacy; it is more highly

contextualized, one might say, than the indirect discourse which is intuitively related to the decontextualized tone of literate culture and written tradition. Like so many elements of literate discourse, indirect discourse is a linguistic device which remedial writing students have a great deal of trouble mastering (cf my own experience in teaching them).

The implication is not that speakers of such styles consciously attempt to invoke solidarity when they speak. Rather, their habitual ways of talking, learned in interaction within the ingroup, have conventionalized the use of verbal devices associated with a camaraderie-based strategy which is associated with oral tradition, as opposed to a Distance-based strategy associated with literate tradition. Camaraderie, as Lakoff (in press) explains, is the strategy which recognizes maximal interpersonal involvement between speakers and between them and their subject. Distance, on the other hand, denies interpersonal or emotional involvement -- hence the association with decontextualized, literate rhetoric of schooling and other formal settings.

Considering the social reality of groups whose dialects we are discussing, it is easy to postulate that strategies which capitalize upon interpersonal involvement would be preferred. Borrowing terms from two related paradigms, I have chosen to refer to the strategy associated with literate tradition as "decontextualized," in order to avoid the possible negative connotations of "Distance," and the strategy associated with oral tradition found in in-group talk as "rapport-based," in order to emphasize that interpersonal involvement is thereby in focus.

The rapport/decontextualized schema sheds light on much recent research, including my own on Greek and American narratives (see p. 45). Insofar as the Greeks in my study sought to tell good stories, they were exercising skills associated with oral tradition. This relates as well to their preoccupation with finding a message in the film and in interpreting and judging characters' motivations. In all these aspects, it is the interpersonal involvement which is paramount. By contrast, the Americans in the study, by performing a memory task, decontextualized the speech event.

In another cross-cultural study (Tannen 1979a) I compare strategies used by Greek and American informants in interpreting a short conversation:

- (1) Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?
- (2) Husband: Ok.
- (3) Wife (later): Are you sure you want to go?
- (4) Husband: OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway.

In choosing variant interpretations, more Greeks than Americans favored the interpretation that the husband's response (2) "OK" did not mean that he really wanted to go to the party. Rather, they believed that he was going along with what he perceived as his wife's indirect indication in (1) that she wanted to go. The reason most often given by Greek respondents to explain why they made this interpretation, was the husband's lack of enthusiasm in his response "OK." This finding corresponds to results of quite a different kind of study by Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou and McGuire (1972) to the effect that Greeks place more value on enthusiasm and spontaneity than do

Americans.

Related to this "enthusiasm constraint" is another phenomenon which I dubbed the "brevity effect." In explaining why they made certain interpretations, many respondents in both groups referred to the "brevity" of the husband's (2) "OK." However, all Americans who made reference to the brevity of "OK," did so to explain why they believed the husband really wanted to go to the party. They reasoned that the brevity of his response shows he was being casual, informal, and hence sincere. This interpretation is based on the assumption that in an in-group setting, one will say just what s/he means. In stark contrast, Greeks who mentioned the brevity of the husband's "OK" did so in support of the interpretation that he did not really want to go to the party. Their interpretation was based on the assumption that, in an in-group setting, resistance to the other's will should not be expressed directly, so it will be expressed by saying little. The strategy is a variation of the adage, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything."

Thus for the in-group setting posed, the Greek speakers in my study evidenced a communicative strategy by which enthusiasm is expected in a sincere expression of one's own preferences, and brevity is expected in expression of unwillingness to comply with the perceived wish of a close partner. The American respondents revealed less expectation of enthusiasm and stated that brevity is associated with the direct communication of one's preferences. In the first system, the signalling load is on interpersonal solidarity through expression of enthusiasm. In the second system the signalling load is on the content which is therefore taken "at face value."

Moreover, in interviews in which respondents discussed why they chose one or the other interpretation, Greek subjects more often personalized their analyses. That is, they reported having made interpretations by reference to their own experience, saying things like, "Well, that's how my husband does it," or, "If I were the one..." Americans, on the other hand, were more likely to try to be "objective" in their analyses. As with the narratives told by Greek women in the film experiment, the Greek approach is more personalized and exhibits strategies associated with social interaction rather than the depersonalized, decontextualized approaches used by American respondents which are associated with formal schooling and literate tradition.

The findings of other researchers can also be understood in terms of the rapport/decontextualized distinction. For example, Courtney Cazden and Frederick Erickson have directed research on communicative strategies in bilingual classrooms. Their initial research indicated that not only Anglo-American teachers but even Chicano teachers praised Anglo-American children more than Chicano children in mixed classrooms. Researchers Arthur Vera and Robert Carrasco began to take part in Chicago bilingual classrooms and thereby discovered that what was going on was more subtle than was at first suspected.

While they did not praise Chicano children publicly, the Chicano teachers found opportunities to praise them in private. At those times they also thanked them for having performed well for the benefit of the teacher. This contrasts strikingly with what has been observed by Sarah Michaels (personal communication) in her role as participant-observer in an ethnically mixed elementary school in Berkeley,

California (in connection with a project directed by John Gumperz and Herb Simons). Michaels notes that the white teacher in her classroom praises children publicly for their performance and regularly reminds them that they are performing not for her but for themselves.

The white and Chicano teachers in these studies use strategies resulting in different teaching styles which are consistent with the rapport/decontextualized distinction. By refraining from singling children out for public praise, the Chicano teacher honors the importance of the children's mutual solidarity. The motivation of pleasing the teacher encourages the child to perform well in school, based on the interpersonal connection between the child and the teacher. In contrast, the anglo teacher's strategy of public praise is likely to engender competitiveness in children (such competitiveness is indeed observed in Michaels' study and not in the Chicano teachers' classrooms). Furthermore, the anglo teacher's de-emphasis of her personal connection with the children leads her to urge them to perform for their own sakes. In striking contrast, the Chicano teacher, when praising Chicano children, regularly takes them into her lap, carresses them affectionately, and calls them endearing pet names -- all devices associated with a family, in-group rapport system.

Just as coherence principles operate on all levels of verbalization (Becker in press b), so the rapport/decontextualized strategies can be seen to operate on the lexical as well as the discourse level. For example, Hill (1978) demonstrates that speakers of Hausa regularly employ an "in-tandem prototype" when talking about spatial relations, while speakers of standard American English employ a "mirror-image prototype." In other words, if there is a rock sitting between you

and a tree, a mirror-image prototype would prompt you to say that the rock is in front of the tree, while an in-tandem prototype would prompt you to say that the rock is behind the tree. By the latter prototype, it is as if you envision the tree as marching in tandem with you, oriented in space just as you are. Hill suggests that such a prototype is "largely generated by dynamic interaction" (532). Building up on this research, Aronowitz and Hill (talk at UC Berkeley February 1979) found that among students in New York City schools, inner-city black speakers were more likely to employ the in-tandem prototype than were their white classmates.

The spatial relation prototype Hill describes as "in-tandem" can be seen as an outgrowth of a rapport-based strategy (the "dynamic interaction", in his terms). The model is based on interaction in which one attributes to others the spatial orientation one experiences oneself, this postulating maximal connection between the other and oneself. Again, I do not mean to imply that this operates on a conscious or literal level. Surely a speaker of Hausa does not feel any more connected to the tree than does a speaker of standard American English. The point is simply that the relationships conventionalized by habitual ways of speaking have built on solidarity-based strategies associated with oral tradition in the one case, and on the decontextualized strategies of literate tradition in the other.

This distinction will figure prominently in the analysis of the conversational style which will constitute the bulk of the present study. It will be seen that the devices preferred by certain speakers in the extended conversation analyzed, are determined by a rapport-based strategy -- i.e. one which honors, above all, interpersonal



connections, and is more concerned with establishing rapport than with taking care not to impose. It is a system which is preoccupied with the rapport function of indirectness -- seeking the higher good of feeling that "we speak the same language" and "we are equals." In other words the signalling load is on the interpersonal connection. By contrast, other speakers in the group operate on a decontextualized strategy. They are more comfortable talking about non-personal subjects. They operate on a system which strives to serve the defensive function of indirectness -- seeking the higher good of not violating people's need to be left alone (nor one's own, in the form of self-exposure). The examination of the consequences of use of particular linguistic devices in interaction between people whose styles thus differ, sets in relief those devices which go unnoticed when interactants share style.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. This is how the last line was spoken at a 1977 production of this play by the Berkeley Repertory Theatre in Berkeley, California. In the published script, the line reads, "Individual rather than consecutive."
2. I feel it appropriate to acknowledge here a personal debt to Sacks and Schegloff, which in itself may be a testament to the impact of their work. When I attended the 1973 summer LSA Institute in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I was a writing teacher who was finding out what linguistics might be. Two of the talks that most inspired me during that crucial summer were those by Sacks and Schegloff. In his talk, Schegloff covered various blackboards with tiny writing giving examples of conversation from telephone talk and proceeded to show that what seemed at first "random" was systematic, orderly, and finely coordinated. It is this sudden revelation of order where there seemed chaos, of the arcane in the seemingly commonplace, that is the stuff of which both science and wonder are made.
3. Other variation theorists as well (cf Lavandera 1978a) have begun to question whether the most interesting linguistic phenomena can be studied purely through quantifiable variation studies.
4. It is difficult to resist the urge to relate a personal anecdote here, to bring home (literally) the significance of the distinction between defensiveness and rapport, or positive and negative face wants. I once had a friend, and a very good friend he was, who asked what I thought people's greatest drive was. I answered without hesitation, "the need for community." He did not agree; he thought it was

"the need for independence." And so it happened that we did not remain friends. It came about, however, that we met and discussed this same question more than a year later, by which time my friend had grown rather tired of his single life, and I had grown rather fond of mine. I told him that I had come around to his way of thinking: I now agreed that people's greatest drive was to be independent. He, for his part, told me he had changed his mind as well and decided their greatest need was for community. This eternal back-and-forth seems attributable to the existence of both these basic drives. We had independently hit upon the very same two basic wants that Brown Levinson discerned, and the basic strategies which Lakoff had noted before them.

5. The outcome of this relationship is a case in point of the possible effects of awareness of stylistic differences. For a period, the two women met regularly in the university setting and found each other's behavior disconcerting: Mary was often hurt by what she perceived as Sue's aloofness and continued to offend her by her unwitting intrusiveness. After a while, however, the two got to know each other and had occasion to discuss their respective styles. They grew to like each other and enjoy each other's company at school. They did not, however, seek each other's company in social settings. The knowledge that a person is using a different strategy may make their style comprehensible, but it is not likely to make it enjoyable.

6. Readers will be interested to know that speaker B in this example is the very same person who figures prominently in the conversation which will be the basis for the present study, in which he is called Karl. It will be seen in that analysis that self-mocking ironic

usages such as "of course" in this conversation, are typical of Karl's style.

7. I do not intend to imply that there are homogeneous groups called "Greeks" and "Americans" which are typified by the subjects in my study. Rather, I use the terms "Greeks" and "Americans" to refer to those who participated in the studies. While it may be that they are representative of certain segments of the populations of their respective countries, this need not be the case for the point to be made that they evidence divergent patterns of verbalization strategies between them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A WORD ON METHODOLOGY

The present study seeks to explicate conversational style by isolating the verbal devices used by six people in two and a half hours of spontaneous conversation. My aim is to show how impressions participants made on each other can be accounted for by their use of these conversational devices.

Talk communicates not only information but also images of the speaker (Goffman 1959). Such conclusions as whether another person is nice or nasty, reliable or untrustworthy, clever or dull -- and hence whether one should befriend or do business with her or him -- are based on a myriad of complex and subtle ways of behaving of which speech is a most salient component. Conversational devices are the means by which both messages and metamessages are communicated. They include such phenomena as what comment to make; when to make it; use of irony and humor; when and how to show enthusiasm and concern; when and how to ask questions; when to overlap; use of paralinguistic features such as pitch, loudness, vowel lengthening, voice quality and tone. All of these and other devices will be examined as they are used in a single extended interaction, to understand their effects when they are used with various other participants.

The analysis reveals that these devices are not randomly distributed in the speech of members of the group. Though no two speakers use all the same devices in the same way, there are patterns by which certain devices cooccur in the speech of participants. The

combination of particular devices makes up the style of each speaker. The broad operating principles by which particular devices are used for particular effects are conversational strategies.

In other words, a person may have a style made up of the use of the following devices: frequent overlap; free offer of opinions unrelated to previous talk; persistence of contributions over several turns despite lack of reaction from others; preference for loud and/or high-pitched utterances; contributions timed to latch onto preceding utterances without pause; few internal pauses; and so on. All of these devices may grow out of a particular way of fulfilling positive face wants or the rapport function of communication. The assumption is that "true friends" do not have to worry about imposing on each other, and the nicest thing one can do is to act as if "we're true friends".

The actual friendliness felt by one operating on such a strategy does not necessarily differ from that felt by one who operates on a different strategy. For example, another speaker might use the following devices: infrequent overlap; picking up on topics raised by others; hedges and hesitations when offering new topics; use of flat intonation; allowing for silence between contributions, and so on. These devices may grow out of a particular way of fulfilling negative face wants or the defensive function of conversation; that is, to respect people's preference not to be imposed upon. The assumption is that true friends respect each other in this way.

Any set of devices becomes conventionalized in speech communities which employ them, and habitual in the speech of members of the group. A "rapport-based strategy" does not necessarily generate

rapport in an interaction. Rapport is the goal of all interaction; it is achieved when expectations about the use of devices to convey particular intent are shared. On the other hand, any device can fail to establish rapport (or distance, or whatever its intention) when used with speakers who are not accustomed to its use for that purpose. This will be demonstrated in the text of the analysis.

The analysis is based on two-and-a-half hours of conversation recorded before, during, and after dinner at a social gathering on Thanksgiving, 1978. The gathering was made up of six people of varying ethnic, geographic, and religious backgrounds, and of varying degrees of familiarity and intimacy among them. I was one of the guests at the dinner. Shortly after everyone had arrived, I asked for permission to tape the conversation. Everyone there knew of my interest in studying conversation, so no one was surprised, but neither did they expect me to do this. I had no specific intention, at that point, of basing my dissertation on this recording. I was in the habit of carrying my tape recorder with me and turning it on whenever people didn't mind my doing so during their conversation. On this occasion, everyone consented, and I placed the tape recorder in the middle of the table.

The tape recorder used was a Sony TC 150. It is small (7" x 4½") and has a plain black leather case which covers its metallic shell. Only the internal microphone was used, to minimize the intrusiveness of the machine.

There is a paradox inherent in the act of recording (as Fillmore has pointed out on numerous occasions), if one is committed both to collecting "natural" data and to being morally responsible by

securing the informed consent of the participants. So long as participants are aware of the presence of the recorder, there is a danger that this awareness may affect their way of talking. Well, one says, that's all right, because pretty soon people forget about the recorder. It is clear that this happened in my study. During most of the interaction, the tape recorder's presence was ignored. On the four occasions when it was noticed and remarked upon, the quality of surprise in the comments ("Are you still taping?") is in itself evidence that participants had forgotten it was there. Furthermore, participants themselves reported that they had forgotten about it and didn't think it affected their behavior. But this very lack of awareness creates a problem in another sense. For isn't their consent thereby effectively cancelled, as witnessed by the horror with which speakers sometimes react when they suddenly remember the recorder and realize that something they have just said was taped (this did not happen during the Thanksgiving conversation).

The issue of "naturalness" is the less troubling. For one thing, as Wolfson (1976) explains, "natural" speech is simply speech appropriate to an occasion. There is not a single elusive form called "natural" which we must constantly pursue. Moreover, the relatively large number of participants in the group and the fact that they are engaged in a social gathering and are friends renders the social pressure far more significant than the presence of the tape recorder. In other words, people play to the crowd. (This was found and reported by Blom and Gumperz [1976] in their study of code-switching in Norway, as well as by Labov [1972] in his research on the speech of inner city black children).



The problem of informed consent is more complex. The fact that consent may be effectively cancelled when speakers forget about the recorder's presence may be overcome by securing consent after the fact. Thus participants in my study listened to the tape afterwards, and again consented to its use. What is more difficult, however, is the question of how "informed" they can conceivably be -- whether they could anticipate the possible impact of microanalysis. By capturing the speech of this interaction on tape, I irrevocably altered the experience for all those who participated. By forcing them to listen to the interaction after the fact, I confronted them with images of themselves which would remain with them, whether they liked the effects or not. By discussing with them and with their friends what their speech sounded like and what impact their speech had on others in the group, I created an awareness in them and in those friends which cannot be erased. When they granted permission for me to tape their conversation that evening in November, they could not have known what the effects of this later exposure would be. And once the analysis was begun, such exposure could not be erased, even if they had asked that the tape recording be erased. I can only hope that the resulting exposure and awareness, though it cannot always be pleasurable, will at least be considered illuminating by my generous if unwitting subjects.

It is a problem not only for participants, but for myself and for readers who wish to put the present study in perspective, that the process of microanalysis leads to distortion as well as insight. (This phenomenon has been noted in Chapter One, as discussed by both Pittenger et. al. and Labov and Fanshel). Capturing a person's speech

for analysis necessarily creates an image of that person and her/his behavior which is out of proportion to the impact they might have had in actual interaction. Everyone has had the experience of wincing on seeing her/himself captured in a photograph -- one's nose looks too long; one's cheeks look hollow; one has been trapped in a grimace. It is not that the expression reported by the camera is not "true" (the camera can only reflect what entered its lens), but the capturing for all time what was a fleeting moment within a stream of behavior necessarily falsifies the essential nature of the glance. Similarly, any person's speech can be rendered absurd, comic, bizarre, or foolish, if it is wrenched out of context and held up for analysis. Yet if it is not wrenched out of context, it cannot be analyzed. This paradox is operative in the present study. I believe my analysis is true to one angle of the picture, but I must remind my readers (and myself) that it is one angle only. At the same time that what I say about the interaction is true, there are also many other truths; had the photograph been snapped a second later, the nose might have looked shorter, the cheeks less hollow -- though they would be, nonetheless, the same nose and cheeks making up the same face.

As soon as conversation is recorded on tape, it becomes a new entity -- a taped conversation, which is different from the conversation as it occurred. For one thing, as has been pointed out, a recording is fixed in time and available for precise reproduction, whereas the very essence of talk is that it disappears as soon as it is uttered and can be imperfectly reconstructed but not retrieved. In addition, the talk as uttered in the actual interaction is one channel of an integrated complex including nonverbal components such

as facial expression, body movement, gesture, and so on. To isolate the verbal channel alone necessarily distorts the picture. In some cases, the loss of the other channels renders talk incomprehensible. Sometimes meaning can be reconstructed by reference to memory, if not one's own, then perhaps that of another member of the group, or by retrieval of physical objects which were present at the time. Thus, for example, at two points in the Thanksgiving conversation, talk referred to a promotional flyer advertising a recital which one of the participants would be performing in. The first time I listened to the tape, this segment made little sense to me. After playing it for others who had been present, however, I was reminded that we had been discussing the flyer, and the one whose performance it announced was able to send me a copy of it, making comprehensible numerous details of our comments which would otherwise have remained opaque.

Despite the exercise of memory and retrieval of objects, however, there are necessarily segments which will make little sense, and those that seem to make perfect sense may nonetheless appear different than they did at the time. Again, what the tape recorder picks up was necessarily there, but it can only pick up a piece of the interaction, and no piece can be completely understood without the whole of which it was a part.

The tape recorder distorts, too, in that it picks up what is nearest to it. Some voices record more easily than others; some speakers were sitting closer to the recorder. One participant, Susie, spoke very softly, and therefore some of her speech was inaudible. Unfortunately, she was also comparatively far from the recorder. In addition, there were numerous overlapping conversations. At the

time, each participant listened to only one of those conversations. As observers, we want to hear both. In some cases it was possible through focused and repeated listening to decipher both parallel conversations; in others cases the overlapping talk made one or both incomprehensible.

Finally, the tape recorder remained stable, while the people moved. Therefore, those who remained in the room with the recorder had more of their speech recorded than did those who occasionally moved into the kitchen. (I remained seated near the recorder the entire time, and this obviously played a role in the fact that I made the greatest number of recorded contributions).

As one catalogues the weaknesses of the tape recorded conversation to reflect the interaction that occurred, the endeavor can begin to feel nearly hopeless. But the other side of the coin is this: on the basis of the recording, we can retrieve much material which was a crucial part of the interaction, and when listening to the recording, the participants retrieved a very large part of the experience which remained dormant in their memories. Furthermore, the isolation of a single channel is not so dreadful a shortcoming in light of the redundancy of channels. Information lost from nonverbal channels, such as facial expressions, gestures, and body movements is not totally different from that preserved in the speech channel. Rather, it reinforces the messages communicated through language.

However, in order to study the taped conversation, we must take it yet another step further from actual interaction -- it must be transmitted to paper. Not only is it impossible to keep the conversation in memory for the purpose of analysis, but even if it existed in

memory, we would have to refer to the taped segment to verify how exactly something was said -- with the result that hours would be needed to find this or that phrase on tape, and the tape (as well as the investigator) would be completely worn out before long. A transcript renders the taped conversation studyable.

But just as the taped conversation creates an entity different from the interaction itself, so the transcript is yet another artifact. Replacing spoken words with written ones creates a myth of discreteness -- utterances which were pronounced imperfectly and in a particular way, are rendered as the complete words, in an idealized form. The most elaborate transcription conventions can give only the most primitive and incomplete indication of such features as tone, voice quality, pitch, amplitude, pronunciation, and so on, which constitute any utterance. My intention was to use the transcript not as the object of study but as a symbol for the recording; after the repeated listenings which were necessary in order to render the transcript, the lilt of the talk became a permanent recording in my head which I heard each time I referred to the transcript. But this creates a discrepancy between the data as studied and the data presented to the reader. Each reader will necessarily create a text in her/his mind as s/he reads the transcribed segments of talk. Only I and those who have heard the tape will be "hearing" the same utterances.

Thus there are troubling weaknesses in the use of tape recording and transcript, yet these tools make the analysis possible. Given our understanding of the shortcomings, and our awareness of them, we must suspend them and move on to make our analysis.

My procedure, then, began with my recording the conversation at this gathering. I had brought a 120-minute cassette, so that two one-hour segments were recorded without interruption. At the end of the two hours, the tape recorder was left idle for a time. Somewhat later, participants noticed that the tape recorder had stopped, just as they had previously noticed that it was still running. They regretted (as I did) that I did not have another blank tape, so the host produced a 60-minute cassette which he had in his house, and another 40 minutes of conversation was recorded. In the interim between tapes, a seventh participant arrived, but one who is deaf and therefore did not contribute to the talk. (Although he became the focus of much attention later in the evening, during the period of taping he was practically ignored).

The fact that I was a participant in the conversation creates both disadvantages and advantages in the analysis. One of the members of the Thanksgiving group, Chuck, turned to me early in the event and asked, "How can you study the conversations if you're a part of the conversations and you're the one that's writing the paper about the conversations and have already made little theories about what the conversations do." He had a point there. However, difficult as it is to reconstruct a sense of an event based only on recorded data, it would be impossible for me to understand what had transpired if I had not been there. Ideally, perhaps, had I enough equipment, time and money, I might have staged an interaction, observed it through a one-way mirror, and both video and audio-recorded it. But even if that had been possible, I would have lost other invaluable advantages. For one thing, observing is not the same as being part -- what I

gained in objectivity I would have lost in intuitive sense of what was going on. And I would then have very different sorts of data. By recording an interaction that was happening anyway -- one that had significance for everyone present quite apart from my taping it -- I was able to capture a kind of interaction ("natural" if you will) which had its own dynamism.

The fact that the event occurred naturally and that I was a natural participant obviates as well the problem of the intrusion of the investigator and the experimental situation. The fact that participants would be talking anyway, gives the study far greater depth, I believe, than that of conversations held between strangers in a contrived situation. Because participants knew each other well and had histories and connections among them, meanings constructed in their talk are perhaps a bit harder to grasp -- they are the result of meaning jointly created over time. However, it yields, too, the great advantage of making available to us patterns of usage which do not emerge among strangers -- playful routines, subtle irony and allusion, reference to familiar jokes and assumptions. People who regularly interact with each other create a special language between and among them, a language which is called upon and built upon in their future interactions (and dies when they cease to interact, which is part of the pain of severing relationships).

Chuck's scepticism about participant analysis had continued: "You stay there and you're participating in the conversation. But if you're busy making theories about the way the conversations go, don't you ever get worried about the fact that you may subconsciously lead the conversation into the way you want it to go?" I answered, "It's

a danger." But then I added, "But I don't think I do. I forget that it's on. I tape myself so much that I really forget." But I admitted that I could not know how much difference it really makes. Chuck was unconvinced but generous: "Yeah but sociologists are wishy washy that way. It doesn't make any difference." "I'm not a sociologist," I reminded him. "Well, ok," he said. "What ARE you?" "A linguist," I announced proudly.

And this leads me to ask to what extent my methods are congenial to linguistics. Certainly, during the last three quarters of a century, the introduction of the scientific method to the social sciences has created an emphasis on quantifiability and accountability, which has made significant contributions to these fields. But it is also clear that there are basic questions about the nature of human interaction that have not been adequately answered by controlled laboratory experiments. As Paul Rozin (talk at UC Berkeley summer 1977) pointed out, given a choice between studying something relatively unimportant which can be isolated and quantified, and something important which cannot be, most investigators have opted for the first kind of study. In recent years, however, there has been a growing sense of dissatisfaction with this approach, and a return to earlier more humanistic methods of inquiry. Research in the humanities (for example philosophy and literary criticism) has proceeded to a large extent undaunted by the rigors and limits of the scientific paradigm, with enlightening and often inspiring results. It is becoming apparent that it is an unnecessary and wasteful handicap -- like trying to study interaction with hands tied behind one's back, ears plugged, and blindfolded -- to rule out the enormous amount of information and insight which an



intelligent observer has at her/his disposal as a veteran of human interaction.

As has been noted in Chapter One, there is a zeitgeist to this effect, as more and more work is being done in a mode that might be called "interpretive". The influence of hermeneutic philosophy has been significant in this regard. In linguistics, the work of Pittenger et. al., that of Gumperz, Lakoff, and Chafe and the most recent work of Labov (with Fanshel) and of his student Lavandera, all point in this direction.

The objection will be raised: but how do you know this is what is really going on? It's just your interpretation. To this I have three replies: (1) the multiplicity of interpretations (2) internal and external evidence and (3) the "aha" factor.

(1) The multiplicity of interpretations. I do not offer mine as THE explanation of what is going on. It is simply one explanation, an account of certain aspects of a mass of components in the interaction.

(2) Internal and external evidence. Interpretation is not fished out of the air. The fact that something is not provable does not mean that it is not demonstrable. I have followed three procedures which insure that I have not been led astray:

A. There is evidence in the data in the form of recurrent patterns. I do not base interpretation on phenomena which appear once, but rather on phenomena which recur. Therefore they are demonstrably motivated, not random.

B. There is evidence in the data in the form of participant behavior. For example, misunderstandings or starred sequences are marked by noticeable kinks in interactional rhythm. Or, if I suggest

that Speaker A is impatient with Speaker B, I show evidence in Speaker A's behavior (including and especially speech behavior) that indicates impatience.

C. There is accountability in the form of two types of playback. After interpretations are made, they are checked against the independent reactions of participants. Does Speaker A report having felt impatient or give other evidence to that effect (e.g. commenting that Speaker B was taking a long time getting to the point)? Playback is the litmus test of interpretation.

A further objection may be that, since participants know each other, they have feelings about each other quite apart from the interaction. What if their reactions are coming not from the behavior of the moment but from their history of interaction and preconceptions about each other? To correct for this possible bias, a second kind of playback was carried out with objective observers. People who did not take part in the interaction listened to segments of the tape and commented on their reactions and the reasons for them. Thus there is not only accountability but generalizability.

(3) The "aha" factor. My third reply to the doubters of interpretation is perhaps the most significant: If my interpretation is correct, then readers, on hearing my explication, will exclaim within their heads, "Aha!" Something they have intuitively sensed will have been made explicit. Most discovery, ultimately, is a process of explaining the known. When the subject of analysis is human interaction -- a process that we all engage in, all our lives -- each reader can measure interpretation against her/his own experience. If an interpretation is misguided, no large number of readers will be deeply

impressed by it; it will fade. If it is true, or has grasped a portion of the truth, it will be remembered.

My method then was to record, transcribe, and study the data, to generate hypotheses, and to engage in playback with participants and others to check hypotheses and generate new ones. Transcription of sections used for analysis were checked as well with at least one of the participants.

During the process of transcription I began to get a sense of which episodes I would focus on for analysis. First of all, it bears mention that the most useful unit of study turned out to be the episode rather than, for example, the adjacency pair or the speech act. The adjacency pair, more often than not, reflected little of what was being done in interaction. The speech act too (for example explaining, questioning) was a means by which speakers were trying to achieve some conversational goal. The goal of talk, from the point of view of participants, was to have some effect on other participants (e.g. draw out a new member of the group; tell an amusing story). It was within the episode that I could observe how participants went about pursuing interactive goals and what the effects in fact were. (The psychological reality of interactive goals as opposed to speech acts is noted by Gumperz [to appear].) In general, two kinds of episodes called out for study: those that were striking because they seemed to typify an identifiable kind of interaction; and those that involved apparent dissonance. Just as the starred sentence is for linguists a device by which underlying grammatical rules are uncovered, so episodes in which conversational cooperation breaks down can be seen as starred sequences and used to discover conversational

control mechanisms which go unnoticed when conversation proceeds smoothly (Gumperz and Tannen 1979) -- in other words, to uncover interactional grammar. Such starred sequences are those in which there is a noticeable disruption in rhythm, or participants show signs of annoyance or dissatisfaction with the interaction (i.e. Erickson's "uncomfortable moments"). Having isolated such episodes and identified the devices which were misunderstood by a participant, I then looked for other occurrences of the same device in interchanges with other participants.

Playback was a sensitive process. Since this was the way that the other members of the group showed me the interaction from their perspectives, it was important for them to direct the session. I had to be careful to wait for them to make comments and not put ideas in their heads or words in their mouths. Therefore, I gave them control of the tape recorder. They could stop it and comment when they liked, and start it again when they felt they had done commenting. In the event, however, that an episode I had singled out for analysis or another participant had commented upon, was not the subject of comment by another participant, I did then call attention to the segment. In those cases I began with the most general questions and only as a last resort made specific mention of what I thought might be going on or what another had observed. The playback sessions were recorded for later reference, and to obviate the need to take notes, which might have hampered the spontaneity of comments.

Playback with Dan, Chuck, and Susie had quite a different character from playback with Karl and Paul. Playback with Karl, and to a large extent with Paul, for the most part confirmed my hypotheses

about their intentions. In contrast, playback with Chuck, Dan, and Susie often resembled field work with native speakers of an exotic language. They constantly enlightened me about phenomena which I had found puzzling. This difference highlights a basic aspect of my study.

I speak with a particular style, and I participated in the conversation being analyzed. Moreover, the style I shared to some extent with two other people in the group "dominated" the interaction. Thus, my analysis emerges, in its focus, as an analysis of that style, and the devices used by the other speakers in the group are contrasted with that. This results from the fact that they never had a chance to exercise their own devices in extended interaction with each other, since the faster-paced, more expressive style made it difficult or impossible for them to participate. Second, I have an intuitive grasp of the operation of my own strategies. My understanding of the devices used by myself, and to a great extent those used by Paul and Karl, was immediate and unequivocal. In contrast, the reactions of the others in the group and the intentions of their devices often had to be explained to me during playback.

This imbalance leads to another danger as well. There are times that the analysis may have a ring of self-congratulation: showing that the devices my friends and I use are successful, while those used by others in the group cause trouble. I tried to avoid this; I have no conscious intention to imply value judgment. My hypothesis is unequivocally that any devices are successful when interactants share expectations about their meaning and use, and any devices can cause trouble when such expectations are not shared. However, it is the

nature of conversational habits that one's own way of saying things seems self-evidently appropriate, just as the word for chair in one's own language seems to reflect what a chair is, while words for chair in other languages seem like translations. Therefore, this study is necessarily -- as a result of the nature of the interaction and my own expertise as a speaker of a particular style -- an explication of a rapport-based strategy. I have tried to be diligent in my research on the other strategies involved; I have tried to be fair in my presentation of those findings. But ultimately it will have to remain for speakers of other styles to give a full account of the operation of their own strategies and consequent devices.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE PARTICIPANTS IN THANKSGIVING DINNER

At 4 PM on November 23, 1978, six people gathered for Thanksgiving dinner in Oakland, California. The guests arrived; they greeted each other, chatted, then sat down to eat turkey, cranberry sauce and sweet potatoes. The table was set at the beginning and cleared at the end; dishes were washed. Guests left; the host closed the door behind him. And all the while they talked. When the guests returned to their homes and the host retired to the restored quiet of his post-dinner house, it was from the talk more than anything else that they gleaned their impressions of the evening and the people who participated in it.

In many ways this dinner in Oakland was like countless others (some larger, some smaller) that were taking place at the same time, or were ending or about to begin. But this was a particular place and time, and these were particular people, gathered at specific times in their lives, with histories and hopes connecting and separating them. We cannot study every Thanksgiving dinner. We cannot study everything about this one. But we can, and we shall, closely examine the tape-recorded conversation of the six people at this dinner, and thereby glimpse the ways in which their talk worked for them on this occasion.

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The dinner, a potluck (in the style that is popular among people of this age living in California at this time) is held at the home of Karl, a 33-year-old professional concert pianist and piano teacher.

The first to arrive are Paul and Susie. Paul, 35, is a management analyst at a major university. He brings two pies he has made (one pumpkin, one mince pie). Susie, 29, is a professional performing cellist and gambist. She has brought a bottle of wine. I am the next to arrive, bringing cranberry sauce and wine. I am 33 and a graduate student at UC Berkeley. Finally, Dan and Chuck knock at the door and I let them in. Dan is 29. He is a painter who works full time as a sign language interpreter. Chuck will be 30 the next day; he is a writer in the promotion department of Walt Disney Productions. They bring a bowl of ratatouille and a large mixed salad. One more guest will arrive late, after dinner: Victor, 37, an architect who is deaf.

The guests have come from a range of places. Dan, like Karl, lives in Oakland. I live close by, in Berkeley. Paul has driven from his home in Palo Alto, about an hour away. He has picked Susie up at the airport, where she arrived from her home in Vancouver.

Traveling back in time, where did these people grow up? Karl, Paul, and I in New York City; Dan and Chuck in Los Angeles; Susie in London, England. And continuing further back, where did their parents grow up, and their grandparents, beginning the process that would lead to this dinner? Karl's and Paul's parents are Jewish and from New York, where their grandparents emigrated from Poland and Russia. My parents were born in those East European countries and completed their growing up in New York. This backing up of generations uncovers a new overlap: Chuck's mother, who is Italian, was born and raised in New York City; his father is from Los Angeles, of Scotch and English extraction. Dan's parents too are of Irish, Scotch and English background, but they grew up in North Dakota and Iowa. Susie's father,



born and raised in England, was Jewish, and his parents were from Poland -- yet another mingling of roots. Her mother is American, from a well-to-do upper New York State family. Thus the ethnic and geographic strands separate and weave in a braid through the generations.

What bonds of friendship and love bring these people together on this afternoon? Karl is the hub. Paul is his brother. I have been his "best friend" for nearly twenty years, since we met at summer camp when we were 14. Karl and Susie lived together as partners for six years; they have lived apart for four. Dan is Karl's good friend. Chuck is Dan's friend, visiting from LA. Victor is Dan's lover.

And with what feelings and thoughts do they arrive? Karl is the host. He is pleased to have his friends and family in his home. Throughout the evening he will be concerned with making people comfortable and keeping things orderly and attractive. Paul is pleased to be with his brother on Thanksgiving, one of his favorite holidays. He is glad to see Susie and me, both of whom are "like family," though he hasn't seen us much lately. Susie is now a guest in the house where she was once resident, but she notices that she feels quite comfortable. It is rather like coming home for a visit to the house where you grew up: both familiar and foreign. For me, this house is as near to "my turf" as any house which is not mine. I know well and like everyone who will be here, except Dan's friend Chuck, but I have heard about him and I expect to like him. My only apprehension concerns Victor. I have had some uncomfortable moments in encounters with him, and I am hoping they will not be repeated. Dan is glad to be spending Thanksgiving with Karl and his friends, although he is perhaps a bit concerned about his place in the group: Karl, Susie,

Paul, and I seem, in a way, like a unit. Dan is concerned that his friend Chuck like his friends and be liked by them. He knows too that when Victor arrives, he will have to assume the role of interpreter, and this will radically alter his interaction in the group. Chuck is looking forward to the dinner, for he has heard about the people involved and he believes he will find them interesting. He is also a bit nervous since he will be the only stranger; perhaps he is a bit intimidated, because people one has heard much about often seem larger-than-life.

Each person has professional concerns on her/his mind. Karl is about to perform a major recital; the following week he will be the piano soloist with a local orchestra. In addition, his piano students, both adults and children, are having various successes and problems, and he is concerned with their progress. Paul is anticipating a raise in the near future; he is thinking about meetings and decisions that have occupied him at work. Susie has come to the Bay Area to perform a series of Early Music recitals. I am about to begin writing my dissertation. This makes me something of a participant/observer in all conversations, including this one, which I will tape. (The decision to base my dissertation on this very conversation has not yet been made). Dan will soon be taking a difficult test for certification as a sign interpreter. Chuck has recently travelled cross-country with the Walt Disney-sponsored whistle-stop tour in celebration of Mickey Mouse's Birthday. The promotional train ride, a national event, was Chuck's idea, so its realization is a source of satisfaction to him. He is also concerned with a creative writing project he is engaged in.

In addition to their professional lives, all of these people are preoccupied with their private lives. Each one is bound in a network of connections to others not present. Susie has recently suffered a break in her relationship with the man she has lived with since she and Karl separated. Paul has just separated from his wife of seven years. Dan is being visited not only by Chuck, his good friend, but also by Victor, who lives in a city several hours away -- despite the fact that their relationship has seemed to be ending (indeed Dan has wanted it to be ending) for some time. Chuck has come to spend Thanksgiving, and his birthday, with Dan rather than going to visit Bob, his lover of two years. Their relationship seems to be on the way out too. Susie is still performing with her former lover, who has also come to the Bay Area for the concert series. Dan is uncertain about the significance of Victor's continuing visits. Paul is in the process of piecing together his feelings about his newly-ex-wife and concerned about the effect of their separation on his children. Chuck is expecting Bob to visit him here in a few days. (Only Karl and I are not in the throes of breakups).

The participants' interests and concerns overlap in some ways and diverge in others. There are two musicians (Karl and Susie); a painter (Dan); two writers (Chuck and I); two involved in the world of the university (Paul and I). Three geographical backgrounds are represented, as well as relationships of varying degrees of closeness: siblings (Paul and Karl); former partners (Susie and Karl); former in-laws (Susie and Paul); as well as friends of varying degrees of intimacy and frequency of contact ranging from Karl and I, who have been friends nearly twenty years, to new acquaintances (Chuck and

everyone there except Dan). There are cases of shared ethnic background (Karl, Paul, and I) and shared sex (two women and four men). Sexual orientation splits the group yet another way: Karl, Dan, and Chuck are gay; Paul, Susie, and I are straight. As the conversation proceeds, these and other alliances appear and recede, either dominating the group discussion or creating parallel discussions.

Each person in the group has a mix of expectations and anxieties about how the others will feel about him or her and how s/he feels about the others. As they engage in conversation, their interests will lead them into group or dyadic discussions, in which their foci will temporarily coincide, or just miss each other, or miss each other entirely. Each participant will move to the center of attention at some point, when her/his interests come into focus. Karl and Susie will talk about music; Paul will talk about aikido (he is a blackbelt), and about his children. Dan will be looked to as the expert on sign language, Susie on cooking, I on language and communication. Chuck will be asked about his home and his work. Events in the relationships of some of those present will be discussed. At transition points, and throughout, everyone will talk about the food.

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Everyone expected to "have conversation" during this gathering, but their notions of what sort of conversation this would be and how it would be effected was necessarily different for different members of the group. All the myriad and subtle calibrations of talk that have been discussed and not discussed in the literature created impressions that each person made on the other people, and ultimately

the impressions that each had of the dinner gathering as a whole.

In recalling Thanksgiving dinner, Karl said he felt that it had been a terrific evening. The conversation had been lively and satisfying; he had had a great time. This coincided perfectly with my own impression.

Paul's recollection was slightly less enthusiastic. He said it had been "successful" but not "ecstatic." He recalled that the conversation had been "competitive," and he remarked that, although he can hold his own in such a conversation, he is not fully comfortable doing so. To explain, he said that he doesn't live in Berkeley or New York, and most of his friends are not so intellectual as many of Karl's friends.

Susie recalled that it had felt like a "New York evening." It was "pretty frenetic and changeable," she said, and she had been insecure as she always is about her "place in a rambunctious crowd." She said that she loves New York style, so long as she gives up trying to be a part of it: "As soon as I try to keep up, I lose track of myself." Since she couldn't participate, there were times when she felt herself verging on boredom. Susie commented that if she had been at a dinner gathering in England, she would have talked more. The conversation would have been "more consistent"; the whole thing would have been more "slow-moving, logical and methodical."

Dan said that he felt the dinner had been dominated by "the New York Jewish element." He remembered the intensity and the pace, and reported that he had felt like an observer, unable to quite "fit in." When I pointed out that he had been the center of attention at numerous times, he said, sure, he could be the center of attention or

he could be an observer but he could not just "be part of the flow." He enjoyed it, he said, but rather as if he had been treated to a show.

Chuck recalled that "the conversation had been all over," but he had enjoyed the dinner very much and gone away happy, feeling that he liked the people he'd met: people who talked a lot about things they knew something about. He felt it had been an animated and intellectual discussion.

Participants differed, too, with respect to their recollections of how much they and others had participated. Karl recalled that I had dominated and Paul had talked a lot too. He felt that Chuck had been very quiet, but Dan had talked rather a lot. Susie identified the "rambunctious crowd" as being composed of Karl, me, Paul, and Dan, although she later singled out Karl and me as "a two-man team." Paul recalled that Karl had dominated; he did not feel I had. I had the impression that Karl and Paul and I had all taken part equally, while Susie and Chuck had been rather quiet, with Dan somewhere between.

In concrete terms, who "dominated" the evening? Table 1 shows how many contributions each participant made during the two and a half hours of taped talk:<sup>1</sup>

Table 1

Number of Conversational Contributions

<u>Name</u>	<u>Conversational turns</u>
Deb	811
Karl	594
Paul	417
Chuck	405
Dan	386
Susie	169

Thus some of the impressions left by the conversation on the various participants differed radically from each other, and from the evidence in terms of number of conversational contributions made. What was it that made the talk seem "great" to Karl and me and "intellectual" to Paul and Chuck, while Susie and Dan experienced it as something definable as "New York" (and Paul as "New York or Berkeley").<sup>2</sup>

A clue to the style difference that accounted for the discrepancy between impressions of Thanksgiving dinner, came in the form of a comment by Dan on another occasion during the time when I was beginning my analysis of the data. He had just met my sister, Mimi, who was visiting me in California. After he had been talking to her for a while at a gathering at my house, Dan came up to me with great excitement and animation. "Your sister talks just like you!" he exclaimed. My interest, of course, could not have been more intense. "Well I was talking to her," he said, "and I told her that I had been in New York last summer. 'WHERE!'" Dan illustrated Mimi's response by tacking on the question, "Where," very fast and abrupt, at the end of his question, with falling intonation, like a poke. As he said it, he darted his head in my direction, too, giving the feeling of physically imposing in my "space". Dan repeated, "Just 'WHERE!' Just like that!", as if this were the most peculiar utterance he had ever encountered. "She didn't say, 'Oh, really? Where did you go in New York?' or anything like that. Just 'where!'" Again he imitated the abrupt question and jutted his head toward me. "And then I realized," he said, "that that's what you do. And at first I thought it was really rude, but then I got used to it. And your sister does the same thing. If I hadn't known I would have thought it meant she was bored and wanted

the conversation to be over quickly."

Dan's comment intrigued me from a number of points of view. That my sister uses a verbal device which I use is not surprising. But Dan was focusing on a strategy that both Karl and I use throughout the Thanksgiving conversation. And the fact that Dan found it so peculiar, that he might in fact find it rude, was a shock to me. How could he think my sister Mimi rude? (let alone me). I was glad that he had "gotten used to it," but I knew enough about communication to know that if he found such a strategy disconcerting, he would continue to do so, and any forgiveness could come only after the fact. Dan's reaction to my sister's abrupt question, and his comment that he found it typical of the sort of thing I do, sent me back to my Thanksgiving tape with renewed focus.<sup>3</sup> Sure enough, I found numerous instances in which strategies similar to that were getting Karl, Paul, and me in trouble with Chuck, Dan, and Susie. On the other hand, such strategies worked just fine when we used them with each other.

In fact, Karl uses precisely the same strategy as Mimi in an interchange with Chuck. Chuck too had recently been to New York, and he made reference to that:

- (1) C That's what I expected to find in New York was lots of bagels.
- (2) K Did you find them?
- (3) C No no what I found were were UH-- croise? crescent rolls, and croissant and all that? ... the ... crescent rolls mostly, lots of that kind of stuff but it was
- (4) K Where.



Karl's question (4), "Where," comes as an interruption and is spoken with abrupt, falling intonation, just like Mimi's question to Dan. In fact, the context is almost exactly the same. Karl too does not know Chuck at this time, and he too is asking, "Where did you go in New York?" Not surprisingly, Chuck, when listening to this portion on the tape, agreed with Dan, that the question was disconcertingly abrupt and clipped. He said that it made him feel "on the spot." His response was hesitant and reserved:

(5) C I don't know. ... I didn't go around a whole lot for breakfast I was kind of ... stuck in ... the Plaza /for a while/ which was interesting.

His answer trails off at the end.

This is an example of the sort of conversational devices which will be discussed in the following analysis.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. I considered a single "contribution" any uninterrupted flow of talk. If another speaker overlapped, and the overlap resulted in the original speaker discontinuing talk which s/he picked up again later, the result was counted as two turns. If an overlap occurred but the original speaker continued without a break in rhythm, it was one turn. In either case the overlap counted as a turn for the second speaker. Non-verbal and contentless utterances, such as "mhm" or "wow" were counted as turns when they were uttered against a background of silence in between other speakers' turns. They were not counted as contributions if they were uttered while other speakers continued talking uninterrupted.

Counts of contributions can be deceptive. For one thing, they do not reflect differences in length of contributions, nor what their content was. Second, as has already been noted, some people strayed out of range of the recorder. I was the only one who remained next to it the entire time; Karl was off in the kitchen quite a lot of the time in the beginning. Nevertheless comments made in the kitchen were audible on the tape, if they were directed to people in the adjacent dining area. And for most of the period of taping, everyone was within range. There is also the problem of parallel conversations. In some cases, it was impossible to decipher either, but in most cases, at least the outlines of talk were distinguished, and even if it was impossible to tell what someone was saying, at least it was clear from the voice who was saying it.

2. I believe Paul's association of this style with Berkeley represents his experience of Berkeley -- i.e. visiting Karl and Karl's friends, many of whom are originally from the East Coast.

3. I also began to notice this and similar devices in my interactions with other people. For example, at a dinner party I met a fellow New Yorker for the first time. We were talking animatedly to each other. At one point she mentioned her brother, and I asked her, "What does your brother do?" "Lawyer," she said, tacking her answer immediately on the tail of my question in a clipped way, with falling intonation. I enjoyed a rush of pleasure at how smoothly our conversation was going, but I thought too of Dan's observation and realized that this was a way of answering that corresponded to the reduced question form Dan had noted.

CHAPTER FOUR  
LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN CONVERSATIONAL STYLE

After Thanksgiving was over, I had the impression that Dan's friend Chuck had been rather quiet. In addition, I was surprised that there hadn't been greater rapport between us, since our interests seemed to overlap in a number of ways. Chuck, too, in recalling his feelings before the dinner, said that, based on what Dan had told him about the people he would meet that day, he had been particularly interested in meeting me. This surprised me even more, since I had seen no evidence of such interest. Listening to our conversations on tape confirmed my impression that we never "really clicked."

Personal vs. Impersonal Topics

For example, I had tried to draw Chuck out by asking him some questions about himself:<sup>1</sup>

- .....
- (1) DT ʔYou live in LÁ?
- (2) C Yeah.
- (3) DT ʔY'vísiting here?
- (4) C Yeah.
- (5) DT What do you ʔdó there?
- ....
- (6) C uh-- I work at Disney Prosuh? ... Walt Disney ....
- (7) DT [ a--nd  
You an ártist?

(8) C No-- no. [tone]

(9) DT Writer?

(10) C Yeah--. I write ... <sup>advertising</sup> copy.  
[tone]

[tone: Self-deprecating]

As I listened to this interchange on the tape, I again had the feeling I recalled having had at the time it took place: Chuck was being uncommunicative. I was asking him questions to draw him out, and he kept responding with as little information as possible. It seemed as if he didn't want to tell me anything. The conversation proceeded this way:

(11) DT Hmm. I know a lot of people who are writers in LA.

(12) C Really? Doing what?

.....

(13) DT <sup>One</sup> of them 's .. been writing movies and things?

(14) C Screenplays. Everybody's .. scri? Really?

(15) DT They're all trying to write scr screenplays. [chuckle]

(16) C Yeah. That's what everybody does in .. LA is wri?  
I <sup>Yeah</sup>

try to write screenplays.

(17) DT Two of them seem to be doing pretty well.

(18) C Really? They doing TV, or they doing features, or what.

(19) DT <sup>p</sup> Movies.

(20) C Really?

(21) DT Movies.

(22) C Yeah if they're doing that they're doing vérý well.

(23) DT Yeah.

Once the subject turned to the general situation of writers in LA, Chuck took an active role in the conversation. He showed interest by volunteering information (16) and evaluations (22) and asking questions (18).

As the conversation proceeded about LA (Chuck and I were now engaged in a dyadic interchange; the others were elsewhere engaged), we achieved a high degree of cooperation. For example, we exhibited a pattern of cooperative sentence-building in which the listener picks up the thread of the speaker and supplies the end of the speaker's sentence, which the speaker then accepts and incorporates into the original sentence without a hitch in rhythm and almost without a hitch in timing.

- (1) C Yeah the town's full of wòuld-be w<sup>í</sup>riters, wòuld-be  
DT I know  
diréctors, wòuld-be prodúc<sup>í</sup>ers,  
(2) DT [ wòuld-be áct<sup>ó</sup>rs, ]  
(3) C [ wòuld-be áct<sup>ó</sup>rs, ]  
(4) DT Yeah.  
(5) C Yeah it's incrédible.

I pick up Chuck's series by offering (2) "would-be actors" as another in his list, and he repeats this as part of his list (3). Our mutual "yeahs" (4) & (5) contribute to the sense of harmony and agreement.

At another point in this segment, it is Chuck who reinforces my point.

(1) DT I think everywhere. What's depressing is that when  
acc

you think about it, it's probably the same way with  
doctors, and dentists,

(2) C Dóctors, and déntists, and ... yeah ... and I know ...  
[It chuckles]

it's true with lawyers, so

(3) DT Yeah. .. Most people .. I always figure ... most  
C Yeah

people just do their jóbs and get bý ... a--nd ...  
maybe about tèn percent are really gréat, and about  
tèn percent are really horrible.

(4) C .nhm

...

(5) DT and .. maybe another .....twenty percent on either end

(6) C [ / . ? ./The

old béll curve comes in again.

(7) DT [Yeah]

In (2) Chuck picks up my phrase, "doctors and dentists," and adds "lawyers." When I explain my idea (3) about people's competence in their jobs, Chuck summarizes the significance of what I have just said by calling it "the old bell curve" (6), and I agree that this is what I had in mind (7) "Yeah."

Thus Chuck and I exhibit a flow in our conversation which we both found satisfying. And yet in listening to the tape I felt that I had

showed a lack of interest in Chuck by deflecting the conversation from him personally and allowing it to veer off toward jobs in general. I can surmise that I felt just the same at the time because I tried once more to focus on him, with results similar to those that appeared the first time:

(1) C So ....

(2) DT So, but that's a permanent full-time thing you have?  
So you eat?

(3) C Yeah.

(4) DT That's good.

(5) C Uhuh, I just sort of fell into it. I was kind of lucky, .... and .. I've just been kind of playing with it .. for a while.

(6) DT Did you go there for that purpose?

(7) C No. I went there to pay off student loans.

.....

(8) DT How'd you get that job.

(9) C My dad's worked there since 1937.

(10) DT Oh. [chuckle] That helps.

(11) C I didn't get a writing job but I got a job like in the mail room. . . .

Listening to the beginning of this segment of the interchange, I again felt that Chuck was being uncooperative. His monosyllabic response (3) "Yeah" seemed resistant. Although Chuck offers slightly more information in (5), he still seemed reluctant to reveal much, because of his use of hedges ("just sort of," "kind of," "just ...



kind of," "a while") and internal hesitations. The entire contribution seemed vague and lacking in information. Frustrated by Chuck's vagueness, I tried to get him to be more specific by asking (6) "Did you go there for that purpose?" Again, Chuck's response (7) "No I went there to pay off student loans" does not seem to me to answer my question. I cannot see the connection between paying off loans and choice of a particular city to live in. At this point a two second pause attests to the breakdown in communication. I expected Chuck to go on. Since he didn't, I asked another question, this time a more direct one: (8) "How'd you get that job?" Chuck's answer to this (9) is not verbose, but it begins to tell something specific. While I am responding with (10) "Oh that helps," Chuck begins to talk at length about how he got his job. For the first time I feel that he is participating in the conversation in the way I expected.

During playback with Dan, I got my first inkling of what might be going on in these interchanges with Chuck. Dan pointed out that the very reason the conversation became smooth and cooperative when it did, was that the topic had switched from Chuck personally to an impersonal topic: LA. He said that he knows Chuck is not comfortable talking about himself, especially with someone he doesn't know very well. Suddenly I saw the irony in my own behavior. Just when Chuck was feeling comfortable with the topic, I became uncomfortable, feeling that I had been rude to Chuck by switching to a more general topic. Therefore I refocused the talk on him, with the intention of making him more comfortable, but I actually made him uncomfortable, and the conversational rhythm faltered again.

During playback, Chuck volunteered the same perspective. He said that he feels on the spot when asked to talk about himself, especially with new acquaintances, and especially about his job. He said that his initial vagueness in the second quoted segment came from that discomfort, but he finally overcame it to answer my direct questions.

Thus I began to see one of the major differences in Chuck's and my strategies: expectations about appropriate topics of talk between new acquaintances.

### The Enthusiasm Constraint

In order to understand Chuck's view of this interchange, it will be useful to back up and look at some earlier interchanges between him and me. Bateson (1972) noted that it is possible to achieve different views of interaction by punctuating the stream of behavior in different places. That is, at the same time that a certain event (X) can be seen as an action causing a reaction (Y), it is simultaneously in itself a reaction to a preceding action (W). And the event (Y) which occurs as a reaction to X will in turn trigger the succeeding event (Z), in a continuous stream. Thus, my conversation with Chuck about LA and his job must be seen in light of our preceding interchanges.

Earlier in the Thanksgiving dinner gathering, the conversation had turned to my work. Chuck asked what kind of analysis I do on conversation. In response to my explanation, he commented, "That's like Erving Goffman kind of stuff." His comment provoked the following exchange:

- (1) C That's like Erving Goffman kind of stuff.
- (2) DT 'You know Erving Goffman?
- (3) C Oh yeah, I love his books.
- (4) DT 'Oh, how do you know? I just met him.
- (5) C Oh did you?
- (6) DT 'Yeah.
- (7) C I always wanted to meet him. I read his books ... a book .. Asylums. first but that's all  
DT 'Yeah'
- because ]
- (8) DT [ I didn't read Asylums but I know it's one of  
C 'But'
- the brilliant ones.
- (9) C And I just ... read another one.
- (10) DT [ Did you read Stigma?
- (11) C No. But I've got ]
- (12) DT [ It's wonderful.
- (13) C I've got ... three or four other ones  
that are like that.
- (14) DT [ Presentation of Self in Everyday Life
- (15) C [ Presentation of Self in  
Everyday Life, u--m
- (16) DT [ A--nd uh Relations in Public, ... and  
Interactional Ritual,
- (17) C Right. Interactional Ritual.
- (18) DT I never read that one.
- (19) C /Yeah I've got that one./
- (20) P [ What is this?

I recall, when I think about the Thanksgiving conversation, that I felt frustrated at the time because I wanted to hear what Chuck thought of Goffman, and he did not tell me. Yet as I listen to the talk on tape it sounds to me as if I am not giving him a chance to tell me, because I keep cutting him off. My comments (8) (10) (12) (14) and (16) all are timed to overlap with Chuck's talk, and they all seem like interruptions, preventing him from saying what he began. How could my conversational device (interruption) so obstruct my purpose (find out what Chuck thinks about Goffman's work)?

When I listened to other parts of the tape, in which I talk to Karl and Paul, I got an insight into what may be going on. I was trying to encourage Chuck to tell me, not by waiting for him to talk, but by showing him my own excitement and exuberance. The message is in the very pace which I am creating: "See how excited and interested I am? I can hardly contain myself." I expect Chuck to become equally excited and shout me down. What throws this conversation off, is that each time I overlap with Chuck, he stops what he is saying. That is why I end up looking like (and feeling like) a bulldozer. From my point of view, Chuck reacts like a basketball player who purposely hurls himself to the floor when an opponent touches him, so that the umpire will think he has been pushed hard. By contrast, in conversations with Karl, I become excited and overlap and shout, and Karl matches my volume and shouts right over me -- some of the time. Other times he stops and I continue. The overall effect is a balanced interchange. (Examples of this will be presented later).

The overlap-as-enthusiasm strategy is reminiscent of the "enthusiasm constraint" I discovered for Greek speakers (Tannen 1976



- (23) DT a pleasure reading. } Yeah. You guys have  
 (24) P } Which one? Asylums?  
 (25) C All of 'em.  
 (26) DT Read Asylums,  
 (27) C Yeah, that's a good one to read.  
 (28) DT And the other one I? well read Stigma,  
                                                   C } Yeah } mm }

....

- (29) P The what?  
 (30) DT Stigma.  
 (31) C Stigma?  
 (32) DT Well maybe read Presentation of Self  
                                           first. } / ??? /  
 (33) C } And he does real strange things yknow he goes  
                                           to he talks about gamblers and all this kind of stuff  
                                           and makes all these analogies ... and it's really /?/

In this segment, Chuck times his contributions to begin before I have done talking (22, 27, 33); we make similar comments simultaneously (21, 22); he ratifies my comments (26, 27); and he echoes my words (30, 31). He also volunteers information and opinions (33).

In playback, Chuck noted that when I questioned him about Goffman, he was intimidated. For one thing, he felt I was the "expert" and he the "novice," and therefore anything he might say would reveal his relative ignorance, so he preferred that I keep talking. He was operating on a defensive strategy. I, however, was operating on a rapport strategy. Starting from the assumption that we were equals, I tried to establish rapport by throwing out everything I could think

of associated with the topic: for example, listing the names of Goffman's books. In prototypical complementary schismogenetic fashion, this had the effect of overwhelming Chuck and intimidating him even more. He commented, during playback, "See how well you know Goffman, how you're rattling off the names of all his books?" The fact that I had not read many of them did not come through; it was overshadowed by the impact of the list. However, in talk aimed at Paul, who did not know anything about the subject, Chuck said he felt free to show off what he knew. This highlights the fact that whereas a speaker may not employ a certain strategy in one situation, s/he might well employ it in a different context. Preference for one strategy or another is not absolute, but context-sensitive.

In the discussion with Chuck about Goffman, I do the same thing that I do in our later talk about LA: I get a sense that I am doing too much of the talking, so I try to turn the conversation back to Chuck. The result is just the same as it is in the other discussion: Chuck's strategy becomes more defensive.

- (1) DT But anyway. ... <sup>f</sup>How do you happen to know his stuff?  
 f —————
- (2) C Cause I read it.
- (3) P [What do you do?]
- (4) DT [ / ? ? ] are you in ... sociology or anything?
- (5) C Yeah I read a little bit of it.  
 [rid]
- (6) DT Hm?
- (7) C I read a little bit of it.  
 [red]
- (8) DT I mean were you ... uh studying sociology?

- (9) C No.
- (10) DT You just heard about it, huh?
- (11) C Yeah. No. I heard about it from a friend who was a sociologist, and he said read this book, it's a good book and I read that book, <sup>DT</sup>uhuh<sup>DT</sup> <sup>P</sup>huh
- (12) DT I had never heard about him before I started studying linguistics.
- (13) C Really?
- (14) DT Yeah.

In answer to my high-pitched question (1) "How do you happen to know his stuff?" Chuck says (2) "Cause I read it." This seemed (and seems) to me to be begging the question. Chuck seemed to be resisting the obvious question of how he happened to read it. Further, he spoke with a tone that suggests slight annoyance, as if to say, "I read it, of course. How else?" Paul reacted as I did, since he asked (3) "What do you do?" at the same time that I asked (4) "Are you in sociology?" (During playback Paul attested that this was indeed his reaction). That is, both Paul and I expected Chuck to tell how his life -- and most likely his work or education -- led him to Goffman's books. My question (4) represents my characteristic tactic of asking with a more direct question, when I do not get the information I expect. Again Chuck's answer (7) "I read a little bit of it," does not explain how he came to read it. Predictably, I follow up by restating my question assuming he didn't understand: (8) "I mean were you ... uh studying sociology?" Again, Chuck's answer declines to give more than the information immediately requested: (9) "No."



At this point I apparently give up trying to elicit information from Chuck. However, the matter does not feel closed to me, so I supply a plausible explanation of my own: (10) "You just heard about it, huh?" Here I seem to be coming to terms with the fact that Chuck is not going to furnish the sort of answer I expect, so I settle for my own reconstruction of his unstated answer. At just this point, Chuck comes through with what I expected four conversational turns earlier: (11) "I heard about it from a friend who was a sociologist." Again, Chuck was reluctant to offer information in a field in which he felt I was more competent. Chuck noted, during playback, another possible factor in his reluctance to offer information about the source of his familiarity with Goffman's work. The friend who was a sociologist was someone Chuck had lived with for many years -- hence, an association with personal matters, which he did not want to talk about.

This conversation about Goffman preceded the one about LA and Chuck's work ( p. 91). The two interchanges exhibit roughly the same pattern (cf Pittenger et. al., "recurrence"). Throughout these conversations, I had the feeling that Chuck was withholding and resisting, and I had no idea why. I kept trying to rectify the situation by talking faster, asking him more questions, being more enthusiastic, saying more, and focusing more attention on him personally. It now seems likely that all these devices had the effect of further stymying him.

There are at least two major stylistic differences operating here: notions of content (what it is appropriate to talk about) and control devices (how it is appropriate to talk about it). The idea that it is "polite" to talk about personal matters, that people like

to talk about themselves, seems like a "given" to some speakers (e.g. me), while for others it is equally obviously not true. Note, of course, that the setting determines appropriateness judgments. Chuck may well like to talk about himself with a close friend, if not with someone he has just met.

### The Machine-Gun Question

To me, the way in which I asked questions of Chuck: with high pitch, rapid rate, fast pacing with respect to preceding comments, and reduced syntactic forms, all signal familiarity and casualness -- hence rapport, designed to make the other feel comfortable. However, my questions made Chuck feel "on the spot," rather like my sister's question to Dan ("Where." p. 86). Questions of this sort operate effectively in other segments of the Thanksgiving conversation -- specifically, in interchanges between Karl, Paul, and me.

For example, note the following segment. At this point, Paul has commented that his son's teacher believes that television has limited children's fantasy lives, and Karl concurs. I then ask Karl and Paul a series of questions, fast and at times high-pitched, just like those that I earlier asked Chuck:

- (1) K I think it's basically done ... d`amage to children.  
 [tone-----p-----  
 .... [That what good it's done is ... outwe`ighed by ...  
 dec-----  
 the d`amage.] [very sober tone throughout]  
 -----]
- (2) DT Did y`ou two grow up with t`elevisi`on?
- (3) P V`ery l`ittle. We h`ad a TV in the Quonset
- (4) DT [H`ow old were you when your

- parents got it?]
- (5) K [We had a TV but we didn't watch it all the time. .... We were very young. I was four when my parents got a TV.]
- (6) DT [You were four?
- (7) P I even remember that. .... [I don't remember/ ?? →
- (8) K [I remember they got a TV →
- before
- P ? /
- K we moved out of the Quonset huts. In nineteen fifty four.]
- (9) P [I remember we got it in the Quonset huts.
- (10) DT [chuckles] [You lived in Quonset huts? .... When you were how old?
- .....
- (11) K Y'know my father's dentist said to him what's a Quonset hut. ... And he said God, you must be younger than my children. .... He was. .... Younger than both of us.  
S [sighs]

The pace of this entire segment is fast, with much overlap and little pause between utterances. My questions may set the pace, but the responses are equally fast-paced. Paul and Karl overlap with each other (7,8) and latch utterances onto preceding ones (5,9) (The term "latch" is taken from Schenkein 1978). My question (2) is latched onto Karl's rather slow-paced and sober observation about television (1). My next question (4) is timed to overlap with Paul's answer to (2). (Since Paul and Karl are brothers, they are equally able to

answer). My questions in (10) are high-pitched and fast: "You lived in Quonset huts?" is a response-question, showing my surprise, and "When you were how old?" asks for more information in just the same tone.

My question (2) "Did you two grow up with television?" represents a shift in focus of the conversation, putting Paul and Karl on the spot in a personal way, whereas they were previously talking about television in general. They both quickly take up this new tack, and in their responses they interrupt and repeat each other to answer in tandem. By the time I ask (4) "How old were you when your parents got it?" Karl has just begun to answer my question (2) with his comment (5): "We had a TV but we didn't watch it all the time." He goes ahead with this comment and then continues to answer my second question by saying, "I was four when my parents got a TV." It is interesting to see how the constructions of the two sentences reflect the shift in focus of Karl's statements. His first sentence in (5) "We had a TV but" echoes Paul's "We had a TV" in (3). Karl's second sentence in (5) picks up the phrase "when my parents got a TV" from my question (4)"...When your parents got a TV."

There are two intricate patterns of synchronization here. The first is Paul's and Karl's "duetting" (Falk 1979), as they both talk about their childhood recollections; that is, they jointly hold one side of the conversation. I, meanwhile, am timing my questions to come either as interruptions or at the precise end of Paul's and Karl's sentences -- extremely rapid fire. If my rapid questions come at a time when Karl is not prepared to stop talking, he either answers when he is ready or ignores the question completely, depending on how

much more he has to say. The first phenomenon has been seen (5). The second can be seen when Karl ignores my question (10) "You lived in Quonset huts? ... When you were how old?" Instead of answering, he tells a little story (11) which he has thought of in connection with Quonset huts.

Note too the compressed nature of the question (10) "When you were how old?" as opposed to the standard form, "How old were you when you lived there?" The full form would have taken longer to utter, and would have signalled its interrogative intent syntactically. The question as uttered is a reduced form; it is shorter, and its interrogative intent is signalled most saliently by sharp rising intonation. The result of this reduction, combined with the accelerated pace of utterance, is that the question relays the conversational ball faster than would "normally" be expected -- just like the reduced question "Where" which was discussed earlier (p. 86). The effect is intended as a rapport device, by which the metamessage is, "We are such good communicators, we don't need full forms." However, when used with someone who does not share this system, the effect would most likely be (like Dan's reaction to the reduced question "Where"), "Let's get this conversation over with because you're such a bore."

In addition, the fast pace, reduced syntactic form, and high pitch of this question are intended to connote casualness, to signal the message, "Answer this if you like, but if you have something else to say, go ahead, because this really isn't all that important." This message gets through; Karl takes the option of not answering the question. It is not the case that the question overlaps with something he has already begun to say, as in (5), where his statement

begins immediately after my question (4). Rather, there is a long pause of 1.5 seconds after my question (10), before Karl begins his story (11). As I listen to the tape, I do not mind in the least that he has chosen to tell this story rather than answer my question. I am pleased that he realizes that I would like to hear what he most feels like telling, and that he does not "stand on ceremony" by feeling he must answer every question I happen to ask. His lack of compulsion about answering my questions frees me to toss them out as exuberantly as I like.

At another times, Karl permits my interruption to change the course of his talk. For example, later in the same episode, he comments that people living in the Quonset huts had rats, and he continues:

- (1) K Cause they were built near the swámp. .... We used to go ... hunting frógs-in the swámps,
- (2) DT Where was it. Where were yours?  
                  acc
- (3) K In the Brónx.
- (4) P In the Brónx. In the East Brónx?
- (5) DT How long did you live in it? ]
- (6) K Near the swamps? .... Now  
there's a big cooperative building.
- (7) P Three years.
- (8) DT Three years?  
[breathy tone]

In this segment, Karl permits my overlap to become an interruption. When I ask (2) "Where was it? Where were yours?" he halts his

recollection about hunting frogs in the swamps (1) to answer my question in (3). However, when my next question (5) comes: "How long did you live in it?" he is still answering my previous question with (6) "Near the swamps? ... Now there's a big cooperative building?" In other words, he has taken one question (2) and allowed it to determine his next contributions, but he ignores another (5) because it is too soon after his answer to (2). My question (5) is actually answered by Paul, who is not otherwise engaged (and who throughout the evening is attentive to my questions and needs, as I am to his).

When Karl listened to this conversation on the tape, he affirmed that it was a fine conversation. He was not troubled by my rapid questions; he felt they showed interest, and he found their pace appropriate to the dynamic nature of the talk. It was just this dynamic quality, he averred, that made the conversation satisfying. Paul did not find the pace unusual either, but he noted that he was having some trouble staying in there.

There are many other segments of the Thanksgiving dinner conversation which show that Karl and I use rapid questions in the same way. In one, Chuck is again the unfortunate target. The beginning of this segment has already been reported and discussed (p. 87). It is the discussion in which Chuck mentions his trip to New York, and Karl asks him where he went there ([5] below). Following is the rest of that segment.

(1) C 'That's what I expected to find in New York was lots of  
acc  
báegls.

(2) DR Yeah lots of báegls and when you go to Bóston you

- expect to find <sup>beáns</sup>.
- (3) K                               ] Did you fínd them?
- (4) C    ̀No no. What I found were were uh-- ... croisə?  
 crescent rolls? and croissant? and all that? .....
- thE .. créscent rolls mostly. Lots of thát kind of  
 stuff. But it was ]
- (5)                                       ] Where.
- (6) DR Croissant.
- (7) C    I don't know. ... I didn't go around a whole lot for  
 breakfast. I was kind of stuck at ... the Pláza for  
 pp  
 a while which was interesting.
- (8) DT You stáyed at the Pláza?
- (9) C    Yeah.
- (10) DT    ] Hooooooooooooo! ]
- (11) K                                   ] Were yóu on the Wést Side at all?  
                                          acc

Karl responds to Chuck's comment (1) that he expected to find bagels in New York by asking (3) "Did you find them?" In this he cuts off the end of Dan's humorous observation (2). Chuck's reply (4) to Karl's question is fairly long but repetitive, slowed down by a filler (uh--), a false start ("croisə?"), repetition and rewording ("crescent rolls", "croissant", "crescent rolls"), empty phrases ("and all that?," "that kind of stuff"), and pauses. Karl interrupts this reply to ask (5) "Where." The contrast between Chuck's diffuse and repetitive (4) and Karl's abrupt question (5) could not be more dramatic. In (7) Chuck replies to Karl's question with another diffuse contribution.



(7) begins with a hedge ("I don't know"), proceeds to a pause, has more hedges ("a whole lot," "kind of") and has more pauses before reaching the contentful answer that he ate breakfast at the Plaza Hotel, after which his voice trails off. It has already been postulated (p. 88), as confirmed by Chuck, that the abruptness of Karl's question probably took him aback and therefore slowed him down even more than ordinarily might have been his style.

No sooner does Chuck get this information out, than I ask a question which is really a back channel response: (8) "You stayed at the Plaza?" In this instance, as has been seen elsewhere, rephrasing Chuck's statement as a question is meant to show great interest: his words have made an impression. Chuck's muted and characteristic response (9) "Yeah" is met with yet another exclamation from me, this time a high-pitched non-verbal one: (10) "Hooooooooo!" At this point, Karl jumps in with (11) "Were you on the WestSide at all?" His question is spoken quickly, with high pitch, ends with marked rising intonation, and is latched onto the preceding utterance.

In another segment of conversation, it is clear Paul too uses the strategy of quick questions to show interest. In the second hour of taped conversation, Dan is talking to the group about sign language. He has just explained the three signs he knows for the word "Christmas" and told what they symbolize.

- (1) DR So-- and <sup>h</sup>this is the one that's <sup>h</sup>Berkeley. This is  
the <sup>h</sup>Berkeley ... sign for .. for <sup>h</sup>Christmas
- (2) DT ↳ Do you figure out  
f

those .. those um correspondences? or do? when you  
DR/?/

learn the signs, /does/ somebody tells you.

(3) DR Oh you mean watching it? like

(4) DT Cause I can imagine knowing that sign, ...  
and not .. figuring out that it had anything to do with  
the decorations.

....

(5) DR No. Y you know that it has to do with the  
decorations.]

(6) DT Cause somebody tells you? Or you figure,  
DR No  
it out.

(7) DR Oh. ... You you talking about me, or a deaf person.]

(8) DT Yeah.] You.  
You.

(9) DR Me? uh-- Someone tells me, usually . ... But a lot of  
em I can tell. I mean they're obvious. .... The better  
I get the more I can tell. The longer I do it the more  
I can tell what they're talking about.

..... Without knowing what the sign is.]

(10) DT huh. That's interesting.]

(11) P But how do you  
learn a new sign?

....

(12) DR How do I learn a new sign?]

(13) P Yeah. I mean supposing ...  
Victor's talking and all of a sudden he uses

a sign for Thanksgiving, and you've never seen it before.

My questions (2) (4) and (6) and Paul's questions (11) and (13) are timed to overlap or latch immediately onto Dan's preceding comments. In contrast, Dan's comments follow our questions after normal or even noticeable (5, 12) pauses.

My question (2) about whether Dan figures out the sign symbolism for himself or is told about it, not only is latched onto Dan's fading comment (1), but is spoken loudly, and whereas Dan was making a general statement about sign, I am suddenly turning the focus on him personally, as I do in previous examples with Chuck and Karl. I now know (from Dan's comments during playback) that abrupt questions catch him off guard. Therefore he is taken aback at this point and hesitates by rephrasing the question. I then interrupt Dan's rephrasing to give more information to illustrate my question (4). The fact that Dan hesitated indicated to me that I had not given him enough information; however, the real trouble was not that, but the suddenness of my question and the fact that it shifted from a general to a personal topic without outward warning. What Dan really wanted was a slower paced conversation.

Dan answers my question (4) by commenting (5) on my illustration, but he does not answer my initial question (2) of HOW he knows that the sign symbolizes a certain thing (the Christmas sign symbolizing decorations was an example). I therefore use my now familiar strategy of asking again, becoming more specific. My question (6) "Cause somebody tells you? Or you figure it out." is latched onto Dan's comment

(5) "You know that it has to do with the decorations." Once more Dan stalls by asking (7) for clarification of the question. Again his question comes after a filler, a pause, a slight stutter at the beginning of his sentence: "Oh. ... You you talking about me...". And yet again, I clarify in machine-gun fashion: (8) "Yeah. You. You." Dan then answers my question to my satisfaction and is rewarded with (10) "huh" and a comment "That's interesting," which overlap with his answer.

The rhythm of this interchange is most peculiar. As with Chuck in the LA discussion (see p.91), the rhythm is a pattern of answer-question, pause, answer-question, pause. Normally, a question-and-answer are seen as an "adjacency pair" (Sacks, Schegloff), and in a smooth conversation, they are rhythmically paired as well. The differences in Dan's style on the one hand, and Paul's and mine on the other, however, create pauses not between an answer and the following question, but between our rapid questions and his delayed answers. Each resultant "rhythmic pair," then, is made of Dan's answer and the next adjacent question. This is typical of the way in which stylistic differences create obstructions in conversational rhythm. The jerky rhythm is created by the difference in expectations about how much time should appropriately lapse between utterances in the conversation. (It has been seen that Chuck is perfectly capable of overlapping and interrupting in other conversations, and Karl, Paul and I allow long pauses during other sorts of talk -- for example, a serious discussion of emotional problems).

A variety of linguistic devices make these questions seem like machine-gun fire: some combination of the devices of high pitch,

reduced syntactic form, fast rate of speech, and directness of content. In addition, the effect of all these devices is increased by the pace with which the question is fired in conversation: the time that is permitted to elapse before the question is posed. In this, the quick question is one aspect of fast pacing that is one of the most salient characteristics of the rapport-based strategy under analysis.

### Overlap and Pace

In the discussion presented above (p.110) about New York, Karl and I are so quick with our responses, so animated in our interest in New York as a topic of talk, that Chuck gets lost in short order. Karl's question (11) "Were you on the West Side at all?" does not spark a discussion with Chuck about his visit to New York. Rather, it launches Karl and me, and to some extent Paul, on a discussion of our own about New York. We fire and answer questions and overlap in the continuing discussion.

In answering Karl's question about whether he went to the West Side, Chuck mentions a restaurant he went to downtown. Karl then corrects, "No, I mean the Upper West Side." Chuck says he doesn't know, so I hypothesize for him that he did not go there, and I ask a question to verify this. The question (1), however, elicits a terse response from Chuck. The one it engages in conversation is Karl:

(1) DT Próbly not. Dju go to the Coliséúm?  
acc

(2) C No.

(3) DT Probly he didn't go to the West Side.  
acc, p

(4) K Colíséúm?!  
f

- (5) DT That's where the beginning of the West Side is.  
acc
- (6) K Oh right.
- (7) P What's the Coliséum.  
K [/?/
- (8) DT Fifty ninth and uh--
- (9) C [sings] Ea--st Si--de, We--st Si--de.
- (10) P What is it.
- (11) DT What is it? It's a big exposition center.
- (12) K And office building.  
DR [/?/
- (13) P [By fifty ninth. And Columbus Circle.  
(14) DT [mmm]
- .....
- (15) K Remember where W I N S used to be?
- (16) DT No.]
- (17) K [Then they built a big huge skyscraper there?
- (18) DT No. Where was that.
- (19) K Right where Central Park West met Broadway. That  
acc  
building shaped like that. [Makes a pyramid with hands]
- (20) P [Did I give you too much? [re turkey]
- (21) DT [By Columbus Circuit? ... that Columbus Circle?
- (22) K [Right on Columbus Circle.  
Here's Columbus Circle, ... here's Central Park West,
- (23) DT [Now it's  
the Huntington Hartford Museum.
- (24) P [That's the Huntington Hartford, right?

- (25) K Nuhnuhno. ... Hére's Central Park West, hére's  
DT<sup>L</sup>Yeah.  
Broadway. We're going nórth, thís way? ... and  
DT uhuh  
here's thís building hére. The Huntington Hártford is  
is on the Sóuth side.
- (26) DT [on the óther? across. Yeah, rightrightright-  
right. ....
- (27) K [And nów that's a new building with uh--]  
[And there was ... L and L ] there was a?  
stóres here, and the upper second floor was W I N S.  
DT oh--  
... And we listened to--
- (28) DT Now it's a round place with a-- movie theatre.
- (29) K Now? there's a roun? No. The next .. nêxt block is but  
... but .. this is a huge skýscrapér right there.  
DT [oh L oh,  
yeah.
- .....
- (30) DT hm ]  
(31) K [It's amazing.  
(32) DT I never knew where W I N S was.  
(33) K That was my haunt cause I went down for chídren's  
concerts.

Beginning with Karl's question to Chuck about whether he went to the West Side in New York, Karl and I launch an intense discussion of the goeography of Columbus Circle. We were joined occasionally by Paul, but Paul noted during playback that he does not know New York City as

well as Karl does, since he never lived in Manhattan as an adult; therefore he felt somewhat intimidated during this discussion. The pace of this conversation is extremely rapid, and includes complex sub-topics within the overall topic of Columbus Circle. For example, Karl asks

(15) R remember where <sup>F</sup>WINS used to be?

WINS is a NY radio station that was popular when we were young. I answer (16) "No," but Karl proceeds with (17) very quickly, as if I had not answered this way at all.

(17) Then they built a big huge skyscraper there?

I repeat my negative reply (18) "No," and ask "Where was that?"

As Karl explains to me where WINS was, there is rapid and loud overlap as Karl, Paul and I all repeat each other's phrases to show agreement. I suggest (21) "By Columbus Circle?" (which is not a real question, since its location in Columbus Circle is the reason Karl brought WINS up in the first place). Karl repeats this phrase (22) "Right on Columbus Circle," timing his agreement to overlap with my utterance. He has had a clue in the form of my false start (21) "Columbus Circuit" and therefore need not wait for me to complete the correct phrase. Karl then continues his explanation, with hardly a hitch in timing:

(22) K Right on Columbus Circle. <sup>Here's</sup> Columbus Circle,  
<sup>here's</sup> Central Park West,

I then interrupt his explanation (22) to show that I understand well



enough to supply a new landmark of my own:

(23) DT Now it's the Huntington Hartford Museum.

(24) P That's the Huntington Hartford, right?

It is particularly interesting to note Paul's contribution (24). Paul is able to use his familiarity with the rhythmic patterns of our talk to participate, even though he is not familiar with the material under discussion. Paul suggests "That's the Huntington Hartford, right?" quite as if he had reason to believe that this is correct. In fact, he is "piggy-backing" my erroneous comment (23). It is highly unlikely, were he to mistake Karl's geography lesson independently, that he would make precisely the same mistake that I did. It seems clear, therefore, that he picks up my comment (23) and uses it as the basis for his own (24), waiting just long enough after I began talking for him to know what I would say. He took a calculated risk, assuming that I would be right. Although I was wrong, and hence he was wrong, he did succeed in participating smoothly in the interchange. This is a testament to the fact that sharing conversational style in the form of pacing and overlap habits is sufficient for participation; specific knowledge of the topic is not.

Since the building Karl has in mind is not the Huntington Hartford Museum, Karl tells us that we are wrong: (25) "Nuhnuhno," backing up to repeat his explanation in precisely the same intonation that he began in (22):

(25) K Nuhnuhno. ... Here's Central Park West, here's  
Broadway

I am now even more anxious to show that I understand, since I have been wrong once, so I complete Karl's sentence with him:

(25) K The Huntington Hartford is is on the SOUTH side.

(26) DT on the other? across.

Yeah, rightrightrightright.

My quintuplet machine-gun "rights" (26) correspond to Karl's triple machine-gun "no's" (25); I need a few more to counteract my previous error (23).

This segment demonstrates as well how our rapport strategy, urging us to reach agreement, throws us into exaggerated forms of our habitual style when it is threatened. Since I do not really understand which building Karl has in mind, I am even more eager with my overlaps and offers to finish his sentences about where it is. The rapid-fire "no's" and "rights" are a symptom of this too.

The next way that I try to rectify my error and show understanding is to offer my idea of what is there now:

(26) DT ... and now that's a new building with uh--  
 (27) K And there was ... and there was  
 a? stores here, and on the upper second floor was WINS.  
 ... And we listened to--

At this point Karl is following up what he started in (15), that is, the location of the radio station. Since he chooses to override my overlap (26) with his explanation (27), I repeat it:

(28) DT Now it's a round place with a-- movie theater.

The next line of conversation is a most intriguing form of evidence for the drive to agree. Karl says:

(29) K Now ?there's a roun? .. no. The next .. next block is  
 but ... but ... this is a huge skyscraper right  
 I oh  
 there.  
 I oh, yeah.

In (29) Karl begins automatically to repeat my phrase "now it's a round building with a movie theater," to ratify my offer of understanding. But in fact he cannot do so, because I have been wrong again (in fact I haven't any idea at all where WINS used to be), so he must stop himself from agreeing, to correct me again. The false start is a testament to the strength of his tendency to repeat an interlocutor's phrase which has been offered as a show of rapport, that is to incorporate their offer into one's own statement. It is interesting to note, too, that Karl's correction (29) "this is a huge skyscraper" is a repetition of his earlier statement (17) "Then they built a big huge skyscraper there?" "Huge skyscraper" seems to be operating as a formulaic phrase; and after all this heated negotiation, Karl is right back where he began with his description.

Now Karl and I have finally agreed upon the site for the building that Karl is talking about -- or at least he has disabused me of my specific confusion of it with another building. There is then a slight pause, in which I say (30) "Hmm" and Karl says (31) "It's amazing," both of which seem like contentless utterances meant to fill the quiet after the storm. Then, in (32), I explain why I have been so inept in placing the building Karl has tried to recall:

(32) DT I never knew where WINS was.

In (33) Karl justifies his greater expertise and perhaps also his intense preoccupation with getting the geography of the area right:

(33) K That was my haunt cause I went down for children's concerts.

Susie's reaction, when listening to this interchange on the tape, was to laugh. She noticed, first of all, how the topic of New York got taken away from Chuck. Then she commented on the intensity of the discussion which Karl and I became embroiled in. "I find it incredibly funny," Susie said. "I love it. It's ultimate New York." What she found funny was that Karl was so intent on establishing just which street and which building he was thinking of, and that I shared that earnestness. Susie remarked that while she loves listening to such discussions, she could never participate in one because she couldn't distinguish between what's important and what isn't. "I would never talk so intensely about something so insignificant," she said. It seems to her that in a New York conversation, anything is important, just by virtue of being talked about. To her, the Coliseum discussion is a great sound and fury signifying nothing.

The fact that Susie felt she could not distinguish between what is important and what isn't is strong evidence that different signaling systems are at work (cf Gumperz). In contrast to Susie's reaction to this discussion as remarkable, when Karl listened to it on tape, he had no particular reaction, except to smile and note that it had been an enjoyable evening. To him (as to me), it was just a good

conversation.

Thus, rapid rate of speech, overlap, and latching of utterances are devices by which some speakers show solidarity, enthusiasm, and interest in others' talk. The resulting fast pace greases the conversational wheels when speakers share expectations about use of these devices.

It is probably not a coincidence that this interchange, which seems typical of "New York" style in its intensity, pace, overlap, loudness, and emphasis on rapport, was about New York. It seems to be the case that a conversation about a certain ingroup or about issues associated with that ingroup often triggers use of verbal strategies associated with that group. Many New Yorkers have reported that when they talk about New York, especially with other New Yorkers, they find themselves using exaggerated New York style. This is natural, since verbal strategies, when shared, are part of what gives people the feeling that they "are on the same wave length." It is the comfort and ease of using a shared communicative system that makes it pleasurable to talk to people of shared background, although the feeling may not be consciously attributed to that factor.

It is interesting to note that Susie mentioned that she "loved" listening to a conversation like this one, even though it seemed strange to her. She lived with Karl for six years, so for her such conversation is associated with him. If she has positive feelings about that conversational style, those feelings necessarily come from her feelings about her history with Karl. Susie noted that when she first met Karl's family, their way of talking (i.e. exhibiting characteristics of the Columbus Circle discussion) was overwhelming to her,

and a bit offensive. (One can't help but recall here the split-screen scene from Woody Allen's film Annie Hall, contrasting the dinner talk of his New York hero and his mid-western heroine, exaggerated for comic effect, of course). But because of later positive associations, Susie now finds such conversation nostalgic. Attitudes toward speech styles are necessarily associated with attitudes toward the people one has met who exhibit those styles.<sup>2</sup>

It is quite clear that not everyone feels positive about people who use such conversational devices. A recent article in New West magazine (Esterly 1979) tells of the work of Gerald Goodman, a psychologist at UCLA who believes that fast talkers are a conversational menace. He calls them "crowders" (thus evincing his bias, as perhaps my own bias emerges in my choice of the term "rapport"), and offers a training course (at a price) which is designed to help them learn "patience."

Goodman sees overlap and latching as obstructive moves: "A slow talker may actually be allowed to end his thought, but then the other person immediately starts talking, and that contributes to a feeling of not being understood or appreciated or taken seriously. And, of course, if you get two aggressive, crowding people together in competition, there's a chain reaction and no communication "( p.69 ) Goodman is expressing the view of the decontextualized strategist. From another perspective, that of those operating on a rapport strategy, the fact that interlocutors understand and appreciate each other is an assumption; the signaling load is on rapport: showing interest and enthusiasm through pace.

Goodman's view, however, clearly expresses the perspective of many non-"crowders". Dan and Susie were disconcerted by the rapid pace and overlap that dominated the conversation, to the extent that it made it difficult for them to participate. Dan commented, "I'm amazed at how you guys talk over each other -- saying the same thing at the same time. When I have a conversation there are pauses." Dan remarked that his parents often interrupted each other, but he had the feeling that this meant they wanted to block each other out. In this, he is expressing the view that Goodman holds of crowders: that is, that overlap makes communication impossible. However, examples of the conversation at Thanksgiving dinner demonstrate that for some people overlap not only does not impede but in fact enhances communication.

#### Mutual Revelation

The Coliseum discussion contains yet another important phenomenon which is part of the conversational style of its participants. In (32) I make a statement about my own experience:

(32) DT I never knew where WINS was.

Karl responds to this by making a statement about his experience:

(33) K That was my haunt cause I went down for children's concerts.

This is a device by which a personal statement is intended as a show of rapport. By this strategy, the speaker expects his or her statement of personal experience to elicit a similar statement from the other. Thematic cohesion is established by the metamessage: "We

are intimate; we both tell about ourselves; we are both interested in hearing about the other's experience."

The effectiveness of this device is dependent upon the sharedness of the system. A friend recently told me about a disconcerting dinner conversation with a man she had just met. During this initial conversation, the man began to regale her with personal revelations about his past and his life. My friend could not help herself from asking him, "Why are you telling me all this?" The man explained, "Because I want to get to know you." This seems at first patently absurd -- how could he get to know her by telling about himself? Yet his strategy makes sense if his personal revelations were intended as an invitation for her to follow suit -- in fact, for one who shares such a system his revelations might be sensed as an imperative to follow suit, since resistance would be an obvious refusal to participate.

The device of mutual revelation is part of the rapport strategy. It fits in with the image of conventionalized camaraderie which was illustrated in Chapter One (p. 31), in the example of the two graduate students. It also figures in a passage in the novel Daniel Martin by John Fowles. The narrator comments, with reference to an American couple seated at the protagonist's table on a cruise ship:

The American pair seemed to have been abroad long enough -- they had been in Cairo some four months -- to have quelled that least attractive (to Dan) of national characteristics: the need to overwhelm you with personal information and then demand yours. The occasional conversation at lunch -- it was properly a rectangular table for six,



which allowed them some separation -- was almost English in its generality. (pp. 506-7)

The preference for personal topics and the expectation of mutual revelation which the narrator associates with Americans comes from a rapport-based preference for conventionalized camaraderie. The commentator, incidentally, is naive in his observation that the couple have given up this "typically American" device because they have been abroad four months. It is highly unlikely that people would change strategies that quickly -- if ever. It is more likely that the hero has come in contact with Americans who operate on a different strategy, one closer to his own, and closer Chuck's.

The strategy of mutual personal statements need not be so dramatic as extended or deeply intimate revelations. It operates on a subtle level as well as in my comments and Karl's about WINS (p.123).

In this system, the interpersonal connection is the source of thematic cohesion. The rapport function -- that is, the notion that, because of our interpersonal connection, we are interested in each other's revelations -- is assumed. If such an assumption is not operative, or if an interlocutor is not familiar with the mutual-revelation device, then the most appropriate response to someone's personal statement would be a reaction to that stated condition or opinion. In other words, thematic cohesion would be established on the basis of content (hence the strategy is decontextualized rather than rapport-based). This is the strategy upon which Chuck operated when I was trying to get him to talk about Goffman's work (p.103). Using the mutual statement device, I said,

DT I had never heard about him before I started studying linguistics.

This represents the same device which I used in my comment to Karl about WINS. I expected (and when I listen to the tape, I again expect) Chuck to respond with a similar statement about himself. Instead, Chuck kept the focus on me:

C Really?

DT Yeah.

with the result that the interchange came to a temporary halt. Not surprisingly (knowing what we now know) the one who did pick up on my ploy was Paul:

P That name is familiar but I don't I din know I didn't know anything about

Another extended interchange between Paul and me demonstrates the operation of mutual revelation. The discussion took place immediately after the Goffman discussion.

(1) DT Do you <sup>é</sup>read? ....

(2) P Do I <sup>é</sup>read? ...

(3) DT Do you <sup>é</sup>read things just for <sup>é</sup>fun?

....

(4) P Yeah. .... Right now I'm reading Norma Jean the  
Termite Queen.  
[laughs]

- (5) DT <sup>f</sup>What's that? .... Norma Jean like uh-- .... Marilyn  
Monróe?
- (6) P It's .. No--. It's a book about ..... a housewife  
[tone] dec  
/??/
- (7) DT Is it a <sup>f</sup>novel or what.
- (8) P 'It's a <sup>f</sup>novel. [tone: self-deprecating]  
[tone]
- (9) DT 'Yeah?
- (10) P Before that .... I read The French Lieutenant's Woman?  
<sup>f</sup>Have you read that?
- (11) DT <sup>f</sup>Oh yeah? } No. Who wrote that?
- (12) P John Fowles.
- (13) DT Yeah I've heard that he's good.
- (14) P 'He's a <sup>f</sup>great writer. 'I think he's one of the <sup>f</sup>best  
[tone-----]  
writers.  
----]DT: hm
- (15) DT /?/
- (16) P 'He's really <sup>f</sup>good.  
[tone] [tone: earnest]
- (17) DT /?/
- .....
- (18) P But I get very busy. .... } Y'know?
- (19) DT } Yeah. I? .. hardly ever  
read.
- .....
- (20) P What I've been doing is cutting down on my sleep.

- (21) DT Oy! [sighs]
- (22) P [And I've been [K laughs] ..... and I<sup>s</sup>
- (23) DT [I do that too  
but it's painfu!.]
- (24) P [Yeah. Fi--ve, six hours a'night,  
and]
- (25) DT [Oh God, how can you do it. You survive?  
.....
- (26) P Yeah late afternoon meetings are hard. .... But out-  
DT : mmm  
side of that I can keep going pretty well
- (27) DT [Not sleeping enough is  
terrible .... I'd much rather not eat than not sleep.  
[tone] [S laughs]
- [tone: "concern"]
- (28) P I probably should not eat so much, it would .. it  
would uh ... save a lot of time.
- (29) DT If I'm /like really/ busy I don't I don't I don't eat.  
I don't yeah I just don't eat but-I
- (30) P [I? I tend to spend a  
lot of time eating and preparing and /?/
- (31) DT [Oh-- I never  
prepare food. .... I eat whatever I can get my  
hands on.]
- (32) P [Yeah.]

Paul and I exchange a series of mutual observations about our own habits. With (19) I show that I understand what Paul means about being

busy by saying that I hardly ever read (presumably because I too am too busy). In (23) I do the same in response to his comment that he cuts down on sleep. In (27) I sympathise with his statement (26) about getting tired at late afternoon meetings by stating what my own preference would be. In (28) Paul makes a comment about his eating habits; in (29) I describe mine; in (30) he reiterates his, and in (31) I reiterate mine. It might seem to some observers that we are not "communicating" at all, since we both persist in talking about ourselves. However, if one is familiar with the mutual revelation device, it is clear that we are showing our understanding of and concern for each other's statements by offering comparable personal statements.

#### Bonding Through Rapport-based Devices

Throughout Thanksgiving there is a significant amount of bonding between Paul and me. We listen to each other; we encourage each other to speak; we have a number of dyadic talks, or at least talks in which the main dynamic is between us. This is partly explainable by the fact that we have known each other for a significant length of time, although we have not been "friends" during that time and have not socialized together much. It may also be attributable in part to the fact that we are both now single. But certainly the continuation of interchanges between us is at least in part due to the fact that our styles are rather similar, and therefore we find talk between us easy and satisfying.

There is evidence throughout the taped conversation, for example, that Paul and I use overlap in similar ways. This has been seen already, in the above example (pp. 129-131). Paul and I both timed our

comments to overlap with or immediately latch onto those of the other: Paul's comments (22), (24) and (30) and mine (19), (23), (25), (27) and (31). Paul responds positively to my sudden focus of attention on his personal life. When I turn to him and ask (1) "Do you read?" I use a rapid, abrupt question, introducing a new topic unexpectedly. After a brief hesitation in the form of restating my question (2) "Do I read?" Paul not only answers the question but supplies specific information (4) about the book he is currently reading. That is, rather than just answering my question as Chuck did with "Yeah," Paul volunteers added information which gives matter for further talk. I then ask him about the book, but it is apparent from (6) "It's .. No--. It's a book about ..... a housewife /??/" that Paul would have gone on to say more about it even if I hadn't asked. He begins by saying "It's," and then has to stop in order to answer my question with "No," and then continues where he had started, with a sentence that now does double duty as the answer to my question: "It's a book about a housewife." As with Karl in earlier examples, when I interrupt Paul in the middle of a sentence he wants to finish, he continues trying to say it until he succeeds. See, for example, (22) and (24), in which Paul makes three attempts to say that he sleeps only five or six hours a night.

When Paul finally says that he sleeps so little, my response is immediate: (25) "Oh God, how can you do it. You survive?" Note the deletion of the auxiliary to render the reduced syntactic form of the question, a device discussed earlier.

### Expressive Phonology and Intonation

An aspect of Paul's and my styles is "expressive" use of phonology and other paralinguistic cues. For example, my question (5) "What's that?" is loud and high pitched. It will be seen in a later discussion (p. 169) that I use this device with Chuck and Dan, with the result that they stop talking in surprise, wondering what caused my outburst. In the present segment, the high pitch on "What's that?" is echoed in the way I end the question as well: The last syllable of "Monroe" has very high pitch. It seems highly likely that my use of this pattern was triggered by Paul's laughter as he finished saying the title of the book he was reading (4).

In responding to my exclamation (5), Paul uses sharp contrasts in pitch and voice quality to signal the message, "I know this is a silly book." His pitch on (6) "No" is very low, and he draws out the vowel, then utters the sentence with slowed pace. The same signals function in (8) when he explains "It's a novel." Shifts in pitch also function in Paul's evaluation of John Fowles:

(14) P 'He's a great writer. 'I think he's one of the  
best writers.

(16) P 'He's really, good.

The pitch is very high on the beginnings of the sentences ("He's" and "I" in [14]; "He's in" [16]), and very low on the emphasized words at the ends of the sentences ("great writer" and "best writers" in [14]; "good" in [16]). The contour which results signals great earnestness and sincerity.

When Paul says (20), that he has been cutting down on his sleep, I respond with a Yiddish non-verbal expression of suffering: (21) "Oy." I am thus expressing sympathy for Paul's loss of sleep. My choice of a Yiddish "response cry" (Goffman 1978) functions in a number of ways, based on a rapport strategy. First of all, I utter the cry as if it were an expression of my own feeling, thus taking Paul's point of view to show that I empathize with his feelings. Second, the fact that I chose a Yiddish expression signals, through metaphorical code-switching (Blom & Gumperz 1972), Paul's and my shared ethnic background. At the same time, however, the exaggerated nature of my response -- the fact that I utter "oy" with a great sigh -- is a way of mocking my own usage, so that the utterance is ironic. The humor of this response is not lost on Karl, who has been engaged in a parallel conversation with other numbers of the group, but who, on hearing my exclamation, laughs loudly. (It will be seen, in the section on humor, that this type of self-mocking, stylized ironic usage is typical of Karl's own humor, and that I am his best audience when he indulges in it.)

I continue the device of expressing exaggerated concern for Paul's loss of sleep in (23), (25), and (27). These comments are all spoken with marked stress and breathy voice quality that express exaggerated and stylized concern. The entire interchange, thus, exhibits marked pitch shifts and exaggerated stress which gives it a sense of expressiveness and empathy (to Paul and me).

My interchange with Paul ends with observations about dating. Paul volunteers the information that following his separation, he went through a period of dating a lot, but now he has decided that he does



not find that satisfying. I make a generalization (a device typical of my style) that his experience is "normal." At the end of our exchange, both the rhythm and content of our comments effect harmony and conclusion:

(1) DT Well that's a véry usual páttern. I mean I think when you suddenly find yourself single, of cource what you want to do is date a lot. .... In fact I would think it would s remain interesting for about a yéar.  
[laugh] Thén you get bored.

....

(2) P We--ll, I think I got bored. [DT laughs] Well I? I  
acc  
mean basically what I feel is what I really líke ...  
is péople. And getting to know them réally wéll. And  
you just can't get to know .... ten people-really  
[breathy]

well. You can't do it.

(3) DT {  
p  
Yeah right. Y'have to there's no? Yeah  
there's no time.

(4) P {  
There's not time.

(5) DT Yeah .... 'strue.

At the beginning of (2), Paul takes my words "Then you get bored," and restates them. By pausing, and by contrasting the drawn-out "well" with the clipped, fast "I think I got bored," he creates a humorous effect. He uses pauses to highlight the key words "people" and "ten." The word "ten" is also emphasized by breathy voice quality, and the

words "really well" are also uttered, the second time, with a plosive emphasis. Paul's statements (2) and (4) flow in a continuous stream, ending with "You can't do it. There's not time." However the phrase "There's not time" echoes my words in (3). My "Yeah ... It's true" in (5) marks the agreement that seals the discussion. The end of the talk is also signaled by the quieting down of the tone -- our voices are softer; our talk is slower. It is like a fade-out.

### Persistence

Throughout the Thanksgiving dinner, our conversational behavior shows that Paul and Karl and I operate on the assumptions that if someone wants to say something, s/he will find the time to say it. By this system, the burden of the speaker is not to make room for others to speak nor to ascertain whether others want to hear one's comments. Rather, the conversationalist's burden is to maintain a show of rapport by offering comments. That others will want to hear whatever comments one has to make, is taken as given. The fact that one makes this assumption is in itself a testament to rapport. Similarly, one assumes that others know that one is interested in hearing whatever comments they may have.

Thus, one of the characteristics of our style is that Paul and I persist when we have something to say. This has already been seen in some of the preceding examples. Both Paul and I persist with contributions for two, three, and four tries. For example, in the following segment, I am explaining a paper in which I have written about differences in conversational pace. I have told Susie that she has appeared in an example in my paper, and I am explaining the difference

between Susie's and my turntaking style, as discussed in that paper:

(1) S u--m .. That <sup>K /? /</sup> Susie would .. was .. was sort of had  
 ? /? / <sup>K /cutting/</sup> everything off before she /?/?  
 learned to wait for a moment of silence before making a  
 contribution, .... and I? was taught to never let there  
 be any silence. .... So I would jump in. [laughs]  
 [laughter]

.....

(2) P That's really

(3) DT 'Dju /?/? 'Did you? 'Didn't I tell you that I wrote that→

(4) P I noticed

that ....  
 paper? 'Oh yeah. [laughs]

(5) P Actually I noticed that balance a lot .. with people.

(6) DT I should send you a copy.

S Yeah.

.....

(7) P Y'know there are some people I have to be very verbally  
 aggressive with cause they never let ... a moment of  
 silence develop, and other people, /?/

Paul begins his comment four times, the first three timed to overlap with my talk. The first three tries (2), (4) and (5) fail because I do not stop for him. By (6), however, I have finished my conversation with Susie about the paper in which I mention her, and therefore Paul succeeds in making his comment. It is amusing that Paul is

illustrating the very phenomenon he is (and I am) talking about. That is, he has to be "very verbally aggressive" at that moment, because I am the sort of person he is (and I have just been) referring to, who does not LET a moment of silence develop. (Paul here is exercising a device that is peculiar to him and is seen numerous times throughout the tape. He repeats something that someone else has just said, but he says it as if he just thought of it himself. It was seen as well in the Coliseum discussion (p.120) when he echoed my suggestion that Karl had in mind what was now the Huntington Hartford Museum.)

At yet another point in the conversation, Paul makes four tries before he gets the floor. In this case, there is much simultaneous talk as people are sitting down to dinner. Paul tells a joke:

- (1) K So should we <sup>do</sup> that? <sup>Should we start with</sup> the white  
DT: Sure
- (2) P Didju hear  
about the? .. lady, who was asked,
- (3) DT I'm gonna get in there, right?
- (4) C Okay.
- (5) P Didju 'hear?
- (6) DR We have to sit <sup>boy</sup> girl boy.
- (7) C Boy girl <sup>boy</sup>?
- (8) P Didju hear about the lady who was asked,
- (9) C There's only two girls
- (10) DT What?
- (11) P Did you hear about the lady who was <sup>asked</sup> ... Do you  
dec C Boy girl boy  
<sup>smoke</sup> after <sup>sex</sup>?

- (12) DR I don't knów I never looked. [tone: mímicking, nasal]  
 [tone-----]
- (13) DT And she said? What?
- (14) P I don't know I never looked.
- (15) DT {Oh [chuckles]

Paul attempts to begin his joke in (2) (5) and (8) before he finally gets to tell it in (11), because everyone else is concerned with sitting down to dinner. Karl is talking about the wine (1) and the rest of us are talking about seating arrangements. When Paul finally begins his joke (11) with audience attention, Dan supplies the punchline (12) in a nasal, twangy voice that is disguised to mimic the speaker in the joke. There is no evidence that Paul is disconcerted by the obstructions to his joke-telling, nor that he hesitates about whether or not to tell it; once he has made up his mind to do so, despite what might well be taken as lack of interest from the others. Paul's only adjustment is a slight deceleration and overarticulation in (11) when he pronounces "Did you hear about the lady who was asked," and a noticeably emphatic tone in (18) when he repeats the punchline. These do not sound annoyed only emphasized.

Following is an example in which I persist with a comment I wish to introduce. The topic of discussion has been Chuck's participation in the cross-country whistle-stop tour sponsored by Disney Productions to celebrate Mickey Mouse's birthday. Dan remarks (boasting for Chuck in a way that friends frequently do) that Chuck may get to make a similar trip through Europe.

- (1) DR Y'know they might get to go to Éúrope? ..... And do the same thing in Éúrope? In the spríng?
- (2) P Oh really.]
- (3) DT [Really.]
- (4) K [Oh--.  
f
- (5) P Thát sounds like fun.
- (6) DT Did
- (7) C [And take the tráin tour through Éúrope.
- (8) DT Did yóu ..serve a function
- (9) P [Except wóuldn't it it be nice if you had a  
acc  
little more tíme there?
- (10) C Yeah? We--ll we /?? / discovered that. ... But we also know .. we found out we .. found out the mán who owned all the .. the who bóught all the càrs from the Órient Expréss. .... So we'll got all .. gèt all the old cars from the Órient Expréss and stíck them all  
[I chuckle]  
together. .... and take it.  
p
- (11) K [What was the Órient Expréss?
- (12) DT [Were yóu serving a función on the tour, or did you just get to go alóng.
- (13) C I was just invited along. ... It was my idéa and things like that y'know cause I wórked on the shòw.  
p, acc \_\_\_\_\_]

I try to start my question in (6) and (8) but am superseded by Chuck (7) and then Karl (9). I finally ask the question in (12), this

time not giving in to Karl's competing question (11). (Notice the balance in Karl's and my alternating interruptions of each other).

On another occasion, when the meal is finished and things are being cleared away, Paul makes three attempts to bring up the topic of dessert. None of them is repoded to, so he drops the matter.

Such examples of speaker persistence are not found in the speech of Susie, Dan, or Chuck. They do not persist more than two tries. For example, the following segment represents the most "aggressive" try Susie makes during the dinner conversation. Karl and I were questioning Dan about sign language. Our discussion began with Karl asking Dan how to say "discrete" in sign language. Several turns later Susie asks Dan how he said discrete, but Dan is still busy answering another question that was posed by Karl and me. Rather than continue to try to get Dan's attention, Susie turns to someone else to pursue her question. At that point, Dan does direct himself to her to answer, but he does not really give her the information she requests. Nonetheless, she lets the matter drop.

- (1) DR No. I don't think si? ... No. I don't think Víctor  
 DT<sup>L</sup>They don't?<sup>J</sup>  
 would .. ever say that.  
 DT<sup>L</sup>Huh?<sup>J</sup>
- (2) S What what what was discrète?  
 P
- (3) DR You'd use this. Inform. Inform.
- (4) S Did he tell us what discrète was?  
 P
- (5) DR u--m, dis u--m ... There's different ... wa? there's  
 P<sup>L</sup>uhuh<sup>J</sup>

different ways of talking about it.

(6) P └─ Are there dictionaries of sign?  
P

(7) DR Yeah.

Following is an extended segment of the dinner conversation in which Karl, Paul and I all simultaneously persist in talking about our own topics, with little or no response from anyone. This segment occurs while we are eating.

(1) DT I wonder how our ... grandparents and parents felt

(2) P └─ cranberry sauce.

about Thanksgiving.

(3) P Cranberry sauce.

(4) DT It wasn't their holiday.

(5) P It's a wonderful holiday.

.....

(6) P Is that the cranberry sauce?  
P, ACC

(7) DT I wonder if they did it

(8) C └─ One holiday a year for stuff

for stuffing yourself?

(9) P └─ Y'know what we should really have?

(10) K Could we get this off the table?

(11) DT └─ / ? └─ / →

Y'know if they used to do it for the kids, or whether →

(12) P └─ I'd like it off →



- DT they really felt it.
- P the table.
- (13) K It keeps coming back on the 'table. It must have a  
[tone-----  
will of its own. →  
-----  
That's all I can say. [clipped, mock sober tone]
- (14) P [-----]  
We should have more napkins.
- (15) K uh? well,
- (16) S [Karl's parents ... feel it. ... They feel,  
... really strongly]
- (17) K [Sure they do. Yeah, it's a major  
uh ....
- (18) P It's always been my favorite holiday.
- (19) DT Well I wonder how
- (20) P [except maybe for ... Pésach
- (21) DT [Well your  
paren? their parents were born in this country.
- (22) S Yeah.
- (23) DT But my parents
- (24) P [to C] [Are you Jewish? You're not Jewish.  
acc -----]

I introduce the topic (1) of how "our parents and grandparents felt about Thanksgiving," since they were immigrants to the United States. In making this statement, incidentally, I am bonding with Paul and Karl, to the exclusion of Dan and Chuck, whose parents and grandparents were born in this country, and Susie, who is British

(much earlier I addressed the same question to her -- asking whether she had internalized Thanksgiving as a holiday. In this sense, my bringing up the topic again is in itself a form of persistence with a topic of interest to myself). I pursue this topic over seven more turns, in (4, 7, 11, 19, 21, 23). I continue trying to make my point, as others either ignore my topic or respond to it in a way that misses my point. During the same conversational segment, Paul talks about the food over five turns -- three concerned with cranberry sauce (2, 3, 6) and two with napkins (9, 14), none of which excites any response from others. Karl, for his part, takes two turns about the tape recorder (10, 13).

Paul's remark (5) "It's a wonderful holiday" appears to be a response to my second try (4) "It wasn't there holiday." Paralinguistically, it echoes the sound and rhythm of my comment in an almost poetic way. His choice of the word "wonderful" echoes my verb "wonder" and the sound of "wonderful" echoes the initial consonant and the rhythm of my "wasn't their." (Sacks, in his lectures, noted the tendency of speakers to choose words just used by interlocutors or that use sounds which appeared immediately prior. He calls that process "sound selection.") However, while Paul's response (5) coheres with the rhythm and topic of my remark (4), it does not cohere with my comment. Whereas I am making a point about the feeling of immigrants for the holidays of their new country, Paul says something about his own feelings for Thanksgiving.<sup>3</sup> He does this again in (18) "It's always been my favorite holiday." Paul is employing the strategy I have discussed previously (p.126) of making a personal statement as a conversational contribution. However, I have not been making personal

statements, but rather have been trying to elicit a theoretical discussion. Therefore, I am not satisfied with his contribution and persist in trying to get the conversation to focus on the topic as I see it.

The one who picks up on my point most closely is Susie (16) "Karl's parents feel it. They feel really strongly." It is clear that Susie is answering my question, since she uses the expression "feel it" which I use in (1) and repeat in (12). Susie's remark (16) directly answers my question about how our parents felt about thanksgiving. However, there is an ambiguity in my use of the phrase "parents and grandparents." What I meant was "my parents and your grandparents" -- i.e. those who came to the United States as immigrants. Since Karl's parents were born in this country, my question does not apply to them. However, in responding, Karl picks up the focus of Susie's remark, not my initial question. Paul, however, is still on his own tack: expressing his own feelings about the holiday (18, 20).

I continue trying to explain what I had in mind (21, 23), but I am finally cut off by Paul, who turns to Chuck with a new question (24) "Are you Jewish? You're not Jewish." Paul asks this in just the way that I asked questions of Chuck in segments discussed earlier (pp. 91,95). It is easy to see what led Paul to this question. His comment about his feelings about holidays led him from Thanksgiving to a Jewish holiday, Pesach (Passover) in (20), and this led him to wonder whether Chuck was Jewish. Chuck answers; I do not hear his answer correctly; there ensues a discussion about my hearing, and then the conversation turns to the food. My observation about immigrants

and Thanksgiving is never picked up.

In this segment, then I persisted over seven turns in attempts to make a point. Paul pursued other points over five turns; responded to my remark without responding to my point, twice; and finally turned the discussion off my topic entirely. Karl pursued his own preoccupation with keeping the table attractive, with only a brief ratification from Paul (12). No one else acknowledged his remarks at all, and no one moved the tape recorder.

#### Tolerance for Noise vs. Silence

Thus, Paul, Karl and I pursue our own interests in talk. When Chuck says something (8) "One holiday a year for stuffing yourself," he is responding to Paul's remark. Susie's comment (16) responds to mine. They do not toss out new, unrelated ideas of their own, simply because they thought of them. The overall effect of three speakers all persisting with their own topics is a period of diffuse talk.

A concomitant of the persistence device, and the assumption that one's thoughts are of interest, is a tolerance for such distraction and diffuse talk, which is related to the tolerance for overlap. When Susie, Dan and Chuck listened to this segment on tape, they noted that it sounded odd (to say the least) to hear Karl, Paul and me pursuing different topics at the same time. Chuck volunteered that his conversations tend to stick to one topic at a time. In contrast, it sounds quite natural to Karl, Paul and me for various topics to be tossed about until one is picked up and developed. Such simultaneous topic-raising is a necessary outgrowth of the strategy we are operating on -- the assumption that it is appropriate for speakers to introduce new

topics just because they thought of them, and that a topic should not necessarily be dropped simply because it wasn't picked up on the first few tries.

What speakers of this system cannot tolerate is the alternative to this strategy: silence. That is, if speakers do not toss out whatever comes into their heads, and if topics are dropped after one or two tries, there will necessarily be periods of silence in conversation between topics. In fact, it is likely that the devices of the rapport-based system grow out of the intolerance for silence. This opposition is noted by Goodman as well: "It may come as a bulletin to crowdies that one of their options is S-I-L-E-N-C-E." Again, John Fowles notes this aspect of contrast between communicative strategies of American and British speakers. In Daniel Martin, the protagonist, who has been living in California, visits his native England and immediately breaks the rules on a British train:

When we drew out of the station the elderly woman opposite me glanced up at the ventilation window. It was slightly open. A minute later she glanced again. I said, "Shall I shut it?"

"Oh well if ..."

I stood and shut it; and received a frozen grimace, meant to represent gratitude, from the lady and two or three covertly disapproving examinations from my male fellow-passengers. I had committed the cardinal sin not of shutting the window, but of opening my mouth. No other

caste in the world [are] so certain that public decency and good breeding is silence . . . (139).

The system described by Fowles is the polar opposite of that exhibited by Karl, Paul and me in the Thanksgiving talk: one system seeks comfort in interaction, the other in silence. The fact that Susie grew up in the environment Fowles is describing may have something to do with the fact that she is the most silent of the members of the Thanksgiving dinner.

Thus the participants in the Thanksgiving dinner conversation showed different expectations with respect to what is appropriate to say and how it is appropriate to say it. Karl, Paul and I shared the tendency to feel comfortable with personal topics of talk. We showed interest by asking machine-gun questions and used marked shifts in pitch and amplitude to show enthusiasm. In addition, overlap and fast pacing were cooperative devices, contributing to the enthusiasm effect. We operated on a strategy which puts the signalling load on rapport: that is, we assumed that irrelevant topics were of interest because we thought of them, and we persisted in our introduction of topics far longer than did the other speakers. Thus we showed a high tolerance for noise and diffuse topics as opposed to silence. All these devices operated to give the conversation its "frenetic" tone, and to establish among us a sense of rapport and successful communication.

The other members of the group: Dan, Chuck, and Susie, did not participate in the use of these devices. During the interchanges in which Karl, Paul, and I used them, the other members were silent or participated only minimally. In dyadic interchanges with Chuck, I

clearly violated his expectations about topic and pace, and Dan and Susie remarked during playback that the fast, expressive, overlapping conversation seemed odd to them. Their lack of experience with such devices made it impossible for them to participate.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Transcription conventions are gleaned from three sources: those developed on the Chafe narrative project; those developed by Gail Jefferson and used by ethnomethodologists (Schenkein 1978); and those used by members of the Gumperz project, based on transcription conventions developed by John Trim. Those conventions which are used:

.. noticeable pause or break in rhythm (less than .5 second)

... half second pause, as measured by stop watch.

an extra dot is added for each half second of pause, hence,

.... full second pause

..... second and a half pause, and so on.

/ marks primary stress

\ marks secondary stress

underline marks emphatic stress

CAPS marks very emphatic stress

┌ marks high pitch on word

┐ marks high pitch on phrase, continuing until punctuation

└ marks low pitch on word

┑ marks low pitch on phrase, continuing until punctuation

. marks sentence-final falling intonation

? marks yes/no question rising intonation

ʔ is the standard linguistic symbol for glottal stop

ə is the standard linguistic symbol for the phoneme "schwa"  
("uh")

-- indicates lengthened vowel sound



→ indicates sentence continues without break in rhythm (look for next line)

, marks phrase-final intonation ("more to come")

. . . spaced dots indicate ellipsis

Musical notation is used for amplitude:

p piano (spoken softly)

pp pianissimo (spoken very softly)

f forte (spoken loudly)

ff fortissimo (very loudly)

acc spoken quickly

dec spoken slowly

The above notations continue until punctuation, unless otherwise noted.

/?/ indicates inaudible section.

/words/ within slashes indicate uncertain transcription

[brackets] are used for comments on quality of speech

[tone] look for explanation of special tonal quality

[ Pinned brackets between lines indicates overlapping speech.

[ Two people talking at the same time.

Pinned brackets on two lines

] indicate second utterance

latched onto first.

2. Note however the possibly patronizing and certainly distancing effect of the amused observer stance. It is rather like saying. "Oh, aren't they cute?" (Thanks to R. Lakoff for pointing this out).

3. Lakoff points out that Paul may have taken my comment as an implicit criticism of Thanksgiving -- i.e. "not a holiday for everyone" -- and may be contradicting that. Nonetheless, his comment does not build on my point as I intend it.

CHAPTER FIVE  
NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Integrally related to expectations about pace, overlap, rate of speech, and other conversational devices which have been discussed are expectations about the telling of narratives in conversation. All of these devices operate in the telling of stories just as they do in other forms of talk, but in addition, there are verbal devices which are specific to the telling of stories.

The notion "narrative" is not a discrete category but a prototype. Some verbal texts are more narrative than others. The prototypical narrative (or "story"; I will use these terms interchangeably) recounts events which occurred in the past. However, there are numerous instances of talk which resemble narrative in some ways but not in others. For example, during the Thanksgiving conversation, Paul summarized an article he had read in a sociology journal about adopted children, and Chuck at one point described Victor signing. Neither of these verbalizations seemed quite like narratives because they did not recount events. At first, Chuck's seemed more narrative in that it told about something he saw. But Chuck referred to Victor in order to justify a point he was making about the difference between sign and spoken language, and his listeners reacted not to his experience but to his observation about language. In that sense, Paul's summary of the article he had read more closely resembled a narrative, because it triggered a series of stories about adopted children. However, I did not count either of these accounts as narratives. In order to

isolate a certain segment of the data for analysis, I decided to consider "stories" only those accounts which adhered to the strictest definition; that is those which told about past events.

In all, 48 narratives were told during the dinner conversation. There are significant differences in the number of narratives told by different members of the group (see Figure 1). Karl told the most (15); I was a close second (13); Paul came next (8); Chuck, Dan, and Susie told fewer (4 each). This hierarchy corresponds to the sense that most of the participants reported, that Karl was the most "dominant" participant, followed by me and then Paul, while Chuck, Dan and Susie had participated much less.

Since some participants spoke more than others, the sheer numbers of narratives told may be misleading. Therefore, I calculated the number of narrative turns as a percentage of the total number of turns spoken by each participant (see Figure 1). This yields slightly different results. Karl still emerges as the most given to story-telling, with 6% of his turns devoted to narratives. However, Dan and Susie are close to him, with 5% of their talk devoted to narrative. This contrasts with the fact that Dan and Susie are the two participants who spoke the least number of turns during the conversation. Furthermore, Paul and I switch places with respect to percentage of talk devoted to story-telling (Paul 4% and I 3%). Chuck is the speaker least given to narrative talk; only 2% of his turns are devoted to telling stories.

Looked at in connection with other aspects of storytelling, these statistics are revealing. For example, the low percentage of narrative turns in Chuck's talk correlates with his observable reluctance to volunteer information about his personal experiences. Thus, he

Figure 1  
Use of Narratives in Thanksgiving Conversation

Name	Total number of turns	Total number of narratives told	Total number of narrative turns	Average number of words per narrative turn	Percentage of turns which are narrative	Average number of words per narrative	Number of stories told in clusters
Karl	594	15	36	23	6%	46	8
Deb	811	13	21	45	3%	80	5
Paul	417	8	16	40	4%	81	6
Chuck	405	4	8	47	2%	94	0
Dan	386	4	18	34	5%	154	2
Susie	169	4	8	21	5%	43	0

tells three of his four narratives in answer to direct questions by others (the fourth is about a cartoon strip he read as a child). Chuck is the only speaker in the group who is directly questioned in this way.

I tell 13 stories during the conversation. The most striking fact about them is that 7 of the 13 are told in support of someone else's point or matching someone else's story. In contrast, Karl tells three stories which contradict someone else's point, and, even more uniquely, 8 of his stories either offer his own experience, unasked or even unrelated to what has been going on before, or explain some reference or remark that he himself made immediately prior to the narrative. This may have contributed to the impression Paul reported that it had been Karl, not me, who "dominated" the gathering.

It is interesting that Karl and Susie tell the shortest stories, on the average, and they have, on the average, the shortest number of words per turn. Karl's narrative turns contain an average of 23 words and Susie's 21; his narratives have an average of 46 words each, and Susie's 43. Thus while Karl tells a lot of stories, the stories he tells are comparatively short. This seems to reflect the fact that his story-telling style is succinct. He does not give long orientations or explanations. Susie's stories are understated. But despite that (or because of that) she has a hard time getting the point of her stories across to this group.

Paul's stories are all personal, and half of them are about his children. Furthermore, Paul is particularly apt to tell stories in a round.

### Story Rounds

One way in which stories function in the Thanksgiving conversation is in story rounds. Ethnomethodologists noted that stories in conversation are often told in clusters or sequences (Ryave 1978). However, I use the term "story round" to refer to a particular kind of story cluster, in which speakers exchange stories of personal experiences which illustrate similar points. The stories told in rounds during Thanksgiving differ in some ways from the stories told in other contexts. For example, they require little or no orientation section; that is, the speaker does not begin by introducing the story with something like "Did I tell you what happened ..." or "You'll never guess what happened..." The very juxtaposition of stories furnishes thematic cohesion. (See for example stories presented on pp. 174 and 177).

21 of the 48 stories told during Thanksgiving dinner were told in a total of five rounds. The first round consisted of three stories about sex differences in language; the second round was made up of 5 stories about people the speakers knew who were adopted; the third of five stories about summer camp; the fourth of five stories about freak accidents; the last of four stories about children and sex (There was at least one more story told in this round, but the tape ran out shortly after I began it, so it is not included in the analysis.)

The story round device clearly belongs to the rapport-strategy members of the group. 19 of the 21 stories told in rounds were told by Karl, Paul, and me. Chuck and Susie told not a single story in a round. In contrast, 6 of Paul's 8 stories were told in rounds.

The story round is another example of the failure of purely surface phenomena to elucidate what is going on in interaction -- in this case, to show the difference between a story cluster and a story round. Just as overlap is a surface phenomenon, whereas interruption is an interpretive category (Bennett 1978), so a story cluster is identifiable simply by reference to the contiguity of stories in conversation, but the existence of a round requires the establishment of thematic cohesion in an appropriate way. For example, Dan's participation in the story rounds yields different results from those of the other three.

#### Contrastive Narrative Strategies

An examination of Dan's four stories supports his recollection that he had been able either to be the center of attention or to observe the interaction but not to "be part of the flow." His stories, on the average, were strikingly long: an average of 154 words each (see Figure 1). This length is not approached by anyone else. Clearly, the effect of telling long stories is to keep the speaker the center of attention.

Dan's longest story is one in which he tells about an episode on a television program. Ostensibly, this story is part of a story round about adopted children. The round was triggered by Paul's summary of the article he read reporting research to the effect that the children of adopted parents have IQ's closer to those of their natural parents than their adoptive parents. Karl immediately offered a story about a student and then another about a friend who were adopted and were very different from their adoptive parents. Dan followed with a story



about some cousins of his who were adopted. (This story will be presented later). I then told about someone I know who is adopted and "sticks out" in her family; Karl comments on my story (he knows the person I am talking about) by saying

K Y'mean just because she táłks líke thís. But 'ánybody  
 [tone-----  
 who táłked líke thát wóuld stíck out líke a sóre thúmb.  
 -----]

In saying this, Karl mimics the person in question by speaking in a loud, nasal, and rasping voice. Several turns later he says, seriously, "She's just very loud."

At that point, Dan begins a story about a satirical sketch he saw on the television program Saturday Night Live:

(1) K She does look different? She's just very loud.

(2) DR Speaking of which they had the Lóud family. Remember  
 [DT laughs]

the Lóud family? On Sàturday Night Líve?

(3) K What was the Lóud family?

(4) DR Dju hear about that? THEY TALK LIKE THIS.  
 p

[laughter]

(5) K I know lóts of people in New York who talk like thát.

(6) DT You don't .. yknow the Loud family.

(7) DR L/ ?? / the Loud family. ]

(8) K [Are they all

(9) DT It was a thing on télevision called An American Fámily.

There ensues a brief discussion contextualizing the Loud family. When everyone is agreed upon who they were, Dan tries to begin his story again, but there is still confusion about what they have to do with the television program Dan has referred to:

(10) DR So they had the Loud family.

(11) P                                 { So they're gonna be on? The whole  
family's, gonna be on?

(12) DT Where.

(13) P The .. Saturday Night Live?

(14) DT { No. No. /?/

(15) DR { No, last week they had the LOUD family. On Saturday  
Night Live. And it's like ... and the and the parents  
are trying to FIGURE OUT ... WHY THEIR KIDS,... just  
ALIENATE, ...

Dan then proceeded to tell about the satirical sketch in which a family named Loud constantly yelled at each other, without realizing that they were doing so.

The connection between Dan's story and the one preceding it is the reference to people who are loud. Like Karl, Dan imitates the loud speech in his narrative. Karl's "she talks like this" is echoed by Dan's (4) "THEY TALK LIKE THIS." However, there is a problem with thematic cohesion. Dan has a lot of trouble with his orientation section before he can launch his narrative. Paul and Karl are both confused and ask a series of questions showing misunderstanding (3) (5) (11) (13), before they grasp what Dan's story is about. Dan finally goes ahead with his story (15) without explaining to Paul that

it is not the Loud family themselves but a satire about them which he is telling about. Presumably, Paul caught on while the story was being told.

After Dan tells this extended story, recounting the details of the television episode, I comment, "All on the pun of Loud, huh?" In a subtle way, my comment is (though was not consciously intended to be) a censure; it is as if to say the story was too long to illustrate a pun. In addition, it seems to betray my feeling that the connection by pun is not sufficient to warrant inclusion in the round. Thematic cohesion is established in rounds through the stories having similar or opposing points.

Nonetheless, Dan is the only non-New Yorker who participates in story rounds at all. On two occasions, he contributes stories to rounds which do cohere in an appropriate way. However, there are some other differences which emerge in terms of pace and formulating the points of the stories.

Following is a narrative which Dan told with Chuck's participation. In the immediately preceding conversation, I have been talking about men's and women's language and have told about an upcoming lecture by a woman who teaches men who are about to undergo sex change operations how to talk like women. After general exclamations about and reactions to this announcement, Dan tells about a conversation that he and Chuck had the night before with a friend of theirs named Randy. (Kari and I also know Randy). Dan's story is about sex and voice quality, and therefore it is appropriately coherent with the topic of the round. There is much interest among the group members in Dan's story. However, there is evidence that some of the other

members of the group expected stories to be told somewhat differently from the way Dan (with the help of Chuck) was telling it.

It becomes clear that I feel Dan and Chuck do not get to the point of their story quickly enough. This can be seen in my repeated questions which serve to "prompt" them to tell the point. (Overlapping talk by Karl and Paul is occasioned by the timer going off in the kitchen during this interchange).

- (1) DR Well ... what was Randy saying last night? ... He was talking about y'know he works Randy works at the uh [name of firm]? At ... [place of firm]? ....  
 C<sup>L</sup>Right<sup>L</sup>
- Something he works with children? .... Language development?
- (2) C } Yeah he he does .. language evaluation on ... autistic a--nd .. all those .. kind of children.  
 DR<sup>L</sup>Yeah<sup>L</sup>
- [timer goes off in kitchen].
- (3) DR Crazy children.
- (4) K } What time is it Paul?
- (5) DT } So what was he saying.
- (6) C He was talking about
- (7) P } Twenty five till
- (8) K } Twenty five to?
- (9) C } There was a there was a
- (10) DR There was a staff conference
- (11) C Right. A staff conference.
- (12) DR And they were ... these incredible, ... these

psychiatrists? ... got up there ? ....  
 C [mhm] p K [chuckles] hm

- (13) DT What were they doing.
- (14) P [from kitchen] Karl you're having /?/ problems back here.
- (15) C Well they were talking about séxual idéntity and all  
 this kind of stuff. So this ... óne woman was
- (16) DR } One  
 woman was talking about .. the gáy voice.  
 K L / ? / J
- (17) C Yeah the gáy voice. She was talking about gáy voices.  
 DR The gay voice J
- (18) DR And Randy was sitting there simmering.
- (19) C Right. [ /?/
- (20) DT [ What was he 'saying.
- (21) C They were wondering whether or not it was .. hormónal.
- (22) DR Whether the gay voice was hormonal.
- (23) DT } WHAT! }  
 ff
- (24) C 'Yeah. Whether the gáy voice was hormónal.
- (25) DT } You're kidding! }
- .....
- (26) DT Wo--w.
- .....
- (27) K Oh God!  
 p
- .....
- (28) C Or whether it was learned behavior, or was w whether  
 it was ... uh learned behavior, o--r genetic, or

hormonal or what. /? as they were gonna /  
 (29) K [ Ooo that makes my skin creep. ....  
           p,dec  
           [ tone-----  
  
 ew--  
 ---]

In listening to this conversation on tape, I reexperienced my impatience with Dan and Chuck for not getting to the point -- that Randy had been present at a meeting at which "experts" were discussing the question of whether the gay voice was hormonal. Three times I ask questions to prompt Dan and Chuck to get to the point:

- (5) So what was he saying.
- (13) What were they doing.
- (20) What was he saying?

The first two questions do not necessarily show impatience. I offer such prompts to other storytellers as well. However, the third prompt (20) clearly shows impatience, in the raised pitch on the stressed word "saying." Furthermore, I have played this segment to others of backgrounds similar to mine, and they have remarked (without prompting from me) that Dan and Chuck are having a hard time getting to the point of their story. During playback, Dan noticed my questions as well. I was surprised, however, at his explanation of what was going on.

Dan noted first off that he began his story (1) in a "weak" way:

- (1) D Well ... what was Randy saying last night? ... He was talking about y'know he works Randy works at

the .. uh [name of firm]? At ... [place of firm]?  
 C<sup>L</sup>right<sup>J</sup>

.... Something he works with children? .... Language  
 p

development?

Dan pointed out that he started with "Well," then paused, and generally sounded as if he wasn't very sure of what he was saying. Although Dan did not say so, the unsureness comes also from the filler ("uh") the repeated pauses, false starts, and the question intonation at the ends of phrases. Dan said that he was hesitant first because he wasn't sure people would want to hear the story. Second he said that, although he knows perfectly well what Randy does, yet he spoke as if he didn't and looked to Chuck for confirmation, to cover himself, lest Chuck contradict him. Finally, he wanted to draw Chuck into the conversation, since Chuck was Dan's guest and friend and Dan felt "paternalistic" toward him in this setting. Chuck, on the other hand, recalled that he was hesitant because it was really Dan's story, and he too was wary lest he make an error that Dan would then contradict.

In addition, Dan said that he was fishing for just the sort of encouragement which I supplied with my questions. These questions were reassurance to him that his story was of interest. Dan noted, however, that he did pick up a slight sense of impatience in my tone, and that that might have reinforced his hesitance. Chuck independently noted the same phenomenon during playback. He remarked that had I not asked any prompting questions, he might well have discontinued the story. However, coming as they did, my questions made him wonder what I wanted, which then made him feel hesitant about saying

anything: hence the tentative sense of his narrative. Both Dan and Chuck thus were operating on defensive strategies, "covering themselves" as it were, preferring to err by saying less, whereas Karl and I would sooner risk error by saying more.

Dan also pointed out, with characteristic perceptiveness about language processes, that at the same time that I asked (13) "What were they doing?" Karl uttered the sound "hm" in a way that Dan recognized as characteristic of Karl and synonymous with my question. That is, Dan hit upon the notion of pragmatic synonymy. Karl's "hm" was also a way of encouraging Dan to go on while evidencing some impatience. Dan said it sounds to him as if Karl is holding himself back, forcing himself to be patient with Dan's slower pace.

Dan's idea of telling a story presupposes a certain hesitancy -- it is appropriate, he explained, to give an indication of what one has to say and then see if anyone picks up on it, rather than imposing the story whether others like it or not. This strategy honors Brown and Levinson's negative face want, or Lakoff's R1 "Don't impose." However, Dan's strategy is exaggerated in this interchange. Feeling a bit insecure in the setting, he begins his story even more hesitantly than he otherwise might have. This increased hesitance then arouses Karl's and my impatience, and the evidence of our impatience reinforces his feeling that he is not fitting in very well. In other words, we have once more a situation of complementary schismogenesis.

#### Expressive vs. Understated Evaluation and Response

Dan explained another peculiarity of this interchange as well. After (24), when Dan and Chuck have told the point of their story



(about the gay voice being hormonal), there is a series of pauses in the conversation. After a 2-second pause I say (25) "Wo--w", and after another pause of a second and a half, Karl says (27), "Oh God!" Both Karl and I, in our usual tandem fashion, fill the pauses with loud and marked exclamations in response to Dan's story. Dan noted that he didn't think that would have happened if it had been one of us telling the story. My first reaction was to disagree; it seemed to me that such exclamations are typical of Karl's and my style. However, I realized after consideration that what made it different was the fact that we were uttering these exclamations against the background of silence. In a conversation in which one of us is telling a story, such exclamations ordinarily come as overlaps or at least rapidly paced in the interchange, where they have the effect of greasing the conversational wheels by encouraging the narrative teller. In fact, I suddenly wondered why these long pauses occurred in the midst of the narrative.

It is only after another pause of a second that Chuck continues the story, rather hesitantly:

(28) C Or whether it was learned behavior, or was w whether it was... uh learned behavior, o--r genetic, or hormonal or what /as they were gonna/

Dan explained that he and Chuck interrupted their story and paused because of my reaction (23) "WHAT!" My sudden, loud and high-pitched exclamation stopped them because its marked paralinguistic features were unexpected. Dan and Chuck wondered what was wrong, what my outburst could mean, and they waited to find out. This, then, created a

pause that was completely unexpected and unexplained for Karl and me, so we filled it with exclamations (liking nothing less than silence in a busy conversation). Only after ascertaining that I wasn't going to follow up my shriek with anything else, did Chuck continue what he began in (24), still hesitant as a result of his uncertainty about the significance of my extreme reaction.

Dan's insightful observation about this dynamic was proven correct, as the same phenomenon occurred when I was talking to Chuck during playback. We were listening to the taped segment about Goffman which has been referred to earlier (p. 98). On the tape, Chuck offered some observations about Goffman for the first time. Shutting off the tape recorder, Chuck commented that he felt free to do this at the time because he was addressing himself to Paul, not me, and Paul did not know anything about the subject. This insight was so helpful and interesting to me that I showed my appreciation by exclaiming, "Oh---- How interesting!" My exclamation "Oh---" was sudden and drawn-out, and I said, "How interesting" in a voice that showed intensity through exaggerated low pitch and thick quality. As soon as I said this, Chuck stopped short, and there was a fleeting look of astonishment on his face. I immediately tried to repair the situation by repeating, "That's interesting," in a more matter-of-fact way: faster, more clipped, with higher pitch. Suddenly I recalled Dan's exegesis of the effect of my extreme reaction to their story about the gay voice. I asked Chuck if my extreme response had stopped him just then. He admitted that it had.

This experience also demonstrates how awareness of stylistic differences can operate. I could not help responding to Chuck in a way

that I "knew" would make him uncomfortable because my response was automatic. However, once the utterance was out, and I saw his reaction, I could catch what had happened and comment on it. Thus we could understand our reactions to each other's styles, although we could not change them.

During playback, Dan pointed out yet another instance of pragmatic synonymy. This one contrasts expressive as opposed to understated evaluation. ("Evaluation" in this sense, following Labov 1972, is a speaker's way of showing her/his attitude toward what s/he is saying). He noted that Chuck's (28) and Karl's (29) were synonymous, although on the surface they could not have been more different:

- (28) C Or whether it was <sup>l</sup>learned behavior, or was w whether  
it was ... learned behavior, o--r genetic, or  
hormonal or what. } /? as they were gonna/  
(29) K { Oooo that makes my skin creeep. ....  
ew---.

Chuck's (28) seemed to me to be a straightforward (if somewhat discursive) statement, without judgment on the part of the speaker. Yet Dan pointed out that Chuck's running together a list of alternatives in a monotonous tone, ending with something hedgy and mumbled like "or what," is his way of belittling what he is talking about, of showing that the ideas he is reporting are repugnant, and he wishes to dissociate himself from them. Karl's (29), with its slowed pace, deliberate emphasis, exaggerated and metaphoric statement of his reaction, and nonverbal expression of disgust ("ew--"), is his way of dissociating himself from the subject, because he finds it repugnant.

Karl uses marked intonation and voice quality to show disgust; Chuck uses extra words and monotonous tone. Chuck's is a style of nuance and understatement, Karl's of expressiveness and overstatement.

A similar contrast can be seen in the discussion that immediately follows the one about the gay voice. It is the discussion of adoption which is sparked by Paul's summary of the article he read reporting research showing that the IQ's of adopted children are more closely correlated with those of their natural parents than those of their adoptive parents. As soon as Paul finishes his observation, Karl exclaims, "Oh, I believe that!" and I say, "Oh, of course," and laugh. Karl's exclamation is timed to immediately follow Paul's comment with no pause, and mine immediately follows Karl's at an equally fast pace. Karl's comment is loud and mine is high-pitched. Once more it is interesting to see that we operate as a team; if our strategies are similar to start with, the response of one seems to trigger that of the other.

Following Karl's and my loud responses, Dan and Chuck agree with us with the muted responses "uhuh" and "mhm" respectively. During playback, Chuck said that he did not react so swiftly and openly to Paul's remarks because he didn't know how the rest of us felt about that sort of argument (i.e. heredity vs. environment). As usual, Chuck was honoring the defensiveness motive of indirectness.

In listening to this segment of the tape, I felt that it was rude of Karl and me to react so precipitously to Paul's observation and reject it out-of-hand. I felt that I would not have done so on my own; not that I would not have felt that the results of the study were obvious, but I would not have said so in such a peremptory way, had

I not been echoing Karl. I expected Paul, during playback, to admit to having felt hurt. Quite the contrary, Paul remarked, on hearing this segment, that the precipitous response, dismissing his comments as obvious, was a verbal device he himself uses. He said, "It was the sort of thing that drove [my former wife] crazy about living with me. She would consider that a put-down, whereas I expect people to say, 'Well look! It really IS interesting'." Thus Paul verbalized one aspect of the rapport strategy that has been discussed: the expectation that, having something to say, speakers will say it. It is not the burden of the interlocutor to make it comfortable and convenient for others to express their ideas, but rather to be free and spontaneous with reactions. In answer to my direct question of whether Karl's response sounded like a put-down at Thanksgiving, Paul said no: "It sounds like Karl." Then he added, with some satisfaction, that the conversation continued on his topic for some time, so clearly people had been interested, and therefore it was not a put-down.

#### Getting to the Point

As has already been noted and as Paul himself observed, the IQ topic sparked a story round about adopted children. Karl told two stories about adopted children he knew; I one; and Dan one. Dan's story cohered thematically and contributed to the round, but there is evidence that Karl felt he did not get to the point in the way he expected.

Let us compare Karl's and Dan's adoption stories and the reactions they triggered from listeners. Here is Karl's first story:

-

- (1) K In fact one of my students told me for the first time, I taught her for over a year. .... That she was adopted, and then I thought .. ?uh? ... that explains  
p acc  
.. so may things.
- (2) DT What. That she was →
- (3) K Cause she's so-- different {from her mother
- (4) DT {Smarter than she should have been? or stupider→
- (5) K [than she should've been. [chuckle]  
It wasn't smart or stupid, actually, it was just she was so different. .... Just different.  
DT hm

In response to Karl's story, I express doubt of his premise; I remark, "But you often find kids that are quite different from their parents, don't you?" and Susie supports my objection: "That's seems very unusual that that that the kid didn't pick up his his unnatural parents' .... characteristics." To prove his point, Karl tells another story, about a woman that he and Susie had both known:

- DT the ... sort of
- (5) K Remember what Deborah Lincoln? Debby Lincoln told us?
- (6) S What.
- (7) K That she met a half sister? [/? ? /]  
P? [/? This article ?/]
- When they were thirty years old? .... that .. she had never met before? It was a half sister? It was father's child. .... And they had all the same

mannerisms.

[Reactions]

(8) DT But they could have gotten the mannerisms from the

(9) K } No. The father didn't live with the other kid. Or  
 didn't live with Débby. ... I don't remember.

(10) DT } You're  
 right. That's very weird.

(11) K So---  
 [creaky voice]

....

Dan then told a story which supports Karl's point:

(12) DR My u--m ... my aúnt's two kids are adopted, and they  
 were both adopted from different .... famili? different  
 móthers.

(13) K Yeah. And?

(14) DR } And they're just 'different from each other  
 and different from anyone in my family. .... They're  
 K hm  
 not like each óther at all.

In comparing Karl's story (1-4) to Dan's (12-14), I noticed that the effects and rhythm of the stories were quite different. For one thing, the focus of Karl's narrative is his own personal reaction to the information that his student was adopted. That is, while the point of the story is to demonstrate the fact that adopted children are more like their natural parents than their adoptive parents, Karl

dramatizes this point by recreating his emotional experience. In contrast, Dan tells about his aunt's two children without saying anything about his participation or how he feels about it. In this sense, then, Karl is employing a rapport-based device: the personal involvement between himself and his subject matter is paramount. In contrast, Dan's strategy is decontextualized: he tells about the content without involving himself personally.

It is highly likely that this difference -- i.e. Karl's expectation that a story will be about the speaker's feelings about what's/he is saying -- contributes to Karl's dissatisfaction when Dan tells his story. Karl's prompt (13) "Yeah. And?" is clearly impatient. Examining Karl's story, I noticed that I prompt Karl during his telling. But the nature of the prompting and the effect of the story-plus-prompts are quite different.

Karl's story is told in a series of alternate up-turned and down-turned clauses. His opening statement (1) "One of my students told me for the first time," ends with rising intonation. The next clause, "I taught her for over a year," is spoken quickly, with rather low pitch, ending abruptly with falling intonation. The intonation and pace mark it as a parenthetical remark within the surrounding sentence: "One of my students told me for the first time that she was adopted." The continuation of that sentence, "that she was adopted," also ends with phrase-final intonation (i.e. "more to come"), while the final sentence in the contribution (1) "that explains .. so many things," is spoken quickly and abruptly, with marked falling intonation. This rising clause falling clause contour carries the reader rhythmically through the narrative. At the end of (1), there is a marked sense of



finality. I believe this explains why I chose that moment to offer (2, 4) "What. That she was smarter than she should have been or stupider than she should've been." This question feeds Karl his next line. It does not show lack of understanding of the point of his story, nor impatience with him for his pacing. In fact, Karl does not wait for me to finish my question (2) but goes right into his explanation (3) which overlaps with my question (2). For my part, I go right on with my question even at the same time that he is answering it, and Karl incorporates my question into his continuation/response (5). Thus Karl and I overlap during a considerable portion of his story, and there are no pauses between question-answer components, but rather they weave into each other to make an inextricably intertwined story/response entity.

There is a similar rhythmic pattern in Karl's second story (5-11). Again, there is dramatic shifting from high pitch and rising intonation on three clauses (shown in the transcription by question marks) followed by marked falling intonation ending on very low pitch on the fourth clause, "It was her father's child." At that point there is a long pause (1.5 seconds) before Karl delivers the climax in a fast and deliberately matter-of-fact sounding coup: "And they had all the same mannerisms." The pauses in Karl's narrative are all functional.<sup>1</sup> The first pause, after "thirty years old", could not be seen as floor-relinquishing because of the sharp rising intonation on the preceding phrase. And the pause just before the final sentence in (7) follows the rapidly spoken clauses and therefore seems deliberate, not hesitant.

When Dan begins his story (12), he begins, as he did his earlier story, with a number of cues that show hesitance about what he is about to say. First there is a false start ("my"), then a filler ("u--m"), then a half-second pause. Within the story, he pauses after "different" and then has another false start: "famili? different mothers," It is then that Karl asks (13) "Yeah. And?" Thus it seems likely that Karl's impatience is also sparked by the fact that Dan's pauses, unlike Karl's, are seemingly random rather than dramatic devices. In this sense, Karl's prompt is designed to help Dan along: rather like saying, "Okay, don't worry about background. I'm with you. Now get to the point." In contrast, my prompts to Karl during his story asked him to elaborate upon a point he had already made, not to get to the point.

If Karl's prompts (7) indicate dissatisfaction with the way Dan is telling a story, the dissatisfaction works both ways. In another segment, it is clear that Karl does not tell a story the way Dan expects. At the very beginning of the taped conversation, there has been much overlapping talk and parallel discussions. At one end of the table, Karl has been showing Dan pictures of his little niece (Paul's child), and he has commented that "she looks like a little girl already." There is some intervening talk. Paul, Susie, and I have been discussing cowboy boots. Karl suddenly switches to our conversation and his voice prevails over the entire group:

- (1) K I have a little seven-year-old student ... a little  
 girl who wears those. .... She .. is too  
 p
- (2) DT She wears those? [chuckle]

múch. Can yóu imagine? She's séven years old, and  
acc

she síts in her chair and she goes .... [squeals and  
acc —————]

squirms in his seat].

(3) DT Oh-- Go--d. ... She's only SEVen? [tone: repugnance]  
[tone----]

(4) K And I say well .. hów about let's do sò-and-so. And  
acc

she says ... ʔOkay. ... ʔJust like that.  
[squealing]

(5) DT Oh-----  
p

(6) DR What does it méan.  
p,acc

(7) K It's just so ... ʔshe's acting like such little girl  
p

already.

In telling about his student (1-4), Karl does not actually state his point at all. Rather, he illustrates it by mimicking the child's "girly" mannerisms and speech. My response is instant: (3). (I also use the characteristic strategy of repeating back an element of Karl's story in echo/disbelief: "She's only seven?" ) I did this, in milder form, in (2) as well. My response (3) is expressive through exaggerated intonation and amplitude. When Karl finishes his story (4), Dan and I respond simultaneously: I groan in commiseration (5) but Dan asks (6) "What does it mean?" Karl's explanation (7) is a repetition, in almost the same words and in precisely the same syntactic paradigm with the same intonational pattern as he had said just before, when showing Dan pictures of his niece:

Earlier: "She looks like a little .. girl already.

now (8): "She's acting like such a little girl already."

Karl made this earlier remark to Dan; I was engaged at the time in the parallel conversation with Paul and Susie about boots. So Dan should have been more likely to understand Karl's illustration of the same phenomenon in the story about his student. For me, the point of Karl's story represents a change in focus; the connection to "boots" is only superficial.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless it is Dan who misses the point of the story.

During playback, Dan said he still felt that Karl hadn't really told the point of his story. I got the impression that Dan hadn't so much been unable to understand Karl's point as he was annoyed that Karl hadn't really made it; that is, hadn't told the story right. Dan noted that even after he asked Karl "What does it mean?" Karl's explanation (7) "She's acting like such a little girl already," does not explain what he is trying to say about her. Dan noted that "such a little girl" to him meant "just like a person," or "grown up," as opposed to "like an infant." What Karl meant and should have said was that she was acting like a "coquette." Dan continued that it made him uncomfortable for Karl to squeal and squirm in his seat, imitating the girl's manner. This acting-out of the story seemed to him a breach of good taste.

In listening to this segment, Chuck noted that Dan's question (6) "What does it mean" was making overt what he himself might have wondered. That is, although he guessed that Karl meant that the girl was acting too coquettish, he would have wanted that made clear. I then asked, given that he had a pretty good idea of what Karl meant, why

would he ask in a way that showed no comprehension at all? Chuck replied that that way he would not risk making himself look foolish, in case he had gotten the wrong idea. Once again, in Chuck's and Dan's system, it is better to refrain from committing oneself, lest one be wrong; in mine, it is better to make a try, because the rapport value of having understood correctly is potentially more important than the possible negative value of having been wrong.

There is probably another level of interaction that contributes to the swiftness with which I participated in Karl's story and the distance that Dan felt. The point of Karl's story was expected to me. It is the kind of observation that I might make myself, that I have made numerous times. It is the sort of thing that Karl and I observe to each other, based on our mutually and repeatedly reinforced attitudes toward sex roles. In this way, shared strategies extend to expectations about what will be said, and what can be assumed about others' attitudes, in the spirit of C. Wright Mills' (1940) notion of vocabularies of motives. For Karl and me, it is obvious that it is undesirable for little girls to act stereotypically feminine, and we expect each other to tell stories with this as their point.

Karl's strategy in demonstrating rather than describing his student's manner is similar to the one he uses in the earlier example (see p.174) about the student who was adopted. When he says, in that story, "and then I thought ?uh?," Karl does not explain what he thought: "This child is so different from her parents." Rather, he dramatized his own reaction by demonstrating his surprise through a schwa-like sound bounded by a pair of glottal stops.

### Meaning in Intonation

It is part of Karl's style to tell a story the point of which is in the intonation rather than the verbal content. This can be seen strikingly in the following example. I have commented on how attractive the table is; Karl has put nuts and tangerines with leaves around it. A humorous discussion followed about "making things pretty," in which Dan suggested that the reason Karl likes to make things pretty is that he's gay. Paul then said that he also likes to make things pretty, and he's not gay. Amid general laughter, Karl said to Paul, "But do you make things as pretty as I make them?" He said this in a mock-taunting tone, like a child razzing his brother. Paul picked up Karl's game and responded in kind, saying "Prettier," also in mock-taunting tone, so that the two of them seemed to be figuratively sticking their tongues out at each other. Everyone laughed at the joke; there was a brief pause; and then Karl told this story:

- (1) K Leslie said to me ..... Can I have that can I have that pen to play with? .... And I said
- (2) DT That pen to play with?
- (3) K I was playing .. with a pen. She said. Can I have that pen to play with? .... I said No, take this pen. She said No I want that pen. And I said ... I'm playing with this pen. ... She said ... We coulda just been four years old.

Karl tells this story as an illustration of another incident in which

he engaged in mock-childlike fighting, just as he and Paul just did. The cohesion between the two incidents is in the intonation used by him and Paul in the one case and by him and Leslie in the other. He never states that point; it resides in the intonation pattern and the juxtaposition of the stories. As Karl tells the story about his earlier conversation with Leslie, he recreates the tone and voice quality with which they spoke, in the same way that he mimicked his little student in the other story. Moreover, he begins the story with no "orientation" i.e. introduction or contextualization. He simply leaps into the narrative event.

As usual I have a response after Karl's very first sentence. In this case, I question the context, because he has jumped into the story without explanation, so the thematic cohesion, which resides in the intonation, has not yet become apparent. He begins (1) "Leslie said to me," quite as if he had already been talking about Leslie. Therefore I ask (2) "That pen to play with?" Using only intonation as a cue, I repeat his phrase to ask, "What are you talking about?" My question barely slows Karl at all. He explains quickly, with low amplitude (3), "I was playing with a pen." The way in which he dismisses this explanation -- a minimal explanation -- of the context, indicates that this is not where the significance of the story lies, so it is not necessary to spend much time talking about it. Karl then returns to his story immediately, with hardly a hitch in timing at all. He backs up and begins again from the beginning: (3) "She said, 'Can I have that pen to play?'" Since his story depends for its impact on the intonational pattern of the interchange between him and Leslie, it is necessary for him to give the entire sequence without interruption,

starting from Leslie's first request for "that pen to play with" up to the intonation climax, (3) "We coulda just been four years old," which is spoken very fast, with very abrupt falling intonation.

The strategy of backing up and starting from the beginning to preserve an intonational pattern is the same that Karl used in the earlier example (see p.117) of the Coliseum discussion. There Karl began, "Here's Columbus Circle, here's Central Park West," but was interrupted by Paul and me suggesting (erroneously) that the building he had in mind was the Huntington Hartford museum. Karl then said "Nuhnuhno," quickly dismissing our error (much as in the present example he dispensed with my question about the context of the pen to play with) and then began again with the same intonational pattern: "Here's Central Park West, here's Broadway." The fact that the words have changed a bit -- that is, "Central Park West" and "Broadway" have replaced "Columbus Circle" and "Central Park West" respectively, does not change the rhythm of the sentence; the intonation pattern remains just the same, and this is what gives the talk its shape.

In addition, it is interesting that Karl uses the same rhythmic pattern to signal the climax of this story as he used in the story about his student who was adopted (p.173).

From p.173 (1):

and then I thought .. ?uh? ... that explains so many things.

Present example (3)

She said ... We coulda just been four years old.

After Karl tells the story about Leslie and the pen, there is general laughter. Then Paul says to Dan, "You missed it," and Dan



says, "Yes I did." Once more Dan has missed the point of Karl's story. Listening to the story on tape, Dan commented that he could easily see the point of Karl's story, but he thought it fell flat. Again, the problem seems to be not his inability to follow such logic, but the sense that this is not how a story should be told.

### Cooperative vs. Impatient Prompting

I wondered about the difference between prompting someone in a cooperative way and dragging a story out of them. The contrast between these two prompting phenomena emerges in a comparison of stories told by Paul and Susie, and how I react to them.

Cooperative prompting questions can be seen in the following story. Paul has just commented that he wonders how his children's view of life is affected, now that he is having relationships with new women. As he is talking, the entire group is listening and reacting, but it is I who actually prompt him in the storytelling:

- (1) P I mean .... y'know Jámie, .... waking up each morning  
with some .. new .. l<sup>á</sup>dy in the house. [others laugh].  
[laughing]  
..... Did YOU stay over<sup>í</sup>night last night? WHERE did  
acc  
YOU SLEEP. [laughter] ..... I slept in your  
DT Yeah [laughing]  
d<sup>á</sup>ddy's bed." ... "Where did my<sup>f</sup> Daddy sleep?" [laughter]  
.....

- (2) DT What'd she say.

A little further on in the same talk, I prompt Paul again:

(3) P The other day he said ... 'Why were you guys making <sup>so</sup> [laughing]  
 much <sup>noise</sup>?" [laughter]

.....

(4) DT 'Did he really? .... And what'd you say--.

At first my questions seem similar to my questions of Dan (see p.163) when he was telling about his friend's experience at a meeting. However, on close inspection, the instances of questions are really quite different. My questions of Dan are trying to get him to be specific about what he has thus far only hinted at. That is, in that interchange, Dan suggests that what his friend Randy heard people saying at the meeting was somehow related to what I have mentioned about women's language, but he hasn't said what the connection was. Therefore I ask, "So what was he saying?" then "What were they doing?" and again, "What was he saying?" All this time, I have the feeling that I have not been told what the point of Dan's story is.

In the present interchange, Paul has begun and stopped his story too, but he seems to have stopped on purpose, for effect. The loud laughter of the group confirms that his point has been appreciated. When I ask Paul (2) "What'd she say?" I am prompting him to continue, to tell the next line. My question comes after a long pause of four seconds, filled with general laughter. This is the same thing that is going on in (4), when I follow a high-pitched exclamation, "Did he really?" with the prompt, "And what'd you say?" My tone shows appreciation of the significance of the moment Paul has described. "Did he really" is spoken with exaggerated intonation to show that Paul's story has had an effect, and the last word "say" in "And what'd you

say?" is drawn out and spoken in an exaggerated intonation contour that shifts from high to low pitch. Thus the question serves both as a prompt and as an additional back-channel show of interest in the story as it has proceeded thus far.

In telling this story, Paul uses intonation and tone to frame direct quotations. He does not introduce reported speech by saying, "He said" or "She said." Rather, he mimics his son's and his girlfriend's speech. The fact that he is quoting is communicated by the tone, intonation, and voice quality.

Throughout the Thanksgiving dinner conversation, Susie has a hard time getting herself heard. She speaks in a soft voice with high pitch and lots of pauses within her speech. According to her own report, she generally waits for silence before saying something, and she does not find many moments of silence in this fast-paced conversation. Susie has had much experience with conversations of this sort; she lived with Karl for six years. But conversational control habits are learned early (Anderson 1977; Schieffelin in press) and are automatic; once they have solidified, continued exposure does not result in acquisition of a new system. It merely intensifies one's feelings about one's inability to understand that system, or rather one's feelings about the people who behave in a way that has different meaning in one's own system. This explains the research finding (Vassiliou, Traiandis, Vassiliou, and McGuire 1972) that increased exposure to members of different groups leads to increased rather than decreased stereotyping.

When Susie does find a place to inject her speech into the conversation, her troubles are not over. It is consistently difficult

for her to pursue a topic until her complete thought is out, and it is difficult for Paul and me to figure out what her main point is. For example, note the following interchange in which Susie tells what she ate on the plane from Vancouver to California that day:

- ....
- (1) S Oh I was amàzed to see the uh ... the meal on the airplane today.
- (2) P What was it?
- (3) S It was ... a bágel with créam chéese .....
- (4) DR What's this?
- (5) P For lunch?
- (6) S At,lunch, ... a bagel with cream cheese
- (7) P That's .. that's  
Air Canada, right? ... um Pacific
- (8) DT A .. a bagel  
and créam cheese?
- (9) S It was United. } A bagel and cream cheese, ...  
acc  
and a whole pile of ham.  
[laughter]

Susie begins her story at a point in the conversation when there was a brief pause. So far so good. She begins by stating the background for what she wants to say (1), much as Dan began his story about his friend Randy (see p.163). Susie's opening also is characterized by a pause, and the filler "uh" plus repetition of the determiner "the" give her contribution a hesitant quality.

Paul gives Susie the encouragement she awaits when he asks (2) "What was it." This seems to be cooperative prompting. Susie then continues with (3) "It was ... a bagel with cream cheese...". This statement ends with steady intonation and a pause. Paul then asks (5) "For lunch?" It is clear from the tape, and Paul stated as much during playback, that he had the impression that Susie had finished her story. Indeed most informants who listened to this segment made this interpretation. Since Susie stopped after "cream cheese," and her intonation did not rise, Paul assumed that her complete story was that she had been served a bagel and cream cheese on the plane. But after Susie answers Paul's question (6) "At lunch," she backs up to repeat "a bagel with cream cheese." Again Paul asks a question (7) about which airline she was on. I interrupt Paul (who has interrupted Susie) to respond to her story by repeating what I, like Paul, think is her already uttered main point. Yet again, Susie answers Paul's question with (9) "It was United" and then backs up and repeats, "a bagel and cream cheese,"<sup>3</sup> but this time she says it quickly, with a sense of urgency, and pauses for only half a second before adding what has been the point of her story all along -- that the bagel and cream cheese were served with "a whole pile of ham." The ham is ironic because bagel and cream cheese are typical Jewish food, while ham is non-kosher and typically non-Jewish. The fact that this is a more significant point is attested to by the loud laughter which follows Susie's mention of the ham. Karl exclaims, "That's disgusting."

During playback, Susie said she couldn't understand why Paul kept interrupting her story to question her about irrelevant details. In other words, Paul's and my prompts seemed obstructive to her. The

reason for them was that Paul and I had not understood the point of her story -- indeed, missed the fact that she hadn't gotten to the point yet -- and were trying to show interest in what seemed like a rather dull story.

Paul and I didn't expect Susie to pause before making her main point, without indicating through intonation that more was to come. For Susie, the pause is necessary. In (9), she succeeds in communicating the fact that more is to come by rushing through "a bagel with cream cheese" very rapidly with a breathy quality, but she still pauses before adding "and a whole pile of ham."

A similar situation arises when Susie tells of another experience later in the conversation. The talk has focused on hands. Karl has commented that short, stubby hands are better for playing the piano. Susie says,

- (1) S I shook hands with Rubinstein once? ... And his hand  
 (2) K Yeah we did  
 together.
- (3) S That's right. We were together. Wasn't it incredible?  
 (4) K Oh it was like a cushion.  
 [laughing]  
 (5) DR What's this?  
 (6) S I ... we shook we shook hands with Rubinstein.  
 (7) K Rubinstein's hands.
- .....
- (8) DT And he had? →  
 (9) S [His hands] .... →  
 DT [Short stubby hands?

Just as Karl asked Dan in the earlier conversation "Yeah. And?" (see p.174), here I ask Susie (8) "And he had? Short stubby hands?" My feeling as I listen to this on the tape now coincides with what I appear to have felt then -- that since Susie brought up the fact that she shook hands with Rubinstein, she should have continued to tell what it was about his hand that was remarkable, after (7). Since Karl had been saying that short stubby hands are good for playing the piano, I supply this as a plausible point for Susie's contribution. (It is typical of my style to supply a point if someone else does not provide one when I expect them to). In fact, that is not what Susie had in mind. While Karl had talked about short stubby fingers, Susie had commented, "and you need thick pads on the end." However, she said this in such a low voice that it was almost inaudible and it was not picked up on.

The conversation continued this way:

- (8) DT And he had? →
- (9) S [His hands] .... →
- DT [Short stubby hands?]
- S [They were  
like ... jéllý. They were like .... they were like ...  
K<sup>L</sup>a famous concert pianist.<sup>L</sup>  
púttý. ... Just .. complételey sóft →  
DT<sup>L</sup> Really?<sup>L</sup>  
and límp. .... Just músh. It was as though there  
K<sup>L</sup> músh [DT chuckles]  
was nò bone. ]  
K<sup>L</sup> and warm.<sup>L</sup>
- (10) DT And short stubby fingers?

(11) S [Short stubby fingers but just ... <sup>totally covered</sup>  
acc-----]

with ....

(12) K fat.

(13) S fat.

Here again is Susie's characteristic strategy of pausing before uttering the crucial word:

(9) They were like ... <sup>jelly</sup>. They were like .... they were  
like ... <sup>putty</sup>.

In (10) and (11) Susie and I almost exactly replicate the devices we both used in the bagels interchange. When I ask (10) "And short stubby fingers?" I am supplying, with question intonation, the point of Susie's story. She lets me know that this is fact, but not the point, by repeating what I have said quickly and with low pitch, and then proceeding to the real point, which she utters after a pause:

(11) Short stubby fingers but just ... <sup>totally covered</sup>  
with .... <sup>fat</sup>.  
K fat.

In the bagels example (p.187), I repeated, with question intonation, "A bagel and cream cheese?" and Susie repeated these words quickly then continued, after a pause, "and a whole pile of ham."

The fact that Susie pauses before saying the key word often leads some others of us to conclude that she is done. When it is clear that she is not done, her pause sometimes tempts Karl to supply her with the word, as if the pause is evidence that she is having trouble

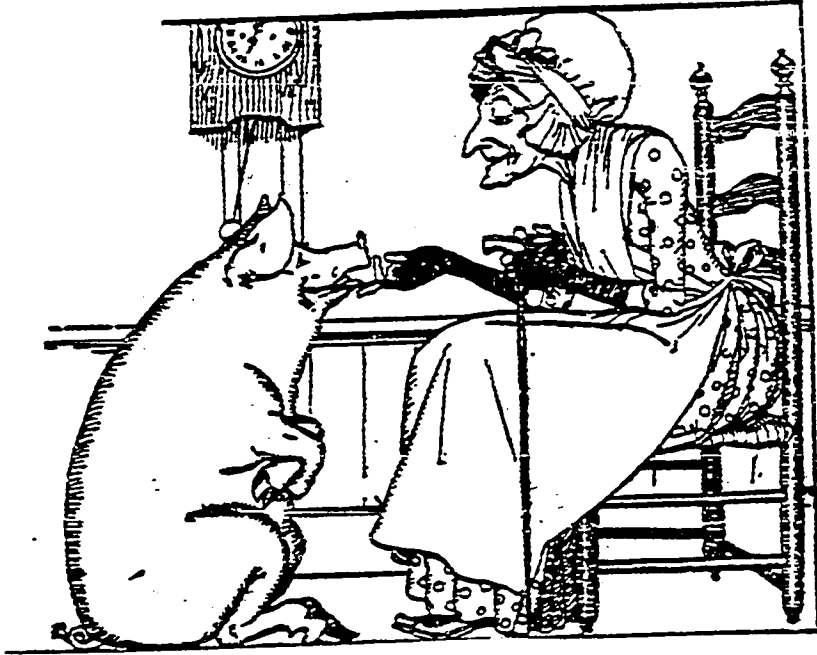


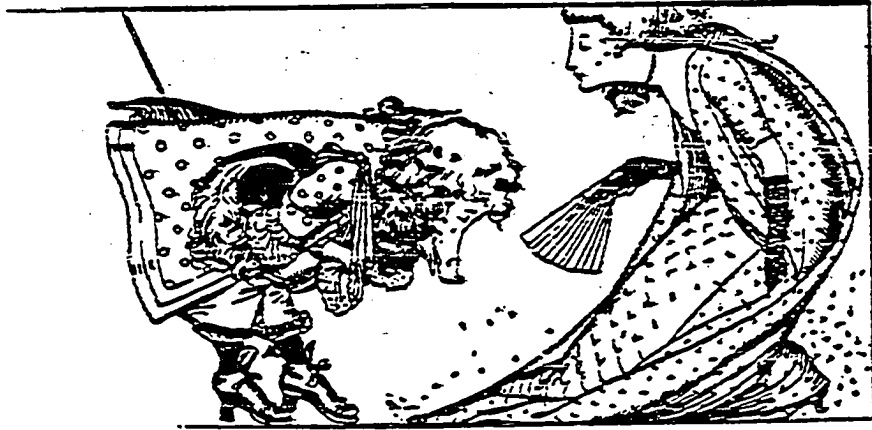
finding the right word, and he wants to help her out. In answer to my questioning during playback, Susie said that she does not mind that kind of "help"; it makes her feel protected and cared for. Certainly this is the spirit in which Karl offers it. It is clear, however, that many people do not like that kind of help, as evidenced by such familiar comments as "Don't tell me what I'm going to say," or, "Don't put words in my mouth." The writer of the New West article, for example, begins by stating that he is a slow talker, and he complains, "But my deliberate gait results in ... problems: All my life, for instance, people have been finishing my sentences for me" (Esterly 1979, p. 67).

#### What the Point Can Be

An even more striking discrepancy arises when Susie tells a longer story. The only extended story she tells during the taped conversation, it occurs late in the evening, which may account for the fact that she felt comfortable enough to offer a story. A flyer advertising a concert series featuring Susie's group is lying on the table, since Susie had brought it out earlier in the evening in connection with a discussion of cartoons. The flyer is illustrated by cartoons (See Figure 2). At this point in the conversation, I notice the flyer and ask Susie whether she did the lettering. She answers that she did and adds that the illustrations were "done" by Howard Pyle (the cartoonist). Chuck makes a comment about the cartoons, and Susie then continues:

Figure 2





- (1) S Yeah. .... Yeah. .... It's a wonderful poem that goes  
 f  
 with the .. with the .. pictures. ... The-- ... the  
 ... rich lady, ... uh ... takes in the pig? And makes  
 him her friend? And decides that she's going to make  
 him into a gentleman. .... So he becomes a gentleman  
 acc-----]  
 and falls in love with a .. falls in love with a lady.  
 .... And ... and then he he proposes to the lady, and  
 all he can say is .. "whee?whee?". [chuckles] .....  
 And that's

...

- (2) DT Who turns him into a pig?  
 (3) C No. He is a pig.]  
 (4) S [He is a pig. ]  
 (5) DT [He is a pig] C Right.  
 (6) S And the rich lady ... decides to bring him up, ... to  
 be a gentleman.  
 (7) DT And he acts like a gentleman, except he ... looks  
 like a pig?  
 [S laughs]  
 (8) DR [And all he can say is ]  
 (9) S [And he learns he learns] .... he learns to dance, and  
 and and have the elegant .... the graces, ... of the  
 elegant man, ... but  
 (10) DT [And how does it end.  
 (11) S He proposes to the lady? And all he can say, ... when  
 he opens his mouth is "whee? whee?."

- (12) DT [chuckle] And then? →
- (13) S [And then] Does she accept him?  
DT
- (14) S No-. Look. Look at the last picture.  
f
- .....
- (15) DT What. She's .. looks uh she .. scowls at him?
- (16) S Yes.
- (17) DT She says is this the thanks I get?
- (18) S [laughs]

It is clear from my questions and remarks (2, 7, 10, 12, 15 and 17) that I simply do not understand the point of the story. My question (2) "Who turns him into a pig?" shows a lack of attention; if I listen to Susie's story on the tape, I easily see that the character began as a pig. But my other questions reflect a sense of bafflement that I experience anew each time I listen to the story. To Susie, however, the point of the story is obvious. When I ask her (10) "How does it end?" she merely repeats (11) what she already said in (1): "He proposes to the lady? And all he can say when he opens his mouth is whee whee." By way of "explanation," she adds the phrase "when he opens his mouth." To Susie, this is the end; the fact that a lady would not marry a pig who can't talk is self-evident. This is similar to what happened in the earlier example in which Karl told about his little girl student's behavior. When Dan asked what he meant to point out, Karl responded by repeating something he had said previously which to him seemed transparent but to Dan was begging the question (see p.178).

During playback, Susie admitted that my responses were most disconcerting to her. It seemed as if I was not paying any attention at all. Her annoyance can be seen in her reaction to my questions and comment at the time. When I ask (12) "Does she accept him?" the way Susie says "No -" (11) is most strident for her: her voice is much louder than usual, and she draws out the vowel. She then says, "Look. Look at the last picture." She clearly feels that if I only pay attention, I'll get the point. I do in fact look at the picture and describe what I see (15), but I still do not get the point. From my perspective, if I am to suspend realistic judgment to accept that a pig learned to dance, why should he not also learn to talk? And if a lady would raise a pig in her house and dance with him, why not marry him too? The very long pause of 5 seconds following (14) attests to my confusion.

My question (17) "She says is this the thanks I get?" is a characteristic attempt to supply an explanation when I feel no satisfactory one has been offered. It reveals yet another misunderstanding of Susie's story. I am under the impression that the lady who raised the pig and the lady he proposed to are one and the same. I have gotten this impression from Susie's intonation in telling the story. When she says, "the rich lady, takes in the pig," and when she later says that the pig "falls in love with a lady," the emphasis is on "lady" in both cases, in the same way. I would have expected her to differentiate by saying, "He falls in love with another lady." In rapid speech, "the lady" and "a lady" are indistinguishable. From Susie's point of view, however, my question was very odd. But rather than confront me directly, she responded by laughing (18) and letting the matter drop.

In this case, there are clearly cultural differences causing problems. In playback, Susie explained that the obvious meaning of the story is allegorical: the pig represents the bourgeoisie, and the point is that no matter how much you educate and dress them up, their basic nature will not be changed. Neither I nor any other person at the Thanksgiving dinner nor any other American for whom I played the story, was able to glean this meaning from it, nor any other meaning either. By contrast, another native British informant who listened to the story said immediately, "Oh yes, the story shows that you should not get involved with those who are fundamentally different from you." When I asked if it might have reference to class differences, she said, "Oh yes of course." Similarly, but disastrously, I told the story to my hairdresser, who is of working class British background, while he was cutting my hair. Not only was he visibly insulted by the story, but I walked out of his shop with the worst haircut he had ever given me.

In addition to differences in expectations about what stories can be about, there are clearly differences operating about how stories are told. Like Karl in earlier examples, Susie did not overtly state the point of her story; she left it to her audience to draw the conclusions. Her strategy is to not impose, not insult her audience by hitting them over the head with the point. But her style differs from Karl's in that intonation and direct discourse are not used to dramatize the point either. Susie's style combines the lexical understatement of Karl's with the paralinguistic understatement of Chuck's styles.

It is characteristic of our styles, too, that of all those who listened to Susie's story, everyone admitted in playback that they

didn't get the point, but only I verbalized my confusion -- with the results that have been seen. Chuck, for example, said that he would never risk offending Susie by making it so obvious that he didn't see the point. Thus Chuck's defensive (or considerate) strategy pays off in rapport, while my rapport-based strategy (assuming positive interpersonal relations) cause interpersonal distress. In other words, the feeling of rapport is the result whenever strategies are shared. The use of a rapport-based strategy with others who do not share its principles and devices can lead to just the opposite of rapport: a feeling of being imposed upon, or, in Goodman's (Esterly 1979) terms, crowded. Ways of telling and responding to stories, then, are an integral part of conversational style.



## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. To say they are functional does not imply that they are consciously calculated.
2. Such a superficial coherence is acceptable to introduce a story because this is not a round. It seems that within this system, just as personal statements have a certain priority, stories have even greater priority. Once a round has begun, however, cohesion is more strictly constrained.
3. It's interesting to note that Susie says "a bage? with cream cheese," her first two utterances, but I say "a bagel and cream cheese." For me this is formulaic. When Susie ratifies my echo of her utterance in (10), she switches to and. This is apparently the effect of the echo which she is now uttering. There are numerous examples in the conversation of people repeating things that they would not ordinarily say, because the person they are echoing said them that way.

## CHAPTER SIX

### IRONY AND JOKING

One of the most distinctive aspects of any person's style is the use of humor. Through intonation, pace, voice quality, and non-verbal signals, a speaker can frame an utterance or string of utterances as "not meant literally." Such stylized usage can range from sarcasm (in which the intent is not humorous, and often hostile), to irony (which might excite a smile or chuckle), to a joke, in which the main purpose is to entertain. Close examination of the use of irony and joking by members of the Thanksgiving group (there were few instances of sarcasm) contributes further insights into their styles.

Roy (1978) notes in an extended study of irony in conversation that irony vs. non-irony is not a binary distinction but rather a continuum. Clearly there is some subjectivity involved in classifying utterances as ironic or not (just as there was with classifying utterances as narrative). Roy points out that there are problems with the traditional definitions of irony as "meaning the opposite of what is said" or "meaning something different from what is said." To arrive at a satisfying definition of irony would require a major study in itself. In general, I regarded statements as humorous or ironic if they seemed not to be meant literally and seemed to be intended to amuse.

Cutler (1974) notes the following intonational cues of irony:

1. nasalization of all or part of an utterance
2. slower rate in all or part
3. exaggerated stress on one or more parts.

In many cases these cues were present in utterances I judged ironic, but certainly not in all cases.

Figure 3 shows the number of turns and percentage of turns devoted to ironic or humorous statements by members of the Thanksgiving group. The speaker who shows the greatest use of irony and humor is Karl, with 64 of his turns classified ironic or humorous. In this his use of humor correlates with his use of narrative. I am next with 58 humorous or ironic turns, but since my total number of turns is greater than Karl's, the percentage of his turns which were ironic or humorous is even more significantly greater than mine: 11% as opposed to my 7%. Interestingly, the person next in line in terms of number of ironic or humorous turns is Dan. In other words, Dan and Paul switch places, as Karl and I switch places, in terms of absolute use of irony and humor as opposed to absolute number of contributions. Strikingly, the percentage of Dan's turns which are ironic or humorous is 11% -- equal to Karl's percentage. In stark contrast, Chuck emerges as the member least given to humor or irony. Although Chuck's contributions in absolute number of turns was almost as great as Paul's and greater than Dan's, yet his use of irony or humor is much less -- only three more contributions than Susie (10 for Chuck; 7 for Susie), and only 2% of his turns are devoted to irony or humor -- by far the least in the group and far less than Dan's. Chuck's use of humor correlates with his use of narrative which also accounted for only 2% of his

Figure 3  
Use of Irony and Humor

Name	Number of ironic/humorous turns	Total number of turns	Percentage of turns ironic or humorous
Karl	65	594	11%
Deborah	58	811	7%
Dan	43	386	11%
Paul	19	417	5%
Chuck	10	405	2%
Susie	7	169	4%

turns. This difference may account for the different impressions made by Dan's and Chuck's participation in the group. On hearing the results of the turn-count, several members of the group were surprised to learn that Chuck had talked as much as he had. We had come away with the impression that he had been very quiet. But in listening to the tape, looking at the transcript, and learning of the turn-counts, we realized that Chuck had in fact been quite an active participant in the conversation. Similarly, we had thought that Dan had participated more. Susie, for example, when referring to the group as a "rambunctious crowd," had included Dan, but not Chuck. Yet in number of turns taken, Dan was less active a participant than Chuck, and more talkative only than Susie. It seems likely that the impression that Dan had participated more than he had, came from the fact that he cracked a lot of jokes. This implies that use of humor makes one's presence felt -- at least the kind of humor that Dan employed (we will see what kind that was, presently).

Paul was next after Dan, with many fewer jokes -- 19, as opposed to Dan's 44, my 58, and Karl's 64 -- and a smaller percentage, as well: Paul devoted 5% of his turns to irony. Susie is right next to Paul in terms of percentage -- 4%, but in absolute number of ironic turns, she is at the bottom of the list with 7.

Thus some of the differences in style which characterize the members of the group can be seen in the amount of their use of humor and irony. Even more, the kind of humor that each person employed was distinctive. It seems likely that "brand of humor" is one of the most highly individualistic aspects of a person's style. Thus it has been seen that in expectation of conversational control devices such as

overlap, rate of speech, use of paralinguistic features, and structuring of narratives, there were many ways in which Chuck and Dan shared expectations, while Karl, Paul and I shared stylistic features. However, in use of humor, Chuck and Dan could not be more different, and Karl, Paul and I also exhibit strikingly different styles.

Karl's most characteristic form of humor is a mocking style by which he exaggerates either his own or someone else's characteristic speech patterns. In this sense, his is an irony aimed at style. It is also of the form which Roy (1978), following Wayne Booth, calls "dramatic irony." By this device, Roy notes, "the speaker can mean what he says and at the same time disclaim what he says by taking on a role, frequently stereotypical or at least well-defined" (118). For example, in his role as host, Karl is frequently in the position of giving orders to people and offering them food. He frequently mocks his own behavior in this role by affecting a stereotypical Jewish speech pattern. For example, when someone offers to help him serve, he replies,

You should sit and relax, dahlink!

His use of the modal "should," exaggerated intonation, stylized voice quality and phonology are all patterned on the speech of Karl's grandmother. Thus he is mocking his own impulse to pattern his hosting behavior on her model. In addition to affecting exaggerated "hosting" style, Karl stylizes the bossiness which his host role leads him to. Thus, for example, he says to Susie, who is helping him serve:

Susie, THAT was for the STUFFing!

His tone affects annoyance far greater than what he might have actually felt, and thereby makes a joke of whatever slight annoyance he actually did feel. This is the attitude that Karl adopts and frequently draws upon with regard to the presence of the tape recorder on the table.

In his role as host, Karl is preoccupied with making the table attractive. He has carefully laid out nuts and tangerines with green leaves, and he makes a point of taking everything off the table that is not attractive. I placed the tape recorder in the middle of the table with full approval from Karl, but at several times during the occasion, his eyes light upon the machine, and he complains about it in an exaggerated tone.

- (1) K Do <sup>we</sup> have to <sup>have</sup> this here. .... Does <sup>this</sup> have to <sup>be</sup> here?
- (2) S /?/
- (3) DT No I mean
- (4) C She set it in the middle.
- (5) DT G'head. Spoil my dissertation. .... I'm gonna put a <sup>footnote.</sup> <sub>K-Does this have</sub>
- (6) K <sup>is.</sup>
- (7) C It's <sup>it</sup> <sub>Does this have to be here like this.</sub>
- (8) K <sup>I mean Marie's.</sup>
- (9) DR <sup>Well</sup> put it on the <sup>salad</sup> and then you can do whatever you want with it.
- (10) K Marie'--s? I mean, ... just look at everything at this table. It's beautiful. And we have to look at Marie's?

.....

(11) DT [chuckle]

Each of Karl's statements (1, 6, 8, and 10) is spoken with exaggerated intonation and voice quality showing great annoyance. After complaining about the fact that the tape recorder is spoiling the appearance of the table, he moves on to complain, in the same tone, about the presence of a jar of commercial salad dressing ("Marie's" is the brand name of the dressing which is printed on the jar).

In response to Karl's complaint about the tape recorder, I respond with irony of my own. I affect annoyance at the fact that he is interfering with my dissertation (5). (In fact, I had only the vaguest notion of possibly using the tape recording for my dissertation at that point.) Although I did feel some slight annoyance that Karl was drawing attention to the tape recorder, I did not take his complaint seriously; I did not think he seriously minded it being there; and I did not for a moment consider taking it away. I believed Karl did not mind my taping, and I knew that the only way to tape was to leave the recorder in the middle of the table.

Dan however, is responsible for the salad dressing, and his response is quite different from mine. He takes Karl's complaint seriously, it seems, and explains (9) that after the dressing is put on the salad, the bottle can be taken away. "You can do whatever you want with it," sounds like a non-ironic expression of annoyance at Karl for making a fuss.

During playback, Dan explained his understanding of what was going on. He believed that Karl was truly angry at me for having the



tape recorder on the table, and then tried to cover his sincere anger by also saying something about the salad dressing bottle. However, Karl, during his playback session, was speechless at my suggestion that he might have genuinely been angry at me for taping. He liked the idea of my taping, he insisted. He said he truly did not like the tape recorder messing up his table, but he wasn't thinking clearly about the fact that it had to be there in order to record the conversation. He was just picking up on a feeling he got and exaggerating it for comic effect. He felt the same way about the salad dressing bottle as he did about the recorder. Thus I had correctly perceived the intent of his irony, but Dan had missed its full impact.

Karl returns to the mock-anger about the tape recorder at two later points in the dinner. One instance has already been discussed in another connection (p.143). Early in the dinner, he says, "Could we get this off the table?" This first question is said more or less seriously. But Karl immediately moves into his mocking style, making fun of himself by exaggerating his slight annoyance:

It keeps coming back on the table, it must have a will of its own. That's all I can say.

And yet again, later, he notices it and comments:

- (1) K Be uh have we been .. <sup>r</sup>taping? This whole time?
- (2) DT I'm glad
- I didn't notice it until just now.
- (3) C She keeps that thing running.

- (4) K I keep I? .. I say, get that thing off the table. She  
acc-----]  
says .. oh yeah okay I'll take it off the table and  
acc -----  
I look, ... 'TWO minutes later and it's back.  
[laughter]  
..... What's to analyze. There hasn't been one  
misunderstanding, we've all understood each other  
perfectly.
- (5) P What do you mean by that.  
[loud laughter] .....
- (6) DT That's 'two-- ..... 'Just forget about it. 'So  
[laughter]  
it's 'there. .... [laughing] [K laughs] What  
do you care what I'm gonna do about it.
- (7) P I don't mind the taping, I mind the space it  
takes up.
- (8) DT It's so unobtrusive.]
- (9) K It's so Ugly. ... Everything on  
[DT laughs-----  
this table is beautiful except THAT and Marie's. And  
-----[DR Chuckles]  
even Marie's is palatable .. next to THAT. [DT laughs]
- (10) DR You can eat .. Marie's.
- (11) DT It's so sleek,  
[laughter] .....
- It's sleek, and black, and and ... fine,  
[You never met
- (12) P Disney. Did you?

As in the earlier example, I react to Karl's exaggerated annoyance about the presence of the tape recorder by exaggerating my defense of it. (My comment [2] is with reference to the preceding topic, not the tape recorder). Again, Karl's intonation and voice quality indicate extreme annoyance, but it is mock annoyance -- and that is why I take it as a joke, laugh, and do not feel it would be appropriate to comply. Karl does not attempt to make me comply; he simply wants to be able to make a joke about it.

Thus Karl uses the mocking style to exaggerate and laugh at his own speech. At other times, he uses it to affect a speech pattern that is clearly foreign to him. Thus when he is serving wine and I am distracted, he gets my attention by saying,

Gimme ya glass, baby.

He says this with nasal quality and a clipped, "tough" manner. My reaction is to laugh and ask, "Who're you calling baby?" At another time Karl uses a similar style with Paul. In offering tickets to his upcoming concerts, he turns to Paul and says,

How many ya want, Paul.

This is said in the same way as the preceding example -- mock "tough" style.

A person's stylistic devices change with changing situations and interlocutors. The role of host encourages Karl to use his mocking style as a way of playing that role without taking himself seriously in it. In the last half hour of taped conversation, when dinner is over and everyone is sitting around the table talking, Karl hardly uses

these devices at all.

I also occasionally affect exaggerated Jewish style. For example, I say to Karl, "Si--t, si--t," when he is busy serving food. But my most characteristic strategy is to build on someone else's humor, as when Karl affected ironic annoyance with regard to my tape recorder, and I responded in kind. Frequently throughout the conversation I make jokes by changing slightly or adding to something that someone else has said. Thus, when I announce that I will tape the conversation, Paul asks, "Just to see if we say anything interesting?" I answer, "No. Just to see how you say nothing interesting." Similarly, in another discussion, Paul is talking about the problem of spending money on children. He comments (ironically):

- (1) P Yeah. ... I mean I get ?I ] I<sup>l</sup>like things .. that you  
p [sighing]  
can buy with m<sup>o</sup>ney. Y'know it's not like I like to  
[D]I laugh]  
suffer and starve.]  
[laugh]
- (2) K [Paul, you ? I think you should  
start meditating more. .... [laughter] You g<sup>o</sup>tt  
get more into sp<sup>i</sup>ritual things.]
- (3) DT [No, maybe he could teach his  
kids to meditate. [laughter]

Thus I build on the already established ironic tone by slightly changing Karl's perspective.

At another point, Dan is telling an extended joke about a fictitious organization he and his friends invented, called NORCLOD

(Northern California Lovers of the Deaf). As Dan embroiders the joke by explaining the rules of the organization, I contribute to his joke by supplying another detail along the lines he established:

- (1) DR u--m ..... and .... um the way we were gonna have the uh the officers of the organization the higher up you go, ... the more hearing people there would be and then the .. the .. the-- chairperson of the organization was gonna be a hearing person.
- (2) DT That didn't know sign language.
- (3) DR That didn't .... Yeah. That didn't know  
[laughter]  
sign language.

Paul, in contrast to Karl, is a straight man. Whereas Karl's irony is mock-annoyed, mock-tough, or mock-sollicitous -- and dramatized through exaggerated enunciation -- Paul's is mock-serious. Susie described Paul as "more sedate" than Karl and me. This impression no doubt comes in part from Paul's serious way of delivering ironic lines, as opposed to Karl's (and Dan's) dramatized, camping irony. In addition, whereas Karl often follows his ironic comments with laughter (Dan laughs even more, and I laugh the most and loudest), Paul never laughs after his one-liners, and he often follows them up with genuinely serious statements.

For example, in the preceding example but one (p.210), Paul stated (1) "I like things that you can buy with money. It's not like I like to suffer and starve." He said this with a serious tone. Even more typically, in the tape-recorder interchange (p.208), Karl has said, in gross mocking style, (4) "What's to analyze. There hasn't

been one misunderstanding, we've all understood each other perfectly." (Karl is referring to my early work on the analysis of misunderstandings in conversation). Paul immediately snaps (5) "Whaddya mean by that." He says this in an utterly serious tone. Its irony comes from the fact that he is pretending to misunderstand, contradicting what Karl has just said. The resultant loud laughter from the group is evidence that his humor is successful, but Paul does not participate in the laughter. Rather, he follows up his joke with a serious statement (7) "I don't mind the taping, I mind the space it takes up." (Throughout the dinner, Paul evidences the same preoccupation with getting extraneous things off the table that Karl does). Karl never makes such a serious statement about the tape recorder. He continues in an escalation of his mocking style (9).

Another instance in which Paul uses this mock-serious irony immediately follows the Coliseum discussion which has already been analyzed (p.116).

- (1) DT Did you know that where<sub>K</sub> ]... the statue of Columbus  
L/?/
- is THE center of Manhattan?
- (2) K The geographical center. My brother told me that  
when I was a little boy.
- (3) DT Your brother told you? [laughs]
- .....
- (4) P Is it really?  
] God rest his soul. [DT laughs]
- (5) DR
- (6) K He also told me about Freud.
- (7) DT So I was told.

- (7) DT So I was told.
- (8) P It's the point .... →
- (9) C Sex?]
- (10) P that .. it's the point at which they .... \*
- (11) K Freud, Marx and sex.  
 they measure, ... if you say y you're .. thirty five  
 miles from New York, that's where they mean.
- (12) DT It's the center?
- (13) K He didn't tell me about the kind of sex I was  
 interested in, though.
- (14) C Nnn never do.  
 [laughter]
- (15) P I didn't 'know.
- (16) K I know. .... Neither did I, actually, to tell you  
 [laughing]  
 the truth.  
 [DT laughs]
- (17) P The blind leading the 'blind.

Karl's statement (2) is ironic because the brother he refers to is sitting next to him, yet he refers to him as if he were not present. Dan picks up on this when he says (5) "God rest his soul," as if the brother were not only not present but not alive. Paul then furthers the joke by asking (4) "Is it really?" as if he seriously did not know. In keeping with their respective styles, Karl continues the irony (13) while Paul continues the geography lesson (10) in a truly serious vein. When Karl's joke wins out (only I [12] respond to Paul's explanation), Paul again participates in the irony. However, whereas

Karl's utterances (13) and (16) are spoken with a slight hint of laughter, Paul's (15) and (17) are thoroughly deadpan. They are marked for irony in their content and a slight exaggeration in pitch height on their final words.

One final example of Paul's deadpan ironic style will be presented. Paul has made an interpretation of a story told by Karl. I am effusive in my admiration of Paul's interpretation:

- (1) DT That's 'grea--t! .... That is brilliant.
- (2) K 'Have yóu ever thought of .... getting a dóctorate in  
[DT & S laugh-----  
sociology, or psychology?  
-----]  
[DT laughs]
- (3) P No.
- (4) K Yóu could write a thésis.
- (5) P No good jobs.  
[DT chuckle]

Karl's response is ironic, marked by deliberately emphatic tone, mocking my exaggerated appreciation of Paul's insight. Paul answers in a way that seems "casual," "sincere," and serious: with low voice, relatively low and steady pitch, and reduced syntactic form (4, 5). Only the knowledge that the question was not serious makes it clear that the answer is not meant seriously either.

Paul does occasionally affect a mocking intonation, but he does so only a few times and always in response to the same usage by others. This was already seen (p.181) in the sequence in which he picked up Karl's cue to participate in a mock-childlike taunting exchange:



K Do you make things as pretty as I make them?

P Prettier.

To rise to the occasion of Karl's mock-challenge, Paul affected a nasal tone and marked downward shift in pitch. But Paul does not initiate such mocking style and does not sustain it for any length of time.

Finally, Paul is the only person at Thanksgiving who volunteers jokes. One has already been seen (p.139) -- the one about the lady who was asked if she smokes after sex. At another point in the conversation, sparked by Chuck's reference to a turkey part as "the pope's nose," Paul asks,

(1) P ʃOh, did you hear? The new po? the-- new pope, ...  
performed his first miracle?

(2) C What.

(3) DR What. Whatwhatwhat.

(4) P He made a blind man lame.

Here too, Paul's humorous style is his serious manner. After he tells this joke, I laugh and Dan and Chuck both comment on the Polish joke. I then say, "Polish pope, huh?" and Paul repeats, with significantly lowered pitch and no hint of humor, "A Polish pope. Yeah." And yet again, after telling this joke, Paul follows up with a genuinely serious explanation: "That's the neck, by the way. It's not the pope's nose."

Dan's humor is similar to Karl's in that he often speaks with an exaggerated form of a speech style. Whereas Karl exaggerates Jewish speech and his own fussiness, Dan exaggerates stereotypical gay speech

patterns; in other words, he camps. At times he speaks with an exaggerated French accent; at other times he overstresses intonational contours. For example, at one point Karl is in the kitchen when the conversation turns to relationships with ex-spouses and ex-lovers. When Karl enters the room he asks, with his own mocking style, "What're we talking about?" Paul answers, "Relationships"; I say "ex-relationships," and Dan says, after a slight pause, "My FAW-MUH," in response to which everybody laughs.

Since they share this taste for mocking style, Dan and Karl sometimes participate in extended "routines." For example, at one point reference is made to a dispute that had arisen between Karl and Dan some time in the past. Dan begins to explain to the others that they are referring to this past dispute, but before he gets to the end of the sentence, he has taken on an exaggerated intonation pattern and switched the utterance to "ironic." Karl picks up on this, and they both have a mock-petty-argument:

- (1) DR We had this big ... we had ... Karl and I had our  
[tone-----]
- first falling out.  
[tone-----]
- (2) K [First?
- (3) DR No. It was .. not our f .. Our third. .... [laughs]  
The second one was .. [laughs] and you remember the  
[tone-----] [DT laugh] [tone-----]
- (4) K And what about the time before the first one,  
[tone -----]
- (5) DR That was ... that was kindergarten.

As Dan begins to explain what he and Karl were referring to (1), he sounds serious ("We had this big"...). However, he hesitates and starts again in a tone that becomes increasingly ironic, until he says "first falling out" with distinctly emphatic stress. The choice of terms "falling out" and the exaggerated emphasis mark his tone as ironic. Karl joins the irony by using exaggerated forms of his own style: he latches onto Dan's statement a clipped, monosyllabic "First?" Karl's ironic tone in (4) is nasal and rasping, and he maintains it throughout his entire utterance. Dan, on the other hand, exaggerates emphatic tone but does not use nasalization, and he tends to build up to his full mocking style during his utterance. Furthermore, Dan laughs in between phrases (3), while Karl maintains the point of view of his mock persona throughout. Dan's last utterance (5) "that was ... that was kindergarten." is spoken in almost-normal tone.

As has already been noted, Chuck uses little humor and irony (10 instances in all). Nearly all of his utterances which are ironic are repetitions of or additions to others' irony. This line is delivered, moreover, in rather standard tones, without exaggerated paralinguistic features. In this, his humorous style resembles Paul's. At another time when Dan comments ironically on stereotypic gay behavior, Chuck says, "It's genetic." (This is an extension of the earlier discussion about the gay voice). In all but one case, Chuck's ironic comments are part of a larger ironic interchange such as this.

Susie, finally, makes only 7 ironic or humorous statements,<sup>1</sup> but these constitute 4% of her utterances as compared to Chuck's 2%. Susie twice contributes to already established ironic banter, but more often (five times) she offers ironic comments in conversation which is,

to that point, serious. For example, there was an extended discussion about theories of learning, in which Karl says that sometimes, when teaching his students piano, he has to push their fingers down to show them what to do; Susie comments, "And if they still don't respond you take a hammer." Susie's irony can be very subtle, as when she says, in answer to my question about whether she did the lettering on her flyers, "I did the lettering and and Howard Pyle did the drawing." Howard Pyle was the cartoonist whose illustrations were borrowed, but he drew his cartoons at the turn of the century; Susie's way of naming him implies that he did the drawings especially for the flyers, with humorous effect. Notice too that while Karl's irony is aimed at mocking his own style, Susie's is content irony; it is aimed outward.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to remember that the forms of humor employed by members of the group on this occasion are not necessarily their only or even "standard" forms of humor. We can be sure only that this is the way they spoke on this occasion. It is likely, for example, that the fact that he did not know the rest of the participants, made Chuck more reserved than he might have been with friends. At the same time, someone else might have reacted differently to being the only stranger in the crowd). It is likely too that since Karl was the host, and since his form of humor was paralinguistically gross, that the guests tended to follow his lead in their form of humor. It has been seen that many of the ironic statements were made as part of banter or routines begun by Karl. In fact, in order to make up for this bias, I had Chuck and Dan tape several hours of their private interaction. Although I did not analyze these conversations in detail, in the interest of keeping the data for the present study circumscribed, much

of the time during their private interchanges, Chuck and Dan engaged in camping which both participated in equally. It was, however, of a sort somewhat different from what went on at Thanksgiving. It is not appropriate to enter here upon an analysis of their humor on the other occasion. The point to be made is simply that the styles exhibited by participants at Thanksgiving can be understood to represent the behavior they deemed appropriate to the occasion. And their use of humor played a significant role in the impact that each had on the group.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. It is possible that Susie made statements intended as ironic or humorous which I have not credited her with. For one thing, I may have missed irony where she intended it, and for another, many of her comments are inaudible because she speaks so softly.
2. Thanks to R. Lakoff for this observation.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has attempted to show some of the concrete devices which make up conversational style. The devices which have been illustrated and discussed are, necessarily, only some of the mass of complex devices operating in interaction. As Pittenger et. al. note under the function they call "reinforcement" (see p. 9 ), "The wise working assumption then is that always no matter how many possible contributing factors we have itemized, there may still be others that we have overlooked." Furthermore, the devices that have been discussed are not discrete phenomena but rather dimensions along which conversational mechanisms operate.

Following is a summary of the dimensions which have been examined.

1. Relative personal focus of topic
2. Paralinguistic features (absolute use and use of marked shifts)
  - a. loudness
  - b. pitch
  - c. pauses
  - d. voice quality and tone
3. Expectation that enthusiasm be overtly demonstrated, for example through:
  - a. quickness of response
  - b. paralinguistic features
  - c. free offer of related material
  - d. use of questions (information, echo, etc.)

4. Use of questions, including
  - a. echo questions as back-channel
  - b. information questions
5. Pacing
  - a. cooperative vs. obstructive overlap
  - b. timing of contribution, relative to previous contribution
  - c. rate of speech
  - d. floor-getting devices (increased amplitude, repetition of words)
6. Use of repetition, for example
  - a. to finish other's statement or add to their line of argument
  - b. to incorporate other's offer into original statement or argument
7. Topic cohesion (and tolerance for diffuse topics)
8. Tolerance for noise vs. silence
9. Laughter (when, how much)

These and other characteristic ways of saying things are used in the production of specific devices, for example:

1. Machine-gun questions
2. Mutual revelation/personal statements
3. Use of ethnically marked or otherwise ingroup-associated expressions
4. Story rounds
5. Ironic routines



The tendency to use such devices based on these dimensions is neither precisely predictable nor random. There are patterns or cooccurrence expectations according to which certain devices tend to cluster, and by which signals in one channel are associated with certain signals in other channels. For example, fast rate of speech; frequent overlap and latching; use of frequent questions; use of high amplitude and high and low pitch, as well as contrasts of these to yield exaggerated contours; tolerance for noise rather than silence -- all these were seen to cooccur. (Although this is beyond the scope of the present study, I would hypothesize that these linguistic signals are correlated with such non-verbal factors as use of broad facial expressions and gestures, as well as relatively close kinesic proximity and frequent touching during talk).

Based on their use of these and other devices, the six people gathered for Thanksgiving dinner had styles which were unique in some ways and in others resembled those of other people present to a greater or lesser degree. In some senses, Karl and I shared styles; for example, we tended to talk a lot; we used much overlap, latching, quick expressive responses, and fast, clipped questions. Paul talked less, but he also used overlap, free offer of opinions and thoughts, personal topics, and quick abrupt questions in ways similar to Karl and me. We three told the most stories, and we told nearly all the stories that occurred in rounds. Thus, Paul, Karl, and I seemed to share stylistic strategies, while Chuck, Dan, and Susie differed.

Yet style is not a matter of polar distinctions. Any device can be used to varying degrees, and each person's style is made up of a unique combination of devices. Whereas Karl and I shared pacing

strategies, yet his use of humor was more frequent and more extreme than mine. He often initiated comic routines, whereas I often built on others' humor. Karl told more stories, and a greater percentage of his talk was devoted to narrative. He was also more likely to initiate stories unrelated to prior talk. Paul shared many strategies with Karl and me, yet his sense of humor was strikingly different. Paul tended to maintain a serious demeanor and deliver ironic lines in mock sober tones; Karl laughed more and marked ironic statements with exaggerated intonation contours. Paul used expressive paralinguistic features in narratives and plain talk. Dan, whose pacing devices were very different from those of Karl, Paul, and me, exercised a form of humor which resembled Karl's in many ways. Whereas Chuck, at first glance, seemed to be using pacing devices similar to Dan's, it turned out that he did use fast pacing and overlap when the topic was objective rather than personal. He never volunteered personal information, whereas Dan did; he never contributed stories to rounds, as Dan did; in fact, he rarely offered stories at all unless he was asked. Chuck also used humor much less than Dan.

Susie, in many ways, was the one whose style was most different. Her voice was the softest; she talked the least. When Dan and Chuck told stories, there was evidence that they did not get to the point in the way that Karl, Paul and I expected, but when Susie told stories, there was evidence that we could not tell what the point was -- nor could Dan or Chuck. Susie's talk showed a relatively high percentage of humor, but the humor was often of a different sort (content rather than style irony).

In other words, each person used a unique mix of conversational devices which constituted individual style. When their devices matched, communication between or among them was smooth. When they differed, communication showed signs of disruption or outright misunderstanding.

Since the present analysis is based on the talk of only six people, it is impossible to generalize about the cultural determination of their styles. Nonetheless it is equally impossible to ignore the fact that those whose styles seemed most similar -- especially in the gross outlines, such as turntaking conventions, use of expressive paralinguistic features, and so on -- were of similar ethnic and geographic background. Karl, Paul, and I all grew up in middle class Jewish-identified families and social networks in New York City. (The fact that Karl and I met in camp when we were teen-agers is evidence that our families had similar orientations). Chuck and Dan, on the other hand, grew up in non-Jewish, non-ethnic identified sections of Los Angeles. Chuck however was less disconcerted by the fast pace of the evening's talk, and he was better able to participate. One cannot help but wonder whether the fact that his mother is an Italian from New York City plays a part in this difference.

The one who was least able to participate in terms of rhythm and the establishment of thematic cohesion was Susie, who was born and raised in England. Moreover, anyone who has experience with people from these backgrounds immediately identifies the devices used by the New Yorkers in this group as somehow reminiscent of the styles they have observed in people from that background, and of Susie's style as somehow "typical" of upper class British speech.

It is certainly not the case that anyone from these backgrounds talks just like this. People differ in individual ways. Nonetheless, use of such conversational devices and the expectation that others will use them is certainly learned the way language is learned -- in interaction with family and friends. Although there is no inherent disposition toward particular stylistic devices associated with ethnicity or class, ethnic and other subcultural identification often involves one in social networks in which particular linguistic strategies are exercised and thereby learned (Gumperz to appear). It would be surprising indeed if people who habitually interacted did not develop ways of talking that became generalized among them .

Conversational style, then, may be seen as a continuum representing relative use of strategies resulting in conversational devices. In one sense, each device is represented by a continuum of its own. Speakers may be distributed on one continuum with respect to how fast they pace their comments relative to previous comments; another for how gross their paralinguistic features are; another for how many stories they tell, and so on. In this sense, speakers in the Thanksgiving group occupy different places on different continua.

A continuum representing grossness of styles of humor might look like this:

Subtle humor	S	C	P	DT	DR	K	Gross humor

A continuum representing pacing practices might look something like this:

Slow pace S DR C P DT K Fast pace

Percentage of talk devoted to stories yields this:

Few narrative turns C DT P S DR K Many narratives turns

But numbers of narratives told yields yet another:

Few narratives C DR S P DT K Many narratives

If these continua are superimposed one upon the other, perhaps some overall continuum representing relative signalling of positive and negative face wants (camaraderie/distance, in Lakoff's terms) would yield something like this:

Negative face S DR C P DT K Positive face

An interesting insight is suggested by the different ways in which the people in this group of speakers perceived each other. In recalling the occasion several months after it had occurred, Susie had referred to the group as a "rambunctious crowd," and she identified the participants of that "crowd" as Karl, Paul, Dan, and me. Dan, in contrast, had thought the evening was dominated by Karl, Paul, and me. Paul had thought the evening dominated by Karl, and Karl had thought it dominated by me. I had had the impression that Karl, Paul, and I had equally participated, to the exclusion of the other three.

Reference to the preceding continuum may account for this discrepancy.<sup>1</sup> Discriminations between speakers become more refined, the closer one is to those speakers in style. Thus, to Susie, Dan's style was more like the styles of the rest of us than like her own, so she perceived him in association with us. To Dan, it was clear that Paul, Karl, and I differed from himself, so he did not make distinctions between our styles. Paul, however, is very familiar with fast-talking style, and he was thus able to perceive the difference between Karl and me. Karl, on the other hand, might understandably be unlikely to see himself as "dominating," so he naturally perceived the one with the next most "intrusive" style in that role.

It seems likely, considering my findings, that some aspects of style are particularly salient -- pacing, grossness of humor, storytelling. It seems likely that Karl and I perceived Dan as more active a participant than he was because he told a number of long stories, and because he joked a lot, with a paralinguistically gross style. Similarly, we perceived Paul as more active a participant than he was because he kept up with the fast pace and told many stories.

Conversational style, then, is made up of use of specific devices, chosen by reference to broad operating principles or conversational strategies. The use of these devices are habitual and may be more or less unconscious. The goal of all conversation is to make clear to others the intentions of the speaker; the degree to which one's meaning is understood as intended depends upon the degree to which conversational strategies, and hence use of devices, are similar. Furthermore, the similarity of such devices makes for rhythmically smooth interaction. Both the rhythmic synchrony and the construction of

shared meaning create the satisfying sense of harmony which often accompanies conversation between people who share social, ethnic, geographic, or class background. By the same token, the use of strategies and consequent devices which are not understood or expected creates a sense of dissonance which often leads to negative or mistaken judgments of intent and often leads one to walk away from an encounter feeling dissatisfied or disgruntled. Thus an understanding of conversational style explains in part what often appears as clanishness among members of certain groups, or discrimination or prejudice on the part of others.

The present study has focused on a single extended interaction, during which a particular style in some way "dominated." Although all conversational devices are equally successful when used by speakers who share expectations of signalling systems, it is in the nature of interaction that when devices are not the same, one style takes over. For example, those who expect shorter pauses between utterances will necessarily speak first, and having spoken, effectively block the contributions of others -- but just those others who cannot tolerate much overlap. The voices of those who tend to talk loudly with marked pitch, will necessarily ring out, while the voices of those who talk softly with subtle contours will thereby be drowned out or overshadowed. These effects are independent of the intentions of the speakers involved. Thus, whereas fast-paced talk such as that discussed here can be observed wherever it occurs, the devices of other strategies will have to be observed in interaction in which there are no fast talkers.

This has been a first attempt to isolate the devices which constitute conversational style. Much work remains to be done, to continue such documentation of devices; to better understand the strategies and universal principles underlying them; to document the devices which make up different styles; to correlate linguistic with non-verbal channels of communication. I would hope in the future to extend this study in a number of ways. First, there remains, always, more detailed analysis to be done on the present data: analysis of other aspects of the speech of those who participated (for example, their use of various speech acts, such as explaining, and various devices, such as repetition). Second, I would want to extend the study to other groups of people. It would be interesting to observe a group made up entirely of people who use a fast-paced style, and another made up only of those who use a slow-paced style. Moreover, it would be interesting to observe both groups, as well as mixed groups, under different circumstances (both more formal and less formal). Finally, it would be preferable for any study carried out to be based on video-taped interaction, so that the nonverbal channels may be correlated with the verbal one. The present study is, however, a first step in the rendering concrete and comprehensible the elusive processes of conversational style.



## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Robin Lakoff alerted me to this perspective, by suggesting the continuum and observing the operating principle, "anyone to the right of me is rambunctious."

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