Invisible culture and cultural variation in language use:
Why language educators should care*

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ABSTRACT: In this essay I discuss theoretical and empirical evidence in order to characterize a relationship between culture and situated communicative behavior, especially in terms of the less obvious ways in which the conduct of talk-in-interaction is intrinsically connected to the participants' culturally learned ways of behaving. A brief intellectual history of key research traditions examining the connection between language and culture introduces the reader to the interactional sociolinguistic and microethnographic approaches to the question. Special attention is given to key concepts formulated by ethnographers of communication (ways of speaking, invisible culture, and communicative competence). These concepts have become instrumental for recent sociolinguistic research to be able to look for and describe — without necessarily having to address the mental states of participants— the apparently seamless connection between culture and language use in social interaction. Next a survey is presented of representative studies in some of the domains of invisible culture. Finally, I discuss why it should be of interest to language educators to reflect on issues related to the interface between culture and language use in the conduct of social interaction.

RESUMO: Neste ensaio discuto evidências teóricas e empíricas para

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*caracterizar uma relação entre cultura e comportamento comunicativo situado, considerando especialmente o modo como se dá a conexão entre a fala-na-interação e os modos de comportamento culturalmente adquiridos pelos participantes. Uma breve revisão histórica das principais tradições de pesquisa que examinam a ligação entre língua e cultura introduz o leitor à sociolingüística interacional e às abordagens microetnográficas relacionadas à questão. Atenção especial é dada aos conceitos chave formulados pelos etnógrafos da comunicação (*maneiras de falar*, cultura invisível *e* competência comunicativa*). Esses conceitos permitiram que a pesquisa sociolingüística recente buscasse e descrevesse — sem necessariamente ter que se preocupar com os estados mentais dos participantes — a conexão aparentemente perfeita entre cultura e uso da língua na interação social. Em seguida, faz-se um levantamento de estudos representativos em alguns dos domínios da cultura invisível. Finalmente, discutem-se as razões por que os professores de língua deveriam ter interesse em refletir sobre as questões que envolvem a interface entre cultura e uso da língua na condução da interação social.*

KEY WORDS: invisible culture, communicative competence, conversational analysis, pragmatics

PALAVRAS CHAVE: cultura ivisível, competência comunicativa, análise conversacional, pragmática.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE — APPROACHES TO EXAMINING THE CONNECTION

The social organization of human talk-in-interaction is the concern of a burgeoning field of inquiry which includes several traditions of sociolinguistic research in anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology (cf. Schiffrin, 1994; van Dijk, 1997). Among them, interactional sociolinguistics (Schiffrin, 1996; Tannen, 1992) and ethnographic microanalysis of interaction (Erickson, 1996; Garcez, in press) are especially interested in investigating cultural patterns in human communicative behavior in social interaction. This essay surveys some key empirical investigations within these and related theoretical

traditions —on what constitutes the links between culture and language use in social interaction— and offers a reflection on the significance of their findings to researchers and educators concerned with (what takes place through) situated language use in social interaction.

The *overt external relation* between a particular linguistic code — a discrete combinatorial system of sound-meaning relationships, often perceived as a complete and self-contained and bounded entity— and the particular culture to which it is tied can be an obvious one.[1] As the macrosociology of language informs us, an individual's language identity often defines his/her national or ethnic identity, for example, in ways that are quite conspicuous both to the speaker and to everyone else (cf. Fishman, 1993). In this sense, speakers are entirely aware that "their" language is a visible part of "their" culture.

Defining the *internal connection* between language as it is used in ordinary everyday life for communication and social interaction, and the user's culture, however, is a more elusive enterprise. When using language in interaction, participants to social interaction are usually concerned with the ends to which language is put, and only relatively aware that language is being used at all. As social interactants use language in real time, they become so involved in the complex processes of exchanging information and performing social actions, that —when asked— they may be unable to tell which linguistic code they were using (as described by Blom & Gumperz, 1972/1986). Spontaneous concerns about which aspects of their language behavior is particular to their culture are rare. Even when metalinguistic/communicative concerns are aroused, most cultural ways of speaking —often the very ones which are indispensable for successful communication— seem to lie beyond the limits of participants' controlled awareness. To social interactants, these ways of speaking are thus as invisible as the particular phonetic features that lie at the foundation of their linguistic codes.

In pondering about the less obvious ways in which the conduct of social interaction may be patterned in some respects that are subtly tied to the participants' learned ways of behaving, this essay will also advocate that having an understanding of how human communicative

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[1] Of course, this may or may not be true on strictly linguistic grounds (cf. Serbian and Croatian or Hindi and Urdu). In addition, as will become clear later in this discussion, clear cut distinctions between different idealized linguistic and cultural identities are hardly ever demonstrable in people's conduct of everyday talk-in-interaction.

interaction is socially organized and culturally patterned may be an important asset for language educators and students. Before doing that, however, the initial sessions below entertain questions regarding the sort of empirical evidence we should look for in order to determine to what extent, and in what domains, the organization of language use and communicative behavior in social interaction is culturally patterned, if at all. By reviewing how students of language and culture have examined the connection between these two constructs, I show that recent advances in our understanding of sociolinguistic relativity in the conduct of social interaction have been achieved by research that moved away from concerns with the relation between the structure of lexical categories of particular languages and the thought worlds of participants. The most fruitful contributions towards that end have been made by researchers choosing to concentrate, instead, on the observation and functional analysis of naturally occurring situated communicative behavior in everyday social interaction.[2] In an attempt to present an integrated picture of a small but representative selection of research findings about the cultural patterning of communicative behavior in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction, I hope to give a sense of why language educators should find such concerns and findings relevant to their task of studying and teaching language use in everyday life in a world where communicative encounters among socio-culturally dissimilar participants have become so common.

As professionals dealing with matters of language in education, where language, culture and society intersect in a number of complex ways, we must develop a working awareness of the centrality of interactional issues to our professional practice. We must consider the ways we and the members of the communities we work with pattern our/their communicative behavior in culturally learned ways that may affect the quality of our contacts and of the social products we co-

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[2] This in no way implies disinterest in the study of cognition. What is meant here, however, is simply that, to show that communicative behavior may be culturally patterned to a significant extent, we must not wait until cognitive scientists agree on the exact nature of thought and its mechanisms or wait until direct relations between thought and particular interactional behaviors can be univocally demonstrated. Further discussion of these issues lies outside the scope of this essay, but the reader is referred to studies of socially shared cognition (e.g., Resnick, Levine & Teasley, 1991) which highlight the interface between language and culture (cf. Wertsch, 1985) as key to an understanding of human cognitive development.

construct. This belief has sedimented during my work as a student of the apprenticeship of competent communicative practice in and through social interaction — who's been involved, for example, in research on how senior physicians instruct and correct medical residents interviewing, diagnosing and treating low-income ethnic-minority patients (Pomerantz, Ende & Erickson, 1997); and who's examined how students from similar backgrounds, working with the same materials but with different cultural models, construct computer-assisted language learning environments ranging from ideal to disastrous from a foreign language pedagogy standpoint (Garcez, 1995a). This belief is also a development of my reflections as a sociolinguist working at the intersection of language, culture and society — who's written about how Brazilians and the Portuguese may come to see the tiny discrepancies in their spelling norms as crucial banners of their national identities (Garcez, 1995b); about how the complex Brazilian system of address poses remarkable difficulties for the translation of original English dialogue into Brazilian Portuguese (Garcez, 1992), or yet about how Brazilian manufacturers and U.S. importers co-construct arguing sequences in business negotiations, how their stylistic organization of information for point-making may differ and how such differences may develop into miscommunication (Garcez, 1993, 1996).

However, it is primarily as a language educator —who's worked for more than a decade in the learning and teaching of EFL in Brazil and of PFL in the US— that I feel strongly about the profession having much to gain —as it progresses towards more culturally responsive and responsible pedagogies— by developing a central appreciation for cultural patterning in the organization of talk-in-interaction. Learning about the extent to which and the domains wherein the organization of talk-in-interaction can be culturally patterned, and then seeing the apparently invisible link between language and culture are the first steps in that trajectory.

Connections between language and culture are at times taken for granted as self-evident, and at other times they are dismissed lightly as unverifiable. There are at least two good reasons for that. One is that, when searching for evidence regarding the cultural patterning of communicative behavior, we are necessarily dealing with elusive evidence: Now you see it; Now you don't. To correct for that in order to see clearly through the haze of our socialized lenses to the world, we

must begin to look at our own cultural assumptions from the perspective of the other. In addition, we must try our best to see the other's cultural perspectives from their own viewpoint, that is, we must first engage in heuristic processes of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar before we begin to glimpse where culture materializes in the use of language in everyday life.

The second reason for taking for granted or for trivially dismissing a verifiable connection between language use and culture is that, until very recently, researchers had been looking for it in the wrong places and with inadequate conceptual tools. The fact that they were unable to produce clear empirical evidence to characterize the cultural patterning of communicative behavior did not in any way reduce the importance that such a phenomenon has to issues related to the organization of social interaction or to competent communicative performance (witness the problems in interpersonal and intercultural communication reported time and time again, and the ever increasing demand for counseling and consultancy services to remedy them). In fact, it might well be the case that current advances in our understanding of cultural patterning in the conduct of talk-in-interaction to be surveyed and discussed below have been brought about as a result of the circumstances of a world composed of communities that are increasingly heterogeneous, where multicultural contact is ubiquitous. In other words, recent historical developments may have helped researchers make the necessary progress in learning where and how to look for the evidence we need in order to establish the role of culture in the shaping of communicative behavior. It is to the evidence of that progress that we now turn.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

A traditional way of showing how language, from within itself, connects to the speakers' culture is to rely on a linguistic or literary analysis of lexicon. The idea is to tease out representative semantic elements claimed to be unique to a given language because they are believed to contain the synthesis of the users' cultural values. The assumption in this approach is that the existence of unique words or semantic elements in a particular language result from the community of

users' cultural need to codify them, and that these particularities, when contrasted across languages, reveal cultural diversity in language use. Wiersbicka (1991), for example, describes key Japanese words which embody "core values of the culture" (p. 333). She argues that, if we develop a "natural semantic metalanguage, based on lexical (and conceptual) universals and near-universals, we can achieve a greater precision and a greater clarity in the description and comparison of cultures" (p. 382). Based on this, it is not unusual for subsequent claims to be made about cultural variability in linguistic and interactional patterning by speculatively extending the semantic analysis of key lexemes to what they entail about language use in social interaction. Culturally-laden language-specific terms (such as Japanese *aizuchi*, for proper listening behavior, through which a recipient shows due attention to his/her interlocutor) serve as the basis for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons which are implicitly taken to be descriptive of the interactional conduct and communicative patterns of the communities involved.[3]

Such attempts to discuss the interface between language and culture can be informative about particular languages and their respective cultures. However, they offer limited contributions to our understanding of how individuals use language in culturally appropriate ways, among many reasons, because they are based on a static view of the linguistic code.[4] By concentrating on open-class lexemes, the archetypal linguistic symbols which can be manipulated extemporaneously and outside a situated context of use (e.g., in dictionaries), these studies can afford to carry out decontextualized analyses of language and culture as neatly matching, coterminous aggregates, in ways that students of language use in social interaction cannot. In addition, they are based on a view of culture as necessarily mapping over language —one which identifies native-speaker with member of the culture, and non-native speaker with ignorant outsider— a position which is hardly tenable in view of most interactional encounters in the contemporary world (cf. Gumperz, 1982, p. 29;

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[3] For talk-interactional views on and discussion of these same issues, see, for example, Miller (1991, 1994), and Moermann (1996, pp. 156-157).

[4] One could also point out that they go against the generally accepted methodological practice among anthropologists and linguists of comparing systems or equivalent items among them rather than individual and isolated items across systems.

Erickson, 1997; Rajagopalan, 1997). For these reasons, research on language and culture that is based on lexico-semantic analyses has more to say about how a language's lexicon can illustrate generic tendencies in the cultural values of its users than about the cultural patterning of communicative behavior in everyday interaction.

The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis

The linguistic relativity hypothesis, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, is perhaps the most forthright unified attempt to argue for a connection between language and culture via thought. It posits that different languages (or language structures) influence the thought, and thus the culture, of those who speak them. Building on Boas's and Sapir's descriptive and comparative work showing considerable variation in the way European and Native North American languages implicitly represented and classified experience, or perceived reality, Whorf sought "to show how specific, often minor, differences in such classifications could cumulatively signal quite general, often major, underlying differences in fundamental approach to the linguistic representation of reality — what he came to call different 'fashions of speaking'" (Lucy, 1992a, p. 31). These fashions of speaking are seen as reinforcing particular behaviors in detriment of others, thus language would influence culture "via its effect on the habitual thought world of speakers" (Lucy, 1992a, p. 63).

Taking a grass field as an analogy to referencing the world, individuals acquiring their native language would be treading on particular paths through the field as suggested by the structure of their language, thus forming trails which become deeper and deeper over time, so that eventually the speaker of that language finds it hard to see other paths as possible ways through the field. According to Whorf (1956, p. 22, cited in Lucy, 1992a, p. 38), the linguistic relativity principle means that

> Users of markedly different grammars are pointed by the grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world.

In sum, Whorf believed in the existence of a connection between

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linguistic patterns and culturally appropriate behavior mediated through habitual thought. The critical question, according to Lucy (1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1996) in his attempt to re-conceptualize the hypothesis in contemporary language studies, is "whether there is or can be solid empirical evidence linking distinctive language patterns to distinctive habitual behavior or belief at the level of aggregable individual social actors" (1992a, p. 7).

While Lucy claims such evidence can be gathered if appropriate research methodology begins to be used, the fact is that Whorf's hypothesis has not been clearly demonstrated empirically. This may be due to two controversial assumptions at its foundations. The first one, namely that thought is dependent on language, has been severely criticized on various psycholinguistic grounds in mentalist accounts of language that are dominant in linguistics (cf. Pinker, 1994, pp. 59-64). No reliable data showing a clear-cut relationship between language and thought has been produced, even if we assume the two terms actually refer to objectively circumscribable phenomena. When it comes to the cultural patterning of communicative behavior within the realm of language use in everyday interaction, then, things become even more difficult, since there are no reliable and falsifiable ways of determining what someone is thinking as s/he performs the actions that compose everyday experience, that is, as s/he is "doing 'being ordinary'" (Sacks, 1984b).

The second problematic assumption underlying the linguistic relativity hypothesis is that of cultural homogeneity among speakers of a language. As Gumperz (1982a) points out, Sapir and Whorf conceptualized "cultural distinctions as distinctions among functionally integrated, internally homogeneous systems" (p. 14), and seemed to trust that culture was capable of being systematized and confined within formal limits just as they and other structuralist linguists had so successfully done with the sub-systems of language structure. Following from this, as Gumperz (1982a) writes,

> In spite of considerable ethnographic and experimental research, no generally accepted methodology has emerged which enables us to utilize the early structuralists' insights into constraints on perception in the study of everyday interaction. Stimulating as it often is, work on language and culture remains speculative, relying on the mere description of parallels among independently determined linguistic and

> cultural characteristics of particular groups. The processes which give rise to these parallels and which condition their social effect have so far eluded systematic investigation. (p. 15)

Nevertheless, the linguistic relativity hypothesis in and of itself does offer us some interesting insights as a backdrop in our conceptualization of language and culture in situations of intercultural contact, especially those involving non-native-speakers of a language variety. For example, if in fact our *Weltanshauung* is shaped by our first languages as Sapir, Whorf and Lucy claim it is, we would expect to find at least some of that to carry over into our performance as second language-variety speakers. This in turn invites a number of questions, about which we can only speculate at this point, regarding how these worldviews surface in social interaction, or what happens in situations of language shift, that is, when a cultural group adopts a new language (e.g., to what extent does the new language replace the *Weltanshauung* set by the previous language?). Empirical research influenced by Lucy's reformulated paradigm of linguistic relativism and by Vygotskyan socio-interactive theories of language may help shed light on these issues and bring the relativity principle back to a central position in language studies. Some of the contributions in the recent edited volume by Gumperz and Levinson (1996a) make a case for that, but they also point out that the cultural patterning of human communicative behavior is most fruitfully inspectable at the level of situated and contexted interaction — and not simply at the level of context-free lexical and grammatical meaning. Gumperz and Levinson (1996b) point out that "utterances can carry with them, or project, the context in which they should be interpreted. These are subtle, culture-specific, processes, learnt within the social networks that utilize them" (pp. 8-9). In other words, instead of linguistic relativity, *sociolinguistic relativity* may be a more tenable principle to demonstrate, one which can be inspected without concerns with the thought worlds of speaker/listeners, and which has direct purchase on questions of everyday social interaction. The following sections discuss these such processes. First, however, let us briefly examine two research traditions that have been concerned with revealing them.

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Hymes' Concept of Ways of Speaking *and The Ethnography of Communication*

Despite the paucity of empirical studies it engendered (cf. Lucy, 1996, pp. 41-42), the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis contributed in subtle but decisive ways to later developments in the ethnography of communication regarding the connection between language use and culture. Hymes (1986/1972), for example, writes of his debt to Whorf in developing his own concept of *ways of speaking*, which is crucial to our realization that, in order to understand sociolinguistic diversity across cultures, we need to study naturally occurring language spoken in context, (i.e., situated communicative behavior).[5]

The essential contrast in scope of reference between Whorf's original claims and Hymes' build-up on them, as Lucy (1992a) points out,[6] however, is that while Whorf

> is concerned with the implications of differences in linguistic structure for "experience and behavior" (language structure --> culture), ... Hymes is interested in "differences in cultural pattern" for "the use of language" (culture --> language use). Hymes places this shift of emphasis in historical perspective and lays out the range of possible interactions of structure and use, uniformity and diversity, both within and across cultural patterns. (p. 106)

In other words, Hymes makes use of Whorf's insights about linguistic structure and culture within the frame of a homogeneous set of system relations (homogeneous linguistic code and homogenous culture among speakers) to propose a new research paradigm capable of investigating the cultural aspects of language as it is used in everyday life by different communities in the real world, where homogeneity among actors in a system is the exception rather than the rule, and where the boundaries between what constitutes a language or a culture are

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[5] In Hymes's (1974/1986) own words:

> Since Whorf was the first in the American linguistic and anthropological tradition, so far as I know, to name a mode of organization of linguistic means cutting across the compartments of grammar, it is good to honor his precedence, while letting the difference in terms reflect the difference in scope of reference. (p. 446)

[6] On this, see also Gumperz and Levinson (1996c, p. 29), and Lucy (1996, pp. 52-54).

much less clearly drawn than in ideal models (see Erickson, 1997, on culture, and Rajagopalan, 1997, on language).

Work subsequently developed within the Hymesian tradition of the ethnography of communication has been fundamental in shaping our understanding of speech as the central component of crucial events in social life, and in establishing the importance of these *speech events* to social organization. Of direct empirical relevance to the debate about the connection between language and culture were the ethnographies of communication (cf. the contributions in Bauman & Sherzer, 1989/1974; as well as those in Gumperz & Hymes, 1986/1972) which showed that language-created activities can be differently organized from community to community in a variety of domains along Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING mnemonic (p. 61).

In addition, ethnographers of communication have contributed to the study of sociolinguistic diversity through their introduction and refinement of the concepts of *speech community*, "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (Hymes, 1986/1972, p. 54), and of *communicative competence*, "the tacit social, psychological, cultural, and linguistic knowledge governing appropriate use of language (including, but not limited to, grammar)" (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 8). These concepts have been instrumental in establishing, together with advances in linguistic pragmatics and ethnomethodological conversation analysis, that language use is not chaotic, but patterned in both similar and different ways from the combinatorial organization of the linguistic code itself (cf. Gumperz, 1982a, p. 155). In addition, they have provided guidelines for the study of the role of shared culture in human communication by allowing us to take theoretical account of the empirical fact that distinct communities will make different interactional uses of similar or even identical resources offered by context and the linguistic code(s), and that different individual speakers may have different degrees of familiarity with the communicative traditions of their community. In sum, in relation to previous and alternative traditions, a more complex notion of culture and of its relation to talk-in-interaction is implied by these terms, one that is much more compatible with the needs of students of language and culture in social interaction as they attempt to describe what is cultural in the activities of actual, flesh-and-bone individuals talking to one another (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992;

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van Dijk, 1997). In a broader conceptual sense, then, the ethnography of communication's deliberate focus on *language use* expanded the definition of language, and this has proved to be key to finding the levels of sociolinguistic analysis that make the connections between talk-in-interaction and culture evident and visible.

As Bauman and Sherzer (1989/1974) pointed out, "language use does not occur in isolated sentences, but in natural units of speaking; stated abstractly: speech acts, events, and situations; stated more concretely; greetings, leave-takings, narratives, conversations, jokes, curing chants, or periods of silence" (p. 9). However, until very recently, as Hymes (1974) showed us, language studies had traditionally defined language almost exclusively in terms of its elementary *referential* function.[7] Hymes called the attention to the equally important but nevertheless neglected second "broad type of elementary function." He argued that "languages have conventional features, elements and relations serving referential ('propositional,' 'ideational,' etc.) meaning, and they [also] have conventional features, elements and relations that are stylistic, *serving social meaning*" (p. 146, emphasis added).

Elsewhere, Hymes (1989/1974) drew another important distinction between the *structural functions* and the *use functions* of speech:

> 'Structural' functions have to do with the bases of verbal features and their organization, the relations among them, in short, with the verbal means of speech, and their conventional meanings, insofar as those are given by such relationships. 'Use' functions have to do with the organization and meaning of verbal features in terms of nonlinguistic contexts. The two are interdependent, but it is useful to discriminate between them. (p. 439)

It is useful to discriminate between them because, to be able to deal with the way humans use language for communication and in social interaction, it is necessary to examine language *in* use during social interaction, that is, when language and context are mutually influential to the participants' construction of meaning and action, as is the case in face-to-face encounters, the basic setting from which all forms of

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[7] Silverstein (1976) concurs with this point when he writes that "it is this referential function of speech, and its characteristic sign mode, the semantico-referential sign [i.e., the symbol], that has formed the basis for linguistic theory and linguistic analysis in the Western tradition" (p. 14).

language use are derived (cf. Clark, 1996). This in turn entails that the structural or functional notions of language that privilege only the abstract, self-contained linguistic code have to be expanded if we want to account for those aspects of social interaction which are not (only) referential, but which are produced in real time by actual participants in interaction making use of grammatical *and* contextual resources (cf. Goodwin, 1981).

In calling attention to these distinctions, Hymes and his followers therefore indicated that examining what is cultural in verbal forms of social interaction requires us to move beyond linguistic analysis, even if our focus is to find what is cultural *in* language behavior. We must look at the levels of discourse where language and social context are used in the creation of meaning and action, for it is by looking within this complex and often neglected aspect of language involving the deployment of indexical signs that we find the otherwise invisible intersection between language behavior and culture.[8] Despite all this, however, ethnographers of communication themselves did not, as a rule, look at interactional detail in this way. Nevertheless, what they did was

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[8] Mertz (1985) draws attention to the reductive tendency in anthropological language studies, inherited from structural linguistics, of circumscribing the sign to only one of its types (i.e., the symbol), in what she framed as the ideological slant in language studies towards an almost exclusive concentration of interest on the symbol — the least context-dependent of signs. "The symbol," she argues, "is the sign that best exemplifies decontextualized semantic meaning. The index, in contrast, relies for meaning upon contextual factors" (p. 2). Mertz thus called for a more comprehensive approach "characterized by careful attention to the distinct ways in which signs have meaning, and, more particularly, to the different ways in which signs mediate" (p. 1), and with special emphasis on the role of social context. The fact that the syntactico-semantic component of reference is not self-sufficient, she adds, is what many fail to realize. In fact, Gumperz (e.g., 1982a, 1982b, 1992a, 1992b), the main proponent of interactional sociolinguistics, has long heeded this theoretical concern when discussing discourse strategies and the signaling of sociocultural identity in conversation. He refers directly to indexicality in defining fundamental concepts within his work:

> Sociolinguistic variables are themselves constitutive of social reality and can be treated as part of a more general class of *indexical signs* [emphasis added] which guide and channel the interpretation of intent. (1982a, p. vii)

> By *contextualization cues* I refer to those verbal signs that are *indexically associated* [emphasis added] with specific classes of communicative activity types and thus signal the frame of context for the interpretation of constituent messages. (1992b, p. 307)

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pave the way to later studies in interactional sociolinguistics, for example, in which greater, more careful attention gets paid to context-dependent aspects of language used in the co-construction of meaning and action.

Confirming this bridge connecting the ethnography of communication to interactional sociolinguistics, Bauman and Sherzer (1989) point out —in an appraisal of the impact of their *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking* fifteen years after its original publication— that comparative work in this tradition has gone beyond its borders to inform "a line of study devoted to the patterns and functions of speaking in cross-cultural encounters in multilingual speech communities, where culturally different ways of speaking are brought together" (p. xiv). They argue that the pioneering efforts of the ethnography of communication to extend "the study of language beyond lexicon and grammar" have been taken a step further by students of cross-cultural and interethnic communication in interactional sociolinguistics, such as John Gumperz and Frederick Erickson. Interactional sociolinguistic research has succeeded in fruitfully extending "the study of language contact beyond traditional investigations that focus on language difference alone" through its constant effort to produce claims about the nature of intercultural interaction that are firmly based on an "understanding of speaking in the respective groups from which participants in the contact situation are drawn and of the emergent system that organizes speaking in the contact situation" (Bauman & Sherzer, 1989, p. xiv).

According to this view, language use can be understood as referring to situations whereby humans interact face to face or over the telephone to produce situated discourse. This is compatible with what Goodwin and Duranti (1992) mean when they write that language may be seen "as an interactive phenomenon," in which "context and talk ... stand in a mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk, and the interpretive work it generates, shaping context as much as context shapes talk" (p. 31). These authors share the research agenda presented next when they say that

> Treating human interaction as a central context for speech provides an expanded view of language, one that ties the production of talk to systematic social organization. ... Face-to-face interaction thus provides an opportunity to analyze language, culture and social organization as integrated components of *a single system of action*.

INVISIBLE CULTURE

Interactional Sociolinguistics

The comparative study of language use in situations of intercultural contact alluded to by Bauman and Sherzer (1989), and which takes language, culture and social organization as components of a single system of action as Goodwin and Duranti (1992) describe it, has been developed within the realm of interactional sociolinguistics, "a major field of research at the intersection of linguistics and anthropology" (Tannen, 1992, p. 12). According to Tannen (1992), interactional sociolinguistic work "frequently identifies discourse strategies as associated with culturally identifiable speakers and examines the effects of interaction of the differing strategies of culturally different speakers" (p. 12). Influenced by Erving Goffman's work on "the interactional order," by the ethnography of communication as well as by linguistic discourse analysis and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (cf. Gumperz, 1982a, pp. 154-160), research in this evolving tradition has provided us with insightful theoretical concepts as well as solid ethnographic evidence about the role of culture and society in people's use of language and context in their co-construction of experience in social interaction.

Gumperz's (1982a) seminal conceptualizations of contextualization conventions and sociocultural background in conversational inference (the discussion of which falls outside the scope of this essay) can perhaps best be summarized by an attention to *invisible culture*, to use Philips's (1983) apt turn of phrase in the title of her major work on culture-specific ways of using language in social interaction by Native North-American Indian speakers of English. She explains the use of the metaphor on the basis that "communicative patterns lack the tangible visible quality of houses, clothing, and tools, so that it is less easy to recognize their existence as culturally distinct phenomena" (p. 12). Moreover, she described the purpose of her ground-breaking study among Native North-Americans as an exploration "in an open-ended fashion [of] the ways in which Warm Springs Indians' use of language was culturally distinctive" (p. 13). An important feature of the people she studied was that they were native speakers of English, which allowed her to study "cultural differences in language use that could be separated

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from the structure of the language itself" (p. 14). Among others, Erickson and Mohatt (1982) have also made use of this felicitous phrase, and of other similar phrases such as *implicit culture* and *silent language* (Hall, 1959), to refer to those aspects of a cultural tradition which are part and parcel of a group's etiquette for the production of situated discourse, those "specific aspects of everyday social life that are culturally patterned in ways that are outside the conscious awareness of the people who act out the patterns" (p. 136; see also Erickson, 1990, pp. 27-29).

Microethnographers of social interaction, like Erickson and Shultz (1982), provide systematic empirical evidence of the way invisible culture operates through language use. Their methodology has been referred by Gumperz (1982a, p. 134) as the ideal discovery method to identify the indirect ways in which contextualization cues function in interaction. The theoretical stance Erickson and Shultz took in their major work on the organization of social interaction in gatekeeping encounters (1982) is also representative of studies in interactional sociolinguistics:

> We have assumed that cooperation in conversation is a human universal. How the cooperation is done, however, may vary from one human group to the next, depending upon the cultural standards of appropriateness and effectiveness in the conduct of interaction that are shared within a given human group. (p. 99)

The contribution of interactional sociolinguists and microethnographers of social interaction has been the most directly relevant to the accumulation of evidence about sociolinguistic diversity in the conduct of face-to-face interaction. This will be evident in the discussion of key studies in the following sections, which address the questions posed at the beginning of this essay regarding the domains and the extent to which communicative behavior may be culturally patterned in social interaction.

DOMAINS OF CULTURAL VARIATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SITUATED DISCOURSE

Research work by sociolinguistic ethnographers of

communication, interactional sociolinguists and, to a lesser extent, conversation analysts, has made invisible culture in communicative behavior at least partially visible. Different researchers have systematized in different ways the domains of cross-cultural variation in the communicative behavior of participants in social interaction.

Scollon and Scollon (1983) classify "four aspects of discourse" (p. 161) involved in the production of culturally specific communicative styles: distribution of talk; turn exchange; topic control and information structure; and frames, schemata, and scripts, to which they add another, the presentation of self (politeness systems; taciturnity and volubility).

Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) offer a three-tiered typology on the "perspectives in the realization of communicative tasks" (p. 12) which involve

(1)   Different cultural assumptions about the situation and about appropriate behavior and intentions within it.

(2)   Different ways of structuring information or an argument in a conversation.

(3)   Different ways of speaking: the use of a different set of unconscious linguistic conventions (such as tone of voice) to emphasize, to signal logical conventions and to indicate the significance of what is being said in terms of overall meaning and attitudes. (p. 12)

In her work on the pragmatics of cross-cultural communication, Tannen (1984b) identifies several "levels of communication differences" (p. 189) among participants in intercultural encounters: when to talk; what to say; pacing and pausing; listenership; intonation; formulaicity; indirectness; cohesion and coherence.

These alternative taxonomies result from the difficulty in designing didactic classifications of phenomena which are in dynamic mutual relationships during the actual production of situated discourse. The item "prosody" exemplifies this difficulty. Some researchers subsume it under larger concepts such as *information structure* (Scollon & Scollon, 1983), while others refer to it as a separate level (Gumperz, 1982a), and yet others break it down to more specific elements such as intonation and listening (Tannen, 1984b). The fact, however, is that prosodic elements are involved in almost every aspect of the production of invisibly cultural forms of situated discourse, as the following overview of key studies in the area confirms.

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Overview of Representative Studies

The classifications presented above and others (e.g., Gumperz, 1992a, p. 231; Tannen, 1984a) are adapted in the following overview of studies on invisible culture in the production of situated discourse. This overview is not meant to be exhaustive in any sense, given the number of studies which have been produced in the last 30 years. It is a representative overview, if not exactly a comprehensive one, since some aspects of crucial interactional importance such as gaze and gesture, for example, are only discussed in passing. The aim of the following sections is to provide a panoramic view of the wealth of empirical evidence that has been collected and analyzed about the otherwise invisible ways in which culture enters into the contextual and linguistic processes involved in human communicative and social interaction.

When and How Much to Talk — Silence and Participation Structures

An important part of one's communicative competence, as parents keep reminding their children in many cultures, is to know when it is appropriate to talk and when it is time to keep silent. We now have strong evidence that this particular aspect of communicative etiquette may vary considerably across speech communities.

Sociolinguistic differences in the way silence is perceived by different groups has been greatly influenced by ethnographic work in Native North-American communities. Basso (1972) showed that "the critical factor in the Apache's decision to speak or keep silent seems always to be the nature of his[/her] relationship to other people" (p. 71). That is to say that, in situations where the participants' roles and identities are or have become uncertain, it is proper not to engage in conversation. Silence is therefore expected when meeting strangers (including close relatives who have been away for long periods of time), during the initial stages of courtship, when being addressed by enraged individuals who "have forgotten who they really are," as well as when sharing grief, or during ritual curing ceremonies.

A poignant contrast between this perception and these uses of silence versus those of Western cultures, for example, is what typically takes place in cocktail parties, or when children come home after

extended periods of absence such as when returning from a long trip or from college. Whereas in some cultures (e.g., mainstream Brazilian) exuberant verbal greetings and mutual demands for reports would immediately ensue, Basso describes as follows the typical pattern for Apache adults greeting their children returning from boarding school:

> It is not unusual for parents and child to go without speaking for as long as fifteen minutes. When the silence is broken, it is almost always the child who breaks it. His[/her] parents listen attentively to everything [s/]he says, but speak hardly at all themselves. This pattern persists even after the family has reached the privacy of its camp and two or three days may pass before the child's parents seek to engage him[/her] in sustained conversation. (p. 75)

Scollon and Scollon (1991) also report similar findings in their analyses of intercultural contact between Anglos and Athabaskans in Alaska and Canada. Looking at the different patterns of volubility and taciturnity from the perspective of presentation of self, the Scollons summarize the problems of this particular interethnic contact as follows:

> For English speakers, volubility is related to social distance and taciturnity to intimacy. For Athabaskans the relationship is the reverse, with volubility possible only in contexts of intimacy where there is no threat to the speaker's view of himself or the world. Since by far the greatest number of contacts between Athabaskans and English speakers happen in semi-formal business, medical, legal or educational contexts, it is not surprising that the English preference is for a lot of talking and the Athabaskan preference is for a reserved amount of talking. (pp. 263-264) [9]

Another important issue regarding when to talk has to do with participation structures in conversation and other sorts of verbal interaction. Participation structures refer to the participants' rights and duties vis-à-vis each other regarding who talks when. Based on her study of interaction in the Warms Springs reservation in Oregon, Philips (1976) came to challenge some implicit claims regarding the universality

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[9] Cavalcanti (1991, 1996) reports similar findings in her study of classroom interaction in an adult education Guarani Indian context in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. See also Mendes (1996).

of the simplest systematics for conversation in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) seminal work in ethnomethodological conversation analysis.

Of interest here is the concept of adjacency pair in conversation analysis, which predicts that when a speaker produces a first turn such as a question or greeting, his/her addressed recipient is constrained to make the next conversational move by subsequently producing a particularly appropriate next turn (i.e., an answer to the question or a response to the greeting). Philips (1976) found that this did not hold in the case of the speech community she studied. Invitations, for example, do not have to be responded to right after they are issued among Warm Springs residents. Showing up or not at the relevant time and place suffices. She provided additional evidence for the non-constraining character of questions in this community by describing topic development in a public meeting in which answers were given to questions that had been asked many minutes before. Philips (1976) thus concludes that

> Indian speakers ... have more control over *when* they will speak (especially about specific topics) because immediate response is not obligatory to the degree that it is with Anglos. Speakers, then, do not set up or determine who will speak next in the way that Anglos do. (p. 93)

Philips (1976) also argued that the "one-speaker-at-a-time" conversation analytic model of conversation was not appropriately descriptive of the conduct of conversation among the Warm Springs, where often "more than one person speaks at a time" (p. 94).

Shultz, Florio and Erickson (1982) looked in more detail at multiple-speaker participant structures in a microethnographic study of Italian-American children at home and at school, and analyzed participation structures during dinnertable conversation in the household and during math lessons at school. They found that, while both interactional environments supported various types of participant structures, these different interactional arrangements and their constitutive phases were not functionally equivalent in both settings. In addition, multiple-floor participant structure were much more common in the Italian-American home than in the classroom. This created difficulties in interaction between the children and their non-Italian-American teacher. As the authors put it, "a situation at home in which

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more than one conversation is allowed may turn out to be a situation in the classroom in which only one conversation with the teacher as the focus is the norm" (p. 118). As a result, these Italian-American children had to learn that "'chiming in' as secondary speaker/attenders while a dialogue was being conducted during a lesson by two primary speaker/attenders" (p. 113) was inappropriate communicative behavior in the classroom. Not learning that, in addition to creating interactional management difficulties for the teacher, resulted in judgments of communicative incompetence and interactional immaturity, judgments which, cumulatively, may have lifetime consequences to a child's educational career towards or away from social opportunity.

Philips (1972) had also examined similar issues when she looked at Warm Springs children in school classrooms with white teachers. She observed that the Indian children were less willing "to perform or participate verbally when they must speak alone or in front of other students" (p. 380), and were less inclined to speak when the teacher designated the moment for the student's contribution. In general, these children were reluctant "to be placed in the 'leadership' play roles that require them to assume the same type of dictation of the acts of their peers" (p. 380). Philips contrasts that to the way social activities are conducted among the Warm Springs and to which the children are exposed. According to her report, these activities are mostly communal and open to all residents so that no single individual conducts the activities and so that individuals can choose for themselves when and how actively to participate.

Erickson and Mohatt (1982) later found remarkably similar attitudes towards control of the actions of others among Odawa Native Americans in Canada. In their analysis of two classrooms of Indian students, one taught by a native Odawan, and another taught by an Anglo, they encountered two different interactional patterns:

> Teacher I's strategies involved proceeding fairly slowly and deliberately, exerting control over the whole class at once, not singling out individuals in the total classroom group, yet singling out and calling by name those children in the more immediate, more "private" reading group. Teacher II moved more rapidly and moved around the whole room, gave directions to the total classroom group and the small reading group at the same time, and kept control of the public arena of the whole classroom scene, calling out directions to individual children

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across the room and over the other children's heads. (p. 151)

In addition, they point out that, in contrast to the typical classroom discourse pattern described by discourse analysts in both the US and the UK, the Native American teacher they observed avoided explicit directives or evaluations of the correctness of student answers. Thus individual students are not put on the spotlight of attention as in European-tradition classrooms. Erickson and Mohatt conclude that "the avoidance of direct and overt social control in situations where such exercise of control over others would be regarded as entirely appropriate and natural by non-Indians" (p. 165) was central to the interactional etiquette of members of this Native American community.

An interesting additional aspect of Erickson and Mohatt's work is that they reflected on their findings together with the members of the Odawan community they studied. The Odawan —one of the first groups to be contacted by European Christian missionaries— had long shifted away from their ancestral language for most practical activities in everyday life. They were thus interested in what the researchers had found to be particularly "Indian" about them. They were surprised and happy to see there was significant invisible Odawan culture left in their conduct of everyday life.

The studies reported above, therefore, present considerable evidence that the organization of participant structures, the degree of control which speakers may have over their recipients' next moves, as well as the role of silence in interaction, all vary in significant ways across speech communities. They also show that diversity in cultural patterning of communicative behavior may exist among speech communities regardless of their common membership in the same linguistic community.

Topic Initiation

Studies in cross-cultural communication have shown that introducing conversational topics may be accomplished in various ways. Scollon and Scollon (1983), for instance, have challenged the universality of the mainstream North-American pattern of topic initiation presented by conversation analysis in interactional openings (e.g., answering phone calls or opening the door after somebody knocked).

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The North-American pattern follows a Participant 1: call / Participant 2: answer / Participant 1: topic initiation format. In other words, it is up to P1, the first participant doing the calling, to introduce the first topic (e.g., P1: ring / P2: hello / P1: hello + topic, e.g., reason for call). Scollon and Scollon (1983, 1991) report that Northern Athabaskans use a radically different pattern in which the call itself constrains the answerer to introduce the topic [the typical call being P1: (ring) + What are you thinking?]. Thus they report that, following conversation openings between mainstream North-American and Northern Athabaskan speakers of English, "there is often a great deal of confusion about whose topic is the legitimate topic" (p. 115). They describe problems as arising in one of two ways:

> If the Athabaskan begins the conversation with a call, he or she will assume the English speaker will introduce the topic. That person, however, assumes the opposite: the Athabaskan has issued a call and therefore should introduce the topic. ... and the conversation drifts on in a topical vacuum with each speaker politely waiting for the other to bring in the major topic.

> In the converse case where the English speaker begins the conversation, he or she expects to be able to introduce the topic. Unfortunately, the Athabaskan may assume because the other speaker has started the conversation it is his or her responsibility to introduce the topic. (Scollon & Scollon, 1991, p. 115)

Along similar lines,[10] Godard (1977) discussed the differences in telephone call openings in the US and in France and found differences both in the order in which the actions get done and in the content of call openings when the person answering the phone is not the intended party. She presents the proper etiquette for such phone calls in France in the form that children are instructed to make them as follows:

(1)   Check number
(2)   Excuse yourself
(3)   Name yourself

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[10] For a brief review of additional such studies in other languages and cultures, and a particular discussion of the same questions discussed here in light of Taiwanese data, see Hopper and Chen (1996).

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(4)   Ask for your friend. (p. 212)

In the US, steps 1 and 2 are optional and step 3 is usually absent. Godard adds that when the caller is familiar with the unintended person answering the phone, before asking for the intended party to come to the phone, it is *de rigueur* to converse a little bit with the answerer. Godard herself, as a French speaker, found this small talk shockingly absent in the US when people who knew her called her house to speak to somebody else. She thus concluded that in the United States telephone conversational openings are more direct and, more controversially, that attending to telephone calls is assumed to take precedence over the addressee's current activities, "all indications that in this society the caller has the right to make what use [s]he desires of this efficient means of communication" (p. 219).

In Scollon and Scollon's (1991) study of English-Asian discourse, that is, conversations in English between Westerners and native speakers of Chinese, Korean and Japanese, they have focused on topic initiation by Asian speakers of ESL. The differences they found in Western and Asian ways of initiating topics in conversation tends to cause confusion on what the topic is. This is not exactly because the order of elements creates a different pattern, but because Asian deference strategies make Asian speakers prefer to delay the introduction of the first substantive topic until after a long period of small talk. Scollon and Scollon (1991) call this pattern inductive: "A chained series of lesser, non-binding topics are broached, not for their importance, but as hints or as preparation for the conclusion in the main topic at the end" (p. 116). The Asian pattern therefore follows a "call-answer-facework-(topic)" format.

These conflicting expectations will cause confusion for the Westerner interacting with an Asian ESL speaker about what is being talked about. In addition, the Westerner will tend to be concerned with making sense of the initial topical elements whereas the Asian participant will be concerned with the details of what gets talked about once they have moved into the substantive topic later in the conversation. However, by the time they reach this stage, the Westerner is often not aware that a substantive topic has been introduced.

What to Say — Topic Management

As with topic initiation in the studies discussed above, some aspects of topic management and development have also been found to

vary in different speech communities. Erickson and Rittenberg (1987), for example, have described topic control by Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs) during interviews with US patients. The tendency for US doctors, they argue, is to share topic control with their patients by letting them present complaints in narrative while showing attention through conversational listening behavior. Only later will the doctor engage in probing, dismissing, and requesting information. The US physician is thus able to create the impression that the (US North-American) societal ideal of equality is being achieved in what in fact is an encounter of marked power asymmetry. Erickson and Rittenberg (1987) then show that the FMGs they studied, who were originally from Eastern European and Asian countries, did not share this societal ideal, and thus failed to uphold this principle: "they tend to avoid giving patients opportunities to articulate concerns. The FMGs also tend to close off patients fairly abruptly once they have begun to tell their story" (p. 405). As a result, the North-American patients were not given the opportunity, or the right as they would probably see it, to express their concerns, and came away from the interview frustrated and with the impression that the physician was arrogant.

Erickson and Rittenberg (1987) conclude that, even if the FMGs are intent on becoming communicatively competent, it is extremely difficult for them to acquire second-culture communicative competence because "it involves learning to recognize patterns invisible to reflection in normal practice" (p. 414). They also add an interesting point to their discussion by saying that, while their study is an exercise in sociolinguistic microanalysis, it can also be seen as societal macroanalysis. In this case, interactional sociolinguistics is not simply "study at the interface between the social order and speaking. It is also the study of the dialectics of social order, since that order is at once creating forms of talk and being created in the talking" (p. 415).

This remark also seems to apply to the work of Besnier (1989) on information withholding strategies among the native Nukulaelae of Polynesia. Besnier (1989) discusses a culture-specific conversation strategy that is directly tied to the speakers' sociocultural organization. According to him, the fact that this culture strongly discourages attempts to guess what is going through somebody else's mind has created special conditions for repair-initiation and the construction of gossip in conversation.

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> In a word search, for example, Nukulaelae conversationalists rarely try to supply possible candidates for the word; rather, they leave it to the initiator of the search to find the candidate and limit their own contributions to questions that aid the searching process. (p. 324)

The contrasting pattern in North-American conversation, for instance, is one in which speakers can count on their interlocutors to make explicit guesses regarding the identity of some problematic material in forgetfulness sequences, for example. The constraint on such conversational practices among the Nukulaelae has important consequences to the way gossip gets conducted among these islanders (for whom gossip is especially important, given their peculiar logistic arrangements as inhabitants of a crowded, small isolated atoll with ample opportunity for constant mutual monitoring).

Since in this culture a gossip initiator can be confident that his/her interlocutor will not try to issue a guess about a possible repairable item, s/he will withhold part of the information in the gossip piece (e.g., by using unrecoverable deictics "I saw uh <pause> someone doing uh whatchamacallit?"), thus creating the impression that s/he is not being clear, and therefore ensuring that his/her audience is attentive and collusive to the gossip piece that follows. Besnier summarizes these information withholding sequences as three-turn sequences whereby a piece of information is withheld in the first turn, other-repair is initiated in the second turn, signaling readiness for gossip recipiency, and the withheld material is provided in a third turn.[11]

Cohesion and Coherence

Aspects of rhetorical organization in talk in interaction are often referred to as issues of cohesion and coherence. Tannen (1984b) has defined cohesion as "surface level ties showing relationships among elements in discourse, and coherence as organizing structure making the words and sentences into a unified discourse that has cultural significance" (p. 194). Implicit in this very definition is the notion that

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[11] Besnier's work shows how ethnomethodological conversation analysis can identify rather fine sociological details of interactional etiquette, the small pieces in "the machinery" of talk-in-interaction (Sacks, 1984a, p. 27), and how they may be quite clearly connected to the participants' culturally learned ways of organizing communicative behavior.

participants must share a common interpretive system for those surface level marks to produce an intelligible global picture if a stretch of discourse is to be coherent. However, cohesion and coherence systems may vary in many invisible ways across speech communities, as Gumperz and his students have amply demonstrated.

Gumperz (1982b) explains that "coherence judgments are matters of conversational inference, which like grammatical rules involve automatic processes not readily subject to conscious control. Yet interpretation at this level of discourse is subject to a far greater degree of optionality than grammatical judgments" (p. 178). Gumperz, Aulakh and Kaltman (1982) add that, to achieve coherence, conversationalists must jointly construct

> (1) what is the main part of a message and what is subsidiary or qualifying information, (2) what knowledge or attitudes are assumed to be shared, (3) what information is old and what is new, and (4) what is the speaker's point of view and his/her relationship or degree of involvement in what is being said. In other words, an utterance to be understood must be contextualized — this sort of information must be signaled in such a way as to fit into the goals and expectations of participants. (pp. 28-29)[12]

They thus show, through analyses of recordings of natural conversations of fluent speakers of what they call Indian English (IE) and Western English (WE), that small differences in the use of cohesive devices amount to great systematic communication problems at the level of coherence. These devices include word order, stress and topicality on verb usage, marks of emphasis, deixis and referencing and repetition. While at the sentence level the different uses of these cohesive devices usually do not impede understanding between IE and WE interactants, from the WE interactants' point of view, IE cohesive devices may be insufficient to produce the complete discursive picture at the discourse level, forming instead a fuzzy or kaleidoscopic image.

Various studies have suggested that Western rhetoric expectations involve a linear deductive/assertive progression of elements tied by

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[12] This applies universally to all interactional encounters (cf. Clark, 1996, especially chapter 4). What may differ, interactional sociolinguists will argue, are the conventions for signaling all this.

explicit syntactic connections. More recent studies have shown that this expectation is not fulfilled by speakers whose overall rhetorical organizational pattern is inductive/collaborative.

Tyler and Davies (1990), for example, analyzed an exchange between a Korean teaching assistant and an American student in a physics lab course at a US university. In the exchange, the student questions the grade he received in an exam. Triangulating information from microanalysis of the videorecording of the exchange and interviews with both protagonists and their peers, Tyler and Davies observed that, in pursuing his alleged multiple goal of making the student's errors clear, holding on to his authority and credibility, and showing understanding of the student's position in order to avoid loss of face, the Korean TA justifies the grade by providing a number of reasons for it. However, he does not start his accounting with an overall statement of the problem, nor does he organize his reasons in any obvious hierarchical order in the student's perception. The Korean TA nevertheless explained that he had presented the reasons leading to the bad grade in an increasing level of seriousness. "His plan was to present the argument in small increments, trying to engage the student's agreement at each point, so that in the end both interlocutors would have created the conclusion" (p. 400).

Tyler and Davies argue, based on internal evidence from discourse analysis of the exchange and external evidence from interviews, that the North-American student takes the TA's first account, the least serious, as the overall statement of the problem. Since this interpretation clashes with the presentation of the more serious reasons that follow, the overall argument doesn't make sense to the student. Given the type of situation this is, negative reactions to the TA and his explanation ensue. Tyler and Davies report that two other North-American students watching the tape commented on the TA's explanation by saying he seemed to be changing his mind and that he didn't seem to know why he gave the grade.[13]

Similarly significant differences can exist among sub-groups of a single national group. Erickson (1984) offers a detailed look at the rhetorical strategies for topical cohesion among African-American adolescents. His microanalysis of conversational data from an informally organized discussion group in an inner city neighborhood explains the

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[13] My own work on point-making styles in a business negotiation between Brazilian manufacturers and US importers (Garcez, 1993) describes similar phenomena.

coherence-building processes of Black rhetoric previously described in generic terms by Kochman (1981). Erickson identifies *anecdote* as the basic unit of this discursive system, and *rhapsody*, "the loose stitching together of diverse elements" (p. 126), as the main fuel for topical development. Topical cohesion is thus maintained through the use of semantically hinged anecdotes in a non-linear, non-pre-determined logical sequence. In other words, topical movement from anecdote to anecdote is accomplished whenever one of the participants finds an opportunity in the local conversational context to tie in a dramatic contribution, even if only slightly connected with the central topic of the previous anecdote. In sum, Erickson writes

> Textual coherence in the conversation seems to have been improvised from moment to moment. ... While there was an overall semantic connection across anecdotes in a given set, it appears that the series position of a particular anecdote was more a function of its potential for drama than of its status in a syntax of linear logic. It was not that the discourse was random or non-rational, but that in oral performance by members of this speech community, strategic considerations regarding the level of dramatic emphasis and the veridical force that inheres in vivid and concrete narrative detail have greater rhetorical value than considerations regarding *the linear kind of logic that is characteristic of Western European literate discourse*. (p. 132, emphasis added)

Elsewhere, Erickson (1982) has shown aspects of the system for building conversational coherence among Italian-Americans, especially the modes of production of multi-floor conversations "in which simultaneously occurring and rapidly alternating speech does not constitute interruption" (p. 66). Erickson argues that rhythm works as a "social glue" (p. 65), and enables participants to engage in overlapping, non-interrupting conversation. In other speech communities, the same behavior which is highly communicative within the realm of Italian-American etiquette may be seen as noise. Erickson notes that their overall patterning has been found among other groups as well, but adds that "the specific organizational features by which multiply floored conversations are managed by speakers do appear to be speech community specific" (p. 66).

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Listenership

Students of face-to-face interaction have shown that conversation is not simply a matter of speakers speaking and listeners listening. Rather, it is a real-time ecological accomplishment of all parties concerned (Goodwin, 1981), so that the actions of those not holding the floor are also crucial to what goes on (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1982, on *continuers*; Jefferson, 1984, on *laughter*; Kendon, 1990, on *gaze direction*). Erickson (1986) summarizes the interpenetration of listener-speaker behavior in human interaction in a metaphor that portrays conversationalists as involved in a communicative task similar to "climbing a tree that climbs back" (p. 316). While this is part of the coordination necessary for any sort of human conversational interaction, the ways of showing and interpreting listening behavior can vary cross-culturally.

Elements of backchanneling behavior, that is, those useful information bits which the addressed recipients of talk offer through vocal and nonverbal forms without claiming the floor, can be deployed according to culture-specific systematic relations. Despite the limited purchase of quantitative analyses of talk-interactional tokens (cf. Schegloff, 1993), White's (1989) analysis of conversations involving speakers of Midwestern US English and Japanese in both homogeneous and cross-cultural groups (i.e., with the Japanese speaking ESL) offers a glance at gross differences between the two listener response systems. White found that the Japanese displayed backchannel behavior of various types significantly more frequently than did the Americans, with no misunderstandings developing from this overall difference.

Tannen (1981) also examined backchanneling behavior and found that while Jewish New Yorkers in her study of a Thanksgiving dinner apparently intended their loud overlapping listener responses to be taken as signals of rapport, other participants in the same conversation, who did not share that cultural assumption, were confused and frightened by these behaviors. Backchannel tokens of the kind that Schegloff (1982) calls continuers, which function as a sign of attention and encouragement for the speaker to go on, when performed exuberantly by New Yorkers of Jewish background in overlap with the floor-holder's vocalizations, can be seen as interruptions by other speakers of English who expect continuers to be produced as softer, prosodically less intense interturn contributions.

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Erickson (1979, 1986) and Erickson and Shultz (1982) have also devoted considerable attention to the issue of listenership in the realm of intercultural communication. Erickson (1979) looked at explanations in face-to-face interactions between white and black North-Americans and found two different patterns of listening behavior, with some elements having almost perfectly reverse function polarity. Citing sources on culturally homogeneous encounters whose observations were confirmed in his analysis of cross-cultural encounters, Erickson reports that

> Whites while speaking tended to look away from the listener rather continuously and to look at the listener only intermittently, while listeners tended to look continuously at the speaker. ... Blacks while speaking tended to look at the listener continuously, looking away only intermittently, while listeners tended to look at the speaker only intermittently, except at turn relevant moments, when both speaker and listener would show gaze involvement. (p. 104)

In terms of inviting listener response, Erickson found that listening response-relevant moments (LRRMs, p. 106) in the black system were marked by sharp falling intonation. In the white system, however, LRRMs were marked syntactically and without further prosodic cues. In addition, the behavioral forms of listener response varied. In the black system, gaze shifts, *unaccented* head nods OR verbal continuers (e.g., "mhm") may suffice as *accountable* listener responses. The white system is redundant, favoring the display of both verbal continuers AND *accented* forms of head nods simultaneously.

Because of these differing systemic features, then, when the African-American interactants in the study were given explanations by European-Americans — a common occurrence in power-asymmetric encounters, they often missed the cues and did not provide (enough) listener responses such as nods and continuers. The white person doing the explaining took these absences as signs of lack of understanding, and then produced hyperexplanations which corroded the quality of these interactions.[14]

Erickson (1986) also discusses inter-ethnic differences in speaker-listener "cybernetic calibration" (p. 306) in a brief analysis of an interaction between a German-American job interviewer and an Italian-

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[14] Erickson and Shultz (1982, pp. 117-140) elaborate on these interracial differences.

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American applicant. He reports various instances in which

> The applicant began to speak while the interviewer was looking at him. Then when the interviewer averted his gaze, the applicant began to squirm slightly in his seat, bring his hand up to his face, and hesitate in speech. He began to recycle chunks of syntax and he skipped over steps in narrative sequence. As the interviewer reestablished gaze engagement, the applicant's speech became fluent again. (p. 303)

Based on additional data from viewing sessions with the participants, Erickson argues that both participants were aware of their eye contact patterns during the interaction. However, whereas the listener/interviewer averted his eyes to make the applicant at ease, the speaker/applicant interpreted the interviewer's behavior as signals of lack of interest in what he was saying. Erickson thus concludes that "differing subcultural schemata of interpretation and expectation regarding appropriate and expectable listening behavior" (p. 306) were the source of these conversationalists' reciprocal, but not complementary, tree climbing which resulted in a difficult interaction.

Pacing, Pausing and Conversational Synchrony

Through research findings such as the ones discussed in the previous section, rhythm has come to be appreciated as an important element in the conduct of social interaction. The rhythmic integration of people's verbal and non-verbal behaviors (i.e., the patterning of speech prosody and body motion) is thus an integral part of the successful accomplishment of talk-in-interaction *qua* communication (cf. Goodwin, 1981; Kendon, 1990; Garcez, 1996).

Erickson and Shultz (1982) have demonstrated how disturbances in conversational rhythm, which they called *interactional arrhythmia* (p. 113), can indicate problems in the conduct of interaction. In their microanalysis of the uncomfortable moments during a large number of junior college academic advising interviews involving participants from various cultural backgrounds, the rate of occurrence of interactional arrhythmia was directly related to ethnicity, their index of the degree of cultural distance between the counselor and the student. They add that:

> Whether arrhythmia is best seen as cause or as an effect of other

troubles in face-to-face communication, it does seem to be related to cultural differences in communicative competence among speakers. Since *arrhythmia* is an indicator of level of *uncomfortableness*, the relative uncomfortableness of uncomfortable moments varies systematically according to the ethnic and racial difference or similarity between the counselor and the student. In this respect, ethnic and racial differences clearly make a difference in the character of interaction in the counseling interviews. (p. 117)

Gumperz (1982a) and Tannen (1984a), among others, have used Erickson and Shultz's (1982) notions of conversational synchrony and arrhythmia as heuristics for spotting possible elements of invisible culture in the language behavior of culturally dissimilar participants in social interaction, for it seems that members of the same speech community share similar rhythms of enunciation and integration of vocal and non-vocal activities during their interactional conduct.

Prosody

The role of intonation in language production and processing has been alluded to throughout this discussion, since it plays a major role at various levels in the construction of communicative interaction. Taking prosody as a term encompassing intonation, loudness, stress, vowel length and pacing and pausing, Gumperz (1982a) writes that prosody "enab[les] conversationalists to chunk the stream of talk into basic message units which both underlie interpretation and control the turn taking or speaker change strategies that are essential to the maintenance of conversational involvement" (p. 107).

Gumperz's (1982a) work on the consequences of differences between the prosodic conventions of different ethnic varieties are well-known, especially his studies of the contrasts between Indian and Western English. A sincere example of this work is the often cited case of the Indian and Pakistani cafeteria workers who exchanged all but a few words with the British cargo handlers they served, and were nevertheless negatively perceived by them as cranky and uncooperative (pp. 173-174). Upon closer inspection, Gumperz noticed that the Indian English speakers used falling intonation to make offers, of food for example, ("Gravy."), when British speakers would use (and expect to hear) rising intonation (i.e., "Gravy?"). Consequently, the Indian and

Pakistani workers' utterance were not perceived as offers, but rather as redundant and rude statements of self-evident fact ("This is gravy.").[15]

While this example can be seen as simplistic, Gumperz's work on the role of different intonation patterns in discourse production and conversational inference has gone a long way beyond single-word utterances. He has shown through careful analysis of multi-turn conversations that, "in comparison to Western English, Indian English bases its prosodic conventions on (a) different syllable-level phonology; (b) a different level of syntactic breakdown; and (c) different phonological means for marking prosodic distinctions and relations" (p. 122). Moreover, in Indian English, shifts in pitch register "mark points of information structure and flow within a clause, which in Western English are signaled by accent placement and tune" (p. 123).

In various other studies, Gumperz (1982a, 1992a, 1992b, *inter alia*) and associates (e.g., Gumperz, Aulakh & Kaltman, 1982) have shown how these different prosodic conventions create communicative difficulties when speakers from these two communities interact. Gumperz has also shown how these same processes work in cross-cultural encounters involving English-speaking members of Caribbean communities in England (Gumperz, 1982a, pp. 167-170; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982, pp. 145-162), and Filipino communities in the US (Gumperz, 1982b, pp. 187-192). Gumperz (1992a) has also described the process through which prosodic elements lie at the perceptual level of the much more global levels of conversational inference, that is, the framing of events that ultimately allows participants to define for themselves and their interlocutors what the nature of their activity is.

Framing What Goes On

Gumperz (1992a) argues that the various types of contextualization cue mismatches between conversationalists at the levels of primary perceptual decoding and secondary local assessment of sequencing between the parts of discourse affect the third level of the

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[15] The fact that minor differences in communicative behavior may be exploited for *borderwork* in the micropolitics of intercultural encounters (McDermott & Gospodinoff, 1981) is obviously a possibility here. Functional miscommunication in cross-cultural talk-in-interaction is beyond the scope of this essay, but see the discussion in Garcez (1996, especially pp. 65-82).

inferential process in communication face-to-face: the *framing* of the sociolinguistic activity in Goffman's (1981) terms, or the metacommunicative level in Bateson's (1972) terms. Both Gumperz (1982a; 1992a) and the contributions in Tannen (1993) have given detailed descriptions of this process. Tannen (1979/1993), for instance, has done work on the consistent framing strategies of Greeks and Americans for narrating their interpretations of the same silent film, and found remarkable differences in the ways members of the two groups "organized and altered the actual content of the movie" in culturally-determined talk-interactional structures (p. 21)

More recently, Watanabe (1993) looked specifically at what Gumperz (1992a) calls the third level of conversational inferencing in her analysis of the framing strategies of North-American and Japanese university students in culturally homogeneous group discussions. She argues that discourse level strategies had a direct bearing on the way participants defined the nature of what they were doing together, and that the nature of what they were doing was internally coherent with their culture's overall values.

She found some major differences in the framing of the activity. First, the North-American students began and ended their discussions without resorting to formal deliberations, while the Japanese addressed procedural matters before the discussions proper began, and had an assigned leader "punctuate the end by checking and announcing it" (p. 177). Watanabe argues that the North-Americans framed the discussion activity as that of four co-present individual contributors momentarily bound by their common purpose. In contrast, the Japanese framed the same discussion activity as to that of a group bound together to carry out a task, for which it is essential that hierarchy first be determined.

A second difference was that, when asked to give reasons for their positions, the North-American students framed their giving of reasons as "briefing," while the Japanese framed theirs as "story-telling." In addition, when the discussions approached controversy, "Americans used a 'single-account' argumentation strategy (one account per discussant at a time) while Japanese used a 'multiple-accounts' argumentation strategy" (p. 177). Thus the North-Americans provided objective, unidimensional contributions supporting or rejecting a position, within a positively confrontational frame where internal dissension is an integral part of getting things done as quickly as possible. This frames the task of

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discussion as "the laying out of the gamut of possible individual approaches to the issue." In contrast to that, the Japanese provided both supporting and rejecting accounts within a single contribution to avoid confrontation and reduce the risk of face-loss for the next speaker, up to the last, the most senior male. This frames the task of *group discussion* as "coming up with a mutually acceptable, group consensual view on issues." In sum, Watanabe argues that interactants rely on cultural knowledge at the macrolevel to interpret each other's communicative behavior at the microlevel in order to move accordingly in their co-construction of talk-in-interaction. Differences at the macrolevel of collective cultural values thus result in differential microlevel conduct and interpretation of what may at first sight be taken as the same collective activity.

DISCUSSION

The overview of studies presented above shows that in the past 30 years researchers have made considerable progress in showing how the cultural patterning of communicative behavior enters into the construction of talk-in-interaction. Many aspects of discourse organization have been shown to be connected to people's particular cultural practices as learned during child language socialization within particular speech communities (Gumperz, 1982a; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In addition to making this connection visible, researchers of language and social interaction have amassed significant evidence of sociolinguistic relativity in their analyses of communicative behavior across the world's speech communities, showing that there are quite a few domains in which these communities vary regarding the production of situated discourse in social interaction.

The importance of this work rests on the fact that it shows that cultural diversity and relativity in human communicative behavior exist in tangible though subtle ways, and that this must be taken into account when we deal with issues of language in society. The fact that such progress has been made, in spite of the emphasis by the dominant trend in linguistics on assuming a homogenous community of equally competent speakers as the premise for linguistic research, highlights the significance of the findings made about the connection between language and culture in the conduct of everyday social interaction.

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INVISIBLE CULTURE

Of course, we have to be careful not to overemphasize sociocultural relativity in language behavior, given that we also know that much more is shared than not-shared as a result of the innate and universal features of human language, and given the ample evidence of how flexible and adaptable humans can be regarding their communicative practices (witness phenomena such as language shift or the genesis of pidgins and creoles). However, considering the importance of talk-in-interaction to most social processes, and especially to the functioning of institutions that control resources in most contemporary human societies, and remembering that we have also learned how implicit cultural ways of communicating can be used to discriminate against people, it is imperative that we make use and expand the body of knowledge about sociolinguistic variation in language use if we seriously aspire to live in a democratic world citizenry.

Many interactional settings could be examined to illustrate this discussion, but none are more central to this reflection than those of formal education practice. During the course of this century, Western-style institutions promoting formal educational have become the ultimate gates to social opportunity all over the world (Green, 1990; Tyack, 1974; Willis, 1981). We need only think of the fact that their purported activities, educational practices such as the teaching and learning of literacy, of the standard language/variety, and of prestigious foreign languages are carried out by and large in and through talk-in-interaction, to see that a great deal is at stake in face-to-face interactions in educational settings. These are usually gate-keeping interactions in the sense that a student's career towards social opportunity may be facilitated, hindered or denied depending on how s/he is perceived as being or not being communicatively, and thus socially, competent. In other words, judgments made about one's communicative competence are ratified as "objective" criteria for access to social goods. Evidence shows that an individual's cultural patterning of communicative behavior may be crucial to his/her participation in such key social encounters to be perceived as appropriate and thus to his/her being deemed as deserving of access to social goods. This is especially obvious when some particular aspects of his/her conventions for the culturally appropriate patterning of communicative behavior somehow differ from the etiquette that is dominant in the gatekeeping institution or when they differ from the etiquette of the person in the gatekeeper's position (cf. Bortoni-

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Ricardo, 1984, 1994, 1996; Chick, 1990; Erickson, 1979, 1987, 1990, 1997; Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b, 1992a, 1992b; McDermott & Gospodinoff, 1981; Moita Lopes, 1994; Philips, 1972, 1976, 1983; Roberts, Davies & Jupp, 1992; Shultz, Florio & Erickson, 1982; Terzi, 1994).

I conclude this essay with a brief look at some of the educational implications of the findings about invisible culture and variation in the patterning of communicative behavior in everyday language use in social interaction.

Educational Implications

A number of the studies discussed above make talk-in-interaction in educational settings their object of investigation (e.g., Erickson, 1979, 1986; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Philips, 1972, 1983; Shultz, Florio & Erickson, 1982; Tyler & Davies, 1990; Watanabe, 1993). Their research findings therefore have key educational relevance, and offer significant contributions to reflections on educational practices.

Much of the concern about cross-cultural variation in language use has to do with the presence of ethnic or racial minorities in industrialized areas of the world, the members of which are largely allocated to lower tiers of the economic pyramid (e.g., Native Americans, Blacks and Latinos in the US, Indians and Pakistanis in the UK, Turks in Germany, Surinamese in the Netherlands, etc.). In fact, these are economic minorities more than anything else, given the fact that other cultural groups with relatively small populations are not seen as clashing against dominant culturally preferred ways of patterning communicative behavior.

Schools, and classrooms especially, are therefore seen as sites of *minorization*. Gumperz (1992b, quoting Py & Jeanneret, 1989), defines minorization as "the context-bound, interactive processes through which certain individuals are stereotyped as members of stigmatized minorities" (p. 302). Gumperz argues —and the research reviewed above clearly supports his views— that the notion of minorization

> is particularly applicable to situations where one participant is bilingual or bidialectal and his/her talk is interpreted in terms of the other participant's culturally specific inferential practices, and where the

> differences in interpretive criteria has a perjorative [*sic*] effect on the outcome of the interaction. (p. 302)

Though using different terms, McDermott and Gospodinoff (1981) have discussed this same process, through which "school systems are set up to have conscientious teachers function as racists and bright little children function as dopes even when they are all trying to do otherwise" (p. 226).

Gumperz (1982a) has incorporated concerns with education and social change in his work by showing how invisible cultural variation in language use can preclude the socio-economic advancement of minority speakers. Consistent with his empirical research is Gumperz's theoretical view that a "sociolinguistic theory that attempts to deal with problems of mobility, power and social control cannot assume uniformity of signaling devices as a precondition for successful communication."

Erickson (1987) has discussed the hegemonic practices, including explorations of sociolinguistic differences, through which minorization is effected (p. 352). He has used the knowledge produced by his and other researchers' work on cross-cultural variation in language use to argue in favor of culturally responsive pedagogy, especially in the early grades as an "effort by the school that can reduce miscommunication by teachers and foster trust, and prevent the genesis of conflict that moves rapidly beyond intercultural misunderstanding to bitter struggles of negative identity exchange between some students and their teachers" (p. 355). While this is still a novel concept and a great deal of *education of educators* needs to be done before it becomes common practice, its genesis has only been made possible by the progress made by researchers of language and culture in showing the extent and forms of intercultural difference in language behavior.

In peripheral-economy societies in the world, research on cultural variation in language use can also make valid contributions to the solution of a variety of problems. In Brazil, for example, we still have to dismiss the myth that there is no significant variation in language behavior among the population before we can start seriously raising the awareness to minorization of non-standard speakers of Portuguese. Bortoni-Ricardo (1984, 1985) has shown that speakers of rural non-standard varieties of Portuguese, who have migrated in vast numbers to urban areas, have serious communication problems when interacting with speakers of the urban standard variety, and are subject to various

degrees of discrimination as "minorized" speakers of "wrong" Portuguese. According to this author, organizing language policies in the current Brazilian context is a complex challenge that must be tackled with the aid of interactional sociolinguistic research in Brazil, so that we have evidence on which to base these policies. Prior to that, the training of pedagogically responsible educators is a feasible first step towards redressing these inequities. Awareness of sociolinguistic relativity is one key element of such training (Bortoni-Ricardo, 1994, 1996).

The work of Terzi (1994), for example, shows how such an awareness can make a substantial difference in the teaching of literacy. She looks at literacy lessons taking place in a Brazilian context through the talk-in-interaction between a middle class teacher and her students who live in a *favela*, and refers to it as an interaction between members of distinct cultures. She shows that significant learning may be allowed to take place once the adult/middle class instructor is able to engage the children in meaningful and respectful conversational exploration of the text they are working on, working out the substantial differences in their cultural etiquette by treating those differences simply as such, and not as bones of contention for borderwork.[16]

Terzi's work is of the kind we need more of, and which only becomes possible once researchers concerned with language education have become attuned to sociolinguistic diversity in the conduct of everyday interaction. In fact, in a published interview (Moita Lopes, Dec. 1994), when asked to point out desirable future developments in applied linguistics research in Brazil, Angela Kleiman, a leading expert in the field, chose to highlight the need for more research attention to the nature of intercultural communication as well as to the organization of talk-in-interaction in the construction of educational practices, which she considers essential for informing the effective training of critical educators, especially when it comes to the learning and teaching of literacy practices. In addition, such attention should help us identify research that pays only lip service to such issues and concepts but ends up misrepresenting the facts and misinforming language educators (e.g., Bortone, 1996).

The research reviewed here about invisible culture in language behavior is also centrally relevant to educational practice in foreign-language learning and teaching. Various researchers and educators in the

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[16] See previous note.

area have been concerned with the interface between language and culture, especially regarding issues of language transfer and cross-cultural variation in speech-act realization (e.g., Richards, 1981; Blum-Kulka 1983; Thomas, 1983; Odlin, 1989; Wolfson, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990).

However, in the contemporary fashion of incorporating cultural aspects in the teaching of communicative competence, it seems that foreign language pedagogy has been slow in acquiring a more sophisticated sense of how human communicative interaction is organized and, as a consequence perhaps, of how culture and its invisible forms help shape talk-in-interaction. If we expect foreign language students to become competent communicators in inter/cross/multi-cultural environments, it seems that foreign language pedagogy must think of performance in terms of a model of naturally occurring face-to-face interaction, and less in terms of scripts and discrete speech acts that disconsider many aspects of the construction of situated talk-in-interaction.[17]

In addition, foreign language educators could do with a less reified notion of culture. In a book entitled *Cultural studies and language learning* (Byram, Esarte-Sarries & Taylor, 1991), for instance, the authors are happy to limit the cultural component in foreign language teaching to informing students about those highly visible aspects of national traditions such as clothing, driving regulations, etc., which can be said to be "French," "German," and so on. The fact that they do not feel compelled to qualify the narrow scope of their approach to the issue of culture in the realm of foreign language teaching is symptomatic of the fact that foreign-language pedagogy can learn a great deal from interactional sociolinguistic work in order to (help students) become more sensitive to issues of invisible culture and the patterning of communicative behavior in attempts to develop foreign language communicative competence. Fortunately, recent publications in the area of language acquisition, learning and teaching, such as Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1995) or McKay and Hornberger (1996), are beginning to wake up to this need and are starting to fill the gap by devoting greater

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[17] For a detailed discussion of what such a model of communication, see, for example, Garcez (1996, chapter 3) and Clark (1996, chapter 1). For a useful critique of interaction-centered SLA research carried out on the basis of faulty assumptions about the organization of talk-in-interaction, see Wagner (1996).

attention to the study of language as talk-in-interaction.

More specifically, with English increasingly becoming the monopolistic dominant language for international communication across the world, the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which started as the training of readers, must quickly develop more sophisticated notions of cross-cultural variation in language use, and its consequences to face-to-face interaction, if it wants to help educate ESP speakers as well. This is a complicated task that can draw only to a limited extent on the findings made by students of cross-cultural communication between dominant and minority speakers in a single society. Pedagogical suggestions that focus on the interactional norms used by native speakers of English, for example, are of little avail for students who will be interacting with members of a multitude of different speech communities. The Brazilian businessmen I have observed for my research, for example, interact on a regular basis with American, German, Argentinian, Czech, and Japanese counterparts (cf. Firth, 1996). What seems necessary for language learners to be competent professional cross-cultural interactants is to learn more about talk-interactional processes in order to develop an ability to reflect —"on the fly"— about what is going on in their interactions, so that they can minimize potential communicative glitches and use English effectively as a shared resource. No laundry list of "how to" tips will equip them to deal with all the variation they might come across. Language educators involved with ESP, in business administration programs, for example, should be able to help them.

Indeed, second language acquisition researchers (Ellis, 1985; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) have come to accept Canale and Swain's (1980) expanded model of communicative competence to include what the authors termed *strategic competence*, that is, "how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open" (p. 20). As part of our concern with developing such competence, we must also be attuned to the fact that the speakers' drive to be strategically competent in the immediate (sequential) conversational context may also backfire and jeopardize other aspects of communicative competence, especially when the speaker's linguistic competence is limited and his cognitive capacities may be overloaded during the production and processing of talk-in-interaction. This seems to be the case of the Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs) in Erickson and

Rittenberg's (1987) study reported above. The FMGs practice of not producing interactional space for North-American patients to air their grievances and concerns allowed the FMGs to minimize their risks of failing at the basic communicative level by reducing the cognitive and interactional burden on their conduct of this complex interaction (Tannen, 1993b). Their strategy, however, is not without a cost, as Erickson and Rittenberg (1987) point out: "The catch is that while this may seem interactionally safe to the FMG, it is, in fact, very risky because rapport with American patients can be damaged by the use of these discourse strategies" (p. 406). Risky as their strategy may be, the FMGs in this case were strategically competent, given that they were making the most out of their limited (socio)linguistic knowledge. What this points to is that patterning one's non-native talk-in-interaction in culturally appropriate ways is also a cognitively onerous task and, following from this, that awareness of such issues may be essential for the effective understanding of what constitutes communicative competence in foreign language interaction as well as for the training of competent foreign language interactants.

This becomes especially poignant as current research on language and social interaction produces more and more evidence regarding the emergent quality of discourse in social interaction, which entails that many actions, once performed, have unpredictable consequences whatever social constraints may be in effect. Lucy's (1996) words from a different discussion seem to apply here as well when he writes that "In short, the rich product of the ethnographic study of language has yet to be brought seriously to play in direct consideration of the relativity experience associated with the diversity of functions and uses of language" (p. 59).

By the same token, native speakers —of the language/variety in which interaction takes place, of dominant languages/varieties especially, and of Standard English above all— must also reflect upon and understand their position in such interactional situations. As Wolfson (1989) pointed out, "native speakers are fortunate in being spared the time and trouble of learning [(] English [)] as a second language, but [they] must also recognize that [their] native use of the language gives [them] no superior right over it" (p. 287). More importantly, "different groups of [(] English [)] users, native speakers or not, must recognize that variation in language, like blood pressure in a

human body, is a vital sign of life" (Wolfson, 1989, p. 288). Finally, as users and as students of language, and of English in Brazil more centrally, we must heed the warnings summarized by Rajagopalan (1997) about the possibility that the concept of a native may be "a dangerous trope, an imaginary yardstick by dint of which to exclude and discriminate against those who, for whatever reasons, fail to fit the standards of purity fixed in accordance with the dictates of someone's idealist fervour" (pp. 227-228).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Perhaps the key to understanding and helping others understand and deal with the relatively small part of human communicative behavior that might not be shared —but which surfaces in intercultural encounters in delicate ways— is to start thinking in terms of *interculture* as well as *interlanguage* (Ochs, 1993, p. 302). As Ochs (1993) suggests, perhaps we should start developing a social constructivist paradigm in linguistics, one that would help us conceptualize and

> examine the building of multiple, yet perfectly compatible identities — identities that are subtle and perhaps have no label, blended identities, even blurred identities. It is just this sort of construction that every language and culture acquirer must learn to accomplish, because there are no simple social or linguistic formulae that spit out how to compose suitable identities for the occasion. (p. 298)

Perhaps this will help us develop a more mature research paradigm accounting for our increasingly multiple voices. Perhaps it will lead us not only to more effective language education but to more equitable societal practices as well. The sooner we start the journey, the earlier we'll get there.

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