Research on Language and Social Interaction
Vol. 23, 1989/90: 261-282

The Critical Voice in Ethnography of Communication Research

Donal Carbaugh
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

ONE BRIEF PORTRAIT OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATON

The ethnography of communication has been always interested, at base, in describing communication systems as constitutive of social and cultural lives. The basic problems for study are typically the available means and uses of communication in socio-cultural contexts and communities. As Hymes (1962, p. 101) put it: "The ethnography of speaking is concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right." The basic data have been various practices of communication that are situated in specific social contexts; the primary theoretic concerns have been their organization into cultural patterns, which themselves sometimes suggest more general principles of and about communication. These practical and theoretical concerns may vary in substance from conversational structures, symbolic forms, speech acts, politeness phenomena, and so on. But each such concern, because of the dual attention to communication in context and theoretical concern with communication in its own right, explores matters both of practice and principle, cultural instances and classes of phenomena, indigenous tokens and general types of communication. It is the discovery and description of such 'situations and uses,' as well as what these suggest more generally, that provide the base for

the ethnography of communication. It is thus first and foremost a basic science, intent on describing and theorizing about natural patterns of communication.

This ethnographic base is often demonstrated as ethnographers build their fieldwork and reports around the twin pillars of (1) description of particular instances, which (2) reveals something general about phenomena. These two basic goals involve continual assessments of descriptive adequacy and theoretical rigor. About descriptive adequacy, one asks, is the pattern represented with its full contextual force? Is the life of the people breathed into these words? The ethnographer thus works to examine (in fieldwork) and re-create (in the ethnographic report) actual moments of natural communication. The efforts are aimed toward discovering and describing communication in its natural social and cultural field, or as Hymes has put it, 'in terms of its own patterns.'

The ethnographer also seeks to render the pattern as saying something of general interest. Here, the ethnographer responds to the question: why should the audience care about a description of this cultural practice? Responses take two general forms. First, because it is there, and second, because it tells us something important about communication. The first response involves a claim of socio-cultural prominence, with the pattern heard to instantiate themes that penetrate the lives of individuals in a society. This introduces considerations of a field theoretic sort. One seeks to claim that the identified pattern holds significance within a particular social and cultural context. Such a claim is often of the form: *X* (the cultural practice of communication) is granted legitimacy (if *X* is a norm) or coherence (if *X* is a code) by participants in communication system *Y* (the speech situation and/or community) (Carbaugh, 1987).

The other path of 'ethnographic theorizing' asks: Does this cultural practice tell us something general about communication phenomena? Within or beyond the particular case? Here, attention is drawn to cultural features of communication practices that demonstrate (or develop) a general understanding of communication principles. For example, Katriel (1986) describes the 'dugri' speech of a Sabra subculture within contemporary Israeli society. She shows how this pattern of 'prickliness' creates a response to the relatively

'unthorny' Diaspora tradition. Thus, 'dugri' – for the Sabra – enacts a cultural identity which embraces direct, assertive, and truthful expression, often involving social identification through confrontation. At this level, Katriel shows the historical and contemporary life of 'dugri' speech among contemporary Israelis. Her account demonstrates the attainment of descriptive and field theoretic goals.

But Katriel goes further. She shows us how a full appreciation of 'dugri' involves the qualification and extension of the theories of facework and politeness. The study of 'dugri' warrants a reconsideration of these theories, if they are to account for cultural variations of 'face' and a strategy of politeness which, at once, threatens and affirms 'face.' In short, the 'dugri' pattern provides a moment for the development of a more general communication principle. On this level, the ethnographer's claim often assumes the form: *X* (cultural practice) suggests theoretical principles (P_1, P_2. . .P_n) about communication phenomena *A* (e.g. politeness, speech acts, person reference, communication coding, conversational structures, style, etc.). Of course, this introduces a level of explanation when such theoretical principles suggest relations among concepts which account for variations in communication phenomena, as when Brown and Levinson (1978) account for politeness strategies through correlations with social relations (power and distance) and rank of imposition.

The discussion to this point describes what I take to be the bases for ethnography of communication research. In summary, the basic data are naturally occurring instances of communication; the theoretic concerns are concepts which organize the situations, patterns and functions of communication as phenomena in their own right. Primary goals include descriptive representation and theoretical rigor, with the latter yielding a theory of a local communication practice (e.g., a theory about 'dugri,' a field dependent theory) which may suggest more general principles about communication (e.g., a theory of politeness, or some other communication phenomena).

A CRITICAL QUESTION

Given the above, one might ask: What, if any, is the role of a critical voice in ethnography of communication research? My first

impulse when asked this question is to cite the above goals as a way of saying, there is no *essential* role in ethnography for the critical voice. One does not necessarily have to evaluate a system in order to describe and theorize about it. In fact, in my studies of American communication, I have found the critical impulse often impeded my intellectual progress. Too often, when I should have been understanding the communication system, when I should have been describing and theorizing about it, I was hurtling assessments its way, lamenting those wretched ways I sought to understand. I of course noted these reactions, using them later as personalized cultural data. But given the primary tasks of description and theorizing, my first response to the question of critique is simply, a critical voice is non-essential to what I take to be the primary goals in ethnography of communication research.

But, just because a critical voice is non-essential, that does not mean it is necessarily excluded from ethnography. This invites a rephrasing of the original question. When a critical voice is included in ethnographic research, what is its nature and function? It is my observation that such a voice does enter some ethnographic studies, sometimes directly, sometimes more subtly. My goal in the remainder of the paper is to discover instances of such a voice and describe in what situations it arises, of what such a voice consists, and suggest some typical uses to which it is put. To develop my response to the question of critique, I first consider, what is a critical voice? Along what dimensions does it vary? And, are different types audible in ethnographic research?

A Definition of 'Critical Voice'

For purposes of this exposition, I will define the critical voice as *an evaluation from an ethical juncture*. The first part of the phrase includes 'an evaluation,' an assessment of degrees of goodness or badness, of what is more right than wrong. This definition emphasizes the evaluative dimension of criticism, as is standard in many rhetorical approaches to criticism (cf. Scott and Brock, 1972, p. 9). Of course, any such judgment is an assertion of an ethic, an application

of a system of morals or values which is itself the basis for valid judgment. The critical voice, when heard in ethnography, reveals moments when ethics come to the fore, when judgments are made from the standpoint of some moral system. Note that the definition affirms two essential ingredients, the evaluation *and* the ethical base which grounds it, with the ethical system providing criteria for what constitutes proof and how such claims are to be evaluated (see Cushman and Tompkins, 1980, p. 43). Both are inextricably wound into the critical thread. Both must be unravelled for criticism to proceed in a balanced, reflective, and intellectually productive way.

The critical voice foregrounds an evaluative function in communication. This function of rendering judgment must be distinguished from the more referential and metalinguistic functions foregrounded above – the functions highlighted respectively when description and communication theorizing are goals. My point here is not that these functions of communication – the evaluative and referential – are mutually exclusive, only that communication (and research about it) is designed differently when one more than the other becomes the primary goal. To claim that all communication is, at some level, evaluative, is to miss this most basic and important point.

Dimensions of the Critical Voice

In what follows, I will discuss three dimensions of the critical voice. These dimensions were derived by applying the definition above to ethnographic studies and asking, when such a critical voice was heard, of what does it consist, and along what dimensions does it vary? Dimensions are defined here as multi-valued sets which enable one to identify the constitutive aspects that are distinctive of a particular voice, and in turn how it is similar to, yet contrasts with, others. What I propose heuristically are three such dimensions, each of which helps identify what is distinctive about a critical moment, and in what ways it contrasts with others. The three I will discuss respond to these questions: What is the object of criticism? From what stance is criticism made? And, what is the mode of criticism?

First, what is the object of criticism? The *object of criticism* varies from concrete cultural practices such as the dispreferred enactment of 'traditional roles,' to the theory or methods of a scholarly community, to the skills of the ethnographer him- or herself. Each such object provides a distinct focus for criticism, and brings different ethical systems to bear. So one aspect of the critical voice entails a response to the questions: What is it that is being evaluated? What object is the focus of criticism?

Second, from what standpont is criticism being offered? The stance or *locus of criticism* may derive from the ethnographer's moral system, the cultural actor's, or perhaps some independent or overlapping one. In an extreme case of the former, the ethnographer would impose his or her value system, or one bolstered by an academic literature, as a juncture from which to evaluate some object. The case at the other extreme involves the judgment of some object from the standpoint of the (or one of the) culture's moral system(s). Addressing the above question requires one to explicate the moral system that was used as the base of judgment, and to locate it within its social and cultural world, be it that of the ethnographer, that of the informant, or some other. The question is simply: From whence does the critical judgment derive?

Third, what is the *mode of criticism*? The aspect of criticism addressed here is, is the critical voice used in a relatively direct or indirect way? Put differently, is the critical voice audible within the primary text? Or, is it inferred through more secondary, background concerns? A line of questioning about indirect criticism becomes productive in at least one non-obvious way. One can find critical voices in ethnographies where their authors may not have intended them. One can claim that the ethnographic report achieved a critical end, although it was designed with descriptive goals in view.

Varying practices along these dimensions create different voices of criticism within ethnographic research. By attending to such concerns we can understand better the critical voice, situations in which it surfaces, and what it is designed to do. Inquiring this way, we find that while ethnography's primary goals do not require a critical voice, such a voice is not necessarily excluded. In fact, as is so often the case in communication, as when the utterance intended as a joke

is taken as an insult, what is not there with intent may nonetheless be there in deed. Much needs to be said about 'criticism,' then, so that when it is heard, it can be understood.

A Typology of Critical Voices

Each type of critical voice discussed here combines the above dimensions in particular and revealing ways. Also, each type of voice points to a typical moment when criticism surfaces in some ethnographic studies. The discussion does not exhaust all of the logical possibilities suggested by the dimensions above, but does elaborate a few which I find more or less typical. My goal is less to provide a comprehensive typology of critical voices than it is to suggest some ways of using and perhaps developing the above dimensions heuristically. In this spirit, I discuss three types of criticism which I call, natural, academic, and cultural.

Natural Criticism: Reports about Criticism

The voice of natural criticism is heard when the ethnographer reports the following: the communication system under investigation evaluates itself, or some aspect of itself, on the basis of (one of) its moral system(s). Thus, the object of natural criticism is, from the 'natives' view,' their indigenous cultural practice; the locus of criticism derives from their own ethical code; with the typical mode of criticism being relatively direct. The ethnographer is thus in the position of describing and interpreting the others' evaluations, to demonstrate the place of a critical voice in another social and cultural world. The primary goal of the ethnographer in this situation is not to evaluate their evaluations, but to describe the situations in, the patterns of, and uses to which the others put directly evaluative communication. The ethnographic goal is the creative affirmation of this cultural voice.

Consider for example one cultural scene in contemporary America, the DONAHUE television show. One prominent voice in this scene seems to follow the rule: 'notice flaws and criticize,' which itself

motivates much talk along the cultural sequence, problem/response (Carbaugh, 1988c, pp. 127-131). And further, consider one cultural premise which provides prominent contents within this form, 'society is a traditional system of oppressive rules' (Carbaugh, 1988c, pp. 87-107). The form and content of this American talk combine to create a critical voice, providing an evaluation from an ethical juncture. The juncture of judgment in this case places standards of 'self,' such as independence and self-awareness, over those of 'society,' such as dependence and conformity. This creates a moral system which, when used, praises the freedoms of 'self' and 'self-expression,' while condemning the constraints of 'society.' A voice of direct criticism is heard ('society and rules oppress'), about specific cultural practices (those which conform to the 'rules' of 'traditional society'), from an indigenous moral system (valuing self over society). A similar critical voice is heard within an American institution. In this context, the workers lament virtually every aspect of the daily work process (including fellow workers, their place of work, and their 'communication problems'), but praise their 'product' (Carbaugh, 1988b). Taken together, this critical American voice problematizes 'society' and its 'institutions' by praising 'the individual' and 'self.' That natural American communication expresses, amplifies, and is friendly to such criticism, should not go unnoticed.

But such a voice is not peculiarly American. In Israel, on Friday evenings people gather at 'griping parties.' As 'griping' occurs, topics such as the problems of public life are addressed. This type of talk functions informationally to alert persons to shared problems, to point out some of the flaws in the public community. Interestingly though, the social functions of these parties for Israelis are more ventilative and integrative than they are redressive of the problems. Israelis do not expect the problems that are addressed to be solved, just talked about (Katriel, 1985, pp. 372-374). Similar to the American case above, the Israeli case includes direct evaluations of cultural practices, although in this case they are less about demeanor (e.g. being 'dependent and uncommunicative as a traditional man would be'), than they are about public services (e.g. the Israeli economy, public morale, or the neighborhood school), with the sense of the moral system being more communal than

individual (Katriel, 1985, p. 371). A critical voice is heard to celebrate a shared identity.

Similarly, among the Western Apache in Cibecue, Arizona, jokes about 'the Whiteman' are told (Basso, 1979). In these joking performances, Apaches imitate ways in which 'the Whiteman' acts, especially with the Apache. What the performances achieve is a negative evaluation of 'the Whiteman's' interactional qualities, such as a self-oriented verbal style, a reckless use of words, an ill-temperedness, an arrogant and presumptuous manner, or, in general, 'the Whiteman's' lack of social graces (pp. 57-60). In turn, the Apache is shown to be properly centered, reserved, tolerant, modest, nondirective, and socially harmonious. The main interpretive functions of the joking performance are to imitate creatively and playfully 'the Whiteman' so that their interactional comportment can be ridiculed, while the Apache's – however indirectly – is reaffirmed (pp. 61-64).

In this type of study, the ethnographer's attention is being drawn to verbal patterns that are used explicitly to evaluate the whole system under study (e.g. 'society' and its 'institutions' for Americans), or aspects of a system (e.g. 'public problems' for Israelis, or 'the Whiteman' for Apaches). Each such judgment reveals from a cultural viewpoint, in direct ways, the objects which are valued and those which are not. The ethnographer thus may discover within a case a voice of natural criticism, moments when the people under study evaluate themselves in whole and/or in part. When and where this is done, how so, and toward what ends are interesting questions for the ethnographer, especially as they reveal the critical voice from within.[1]

This kind of 'criticism,' if properly called criticism, it seems to me, is associated with what John Dewey (1930) had in mind during his lecture on *Construction and Criticism*. He defined criticism saying:

> Criticism is judgment engaged in discriminating among values. It is taking thought as to what is better and worse in any field at any time, with some consciousness of why the better is better and why the worse is worse. (p. 12)

Toward such an end, the ethnographer finds him- or herself listening to the critical assessment of cultural objects, talking about what is better or worse, and seeking to understand it from the viewpoint

of the 'other,' whether done in a relatively direct or indirect mode. In this sense, natural criticism occurs as the culturally designed scenes, patterns and uses of evaluative communication are reported.

Academic Criticism: Evaluations of Scholarly Practice

Some moments of fieldwork and report writing are given to evaluating the state and standards of scholarly practice. At these moments, the objects of criticism are communication theories and methods, the locus of criticism being couched within some scholarly community, with the mode of criticism varying from direct to indirect. Often in the 'introduction' and 'discussion sections' of research reports, the ethnography is used to evaluate the current state of scholarly knowledge and practice. The goal often involves both an affirmation of some knowledge, as when Katriel (1986) affirmed the utility of politeness theory; and a creation, politeness theory is better with these qualifications, additions, etc.

In addition to Katriel's example, consider Rosaldo's (1982) use of speech act theory. In her study of Ilongot speech, she uses the speech act framework of Searle, and asks of it, does it provide an adequate descriptive and explanatory base given the patterns of Ilongot speech? She thus takes speech act theory to be her inspiriation (an affirmation of the theory) and her butt (she concludes that the theory needs revision). Rosaldo focuses her critical commentary, in part, on the role of 'expressed psychological state' within speech act theory, and argues that an emphasis on this dimension of illocutionary force obscures the nature of Ilongot speech. While the consequences of this argument for speech act theory are disputable and manyfold (cf. Graham, 1988), Rosaldo demonstrates a sustained and rigorous exercise in academic criticism as she applies and argues for revisions of theory, based on a careful consideration of cultural communication practices.

A similar kind of academic criticism is demonstrated by Hymes (1987) and Keesing (1975). In fact, Hymes alleges that standards of orthographic theory have perpetrated a "cardinal sin, the distortion of another cultural reality through categories of our own"

(p. 18). He supports his claim with evidence from the cultural patterning of myths and tales the world over, and concludes that all earlier collections done with standard orthographic theory "must be redone" (p. 19). Hymes then proposes a conceptual framework which he argues is able better to represent oral narrating (Hymes, 1987, pp. 20 ff.). Similarly, Keesing (1975) applies a standard 'role theory' to the Kwaio, arguing for its revision: its bases must be understood as "premises about communications" which "defines a communicative context" (p. 402).

Each of these examples demonstrates how ethnographic study can make scholarly practices the objects of direct criticism, with such judgment deriving from an ethical juncture in the academic community. But this does not imply that the ethics of 'good scholarship' are agreeable to all. One recent development within ethnography generally has been the introduction of 'the researcher as instrument,' whose flaws and abilities become parts of some 'experimental ethnographies' (for a review see Marcus and Cushman, 1982). In some of these experiments, the actual practice of fieldwork becomes part of the account, including 'personal reflections,' interactions with informants, and so on. In such study, the researcher him- or herself becomes the object of criticism, a direct and critical assessment of the ethnographer's performance part of the ethnographic goal.

There is a sense in which academic criticism gets done indirectly. Sometimes studies enter the literature which display a kind of scholarly practice, a theory-in-the-works, a way of knowing that counters common expectations thus throwing sensibilities into a new light. Such an effect may or may not be the goal of the author, but one might notice over time that the study had a creatively critical effect. Something like this, I believe, happened after the publication of Philipsen's first two Teamsterville studies (1975, 1976). In the face of a popular 'interpersonal ideology' (see Parks, 1982), Philipsen displayed to his colleagues data which were unfriendly to some curent trends, and a way of understanding such data that was, to many in the audience, novel and productive. The studies forced a reconsideration of some current scholarly standards, and because done with such high quality, intrigued many as a way to proceed, in method and theory. What the Teamsterville studies introduce for our purposes is simply

this: ethnographic studies of communication may, rather indirectly and perhaps even unintentionally, throw some scholarly practices into a critical light, opening them for reflection. To some – those who secretly fear their pet theory is not supported by the Bongo-Bongo, etc. – ethnography assumes a perhaps overemphasized role as 'debunker,' describing human instances which demand reevaluations of some deeply rooted academic practices. In this way, ethnography can provide a perspective from which to assess the scope of scholarly practices, especially by looking into the social and cultural grounds to which some scholarly standard(s) is claimed to apply. In this sense, ethnography can provide for criticism indirectly, while not engaging directly in a critical act.

In sum, the voice of academic criticism takes certain scholarly objects within the academy as focal concerns for evaluation (e.g. existing theory, methods, researchers), rendering judgments that derive at least in part from the academic community (e.g. standards for what constitutes good method and theory), and may occur in a relatively direct or indirect mode.

Cultural Criticism: Description and Criticism

At an abstract level, the above two types of criticism are instances of cultural criticism in that both express an evaluation of aspects of a speech community through an ethical standard intrinsic to it. The one, natural criticism, describes criticism by the folk of their own cultural practices from a juncture within their community; the other, academic criticism, expresses criticism by the ethnographer of practices done within his or her – the ethnographer's – community from the standpoint of one of its ethical systems. But rather than lump these critical voices together as cultural criticism, I want to discuss 'cultural criticism' in a special sense, as moments in ethnographic reports when the ethnographer, directly or indirectly, renders some judgment about indigenous cultural practices of some non-academic speech community.

Toward this end, I want to discuss three cases, the Ilongot of the Philipines (Rosaldo, 1973), the Western Apache (Basso, 1979,

1979), and the middle American (Carbaugh, 1987, 1988b, 1988c). Each of these cases, at some particular moment and each in its own way, renders some critical assessment of a non-academic speech community. In Rosaldo's piece, the speech style of a subgroup is critically assessed. In Basso's work, a contact group, the White speech community that Apaches must live within, or under, is evaluated implicitly. And similarly, in my own work, the middle American communication system becomes, at times, the object of critical assessment. I should note however that the critical voice in Rosaldo's and Basso's work is exercised only after the main work of ethnography is done. In my own work, one can perhaps pinpoint an earlier point of critical entry.

Rosaldo (1973) describes in the main part of her ethnography an Ilongot speech event or style, 'crooked' speech. This speaking style is used on some important Ilongot speech situations, such as bride-price meetings, and is "rich in art, wit, and indirection" (p. 193). One function of this style is the display of a common understanding and agreement – an achievement the Ilongot know will be difficult – through communicative devices such as person and metalinguistic reference, themes of deference, and body positioning. The 'crooked' performance displays the importance to the Ilongot of their egalitarian society, enabling an embrace of all through a voice of indirection and deference. In the last several pages of her study (pp. 218-222), Rosaldo contrasts this 'crooked' speaking style with another 'straight' style, used by 'captains' of the 'government' (linked curiously to Christian missions) who claimed authority, not of the traditional type of appeal to wit and indirection, but by appeal to their position in the government (and to God). Thus, implied by Rosaldo, the traditional voice of communal power, witty persuasion from within, was being – apparently rather quickly – supplanted by a modern voice of power from without, a 'straight' and direct exercise of force. Part of the rhetorical power of Rosaldo's ethnography is its documentation of this dynamic, and its implicit lament that yet once again one way of speaking, of living, was succumbing to another. The tone of Rosaldo's (1973, p. 222) final comments indicate that it is she, perhaps more than the Ilongot, who laments such a 'passing.'

> Recalling that modern Ilongot oratory denies, or undermines, traditional rhetorical elaboration, one cannot help but conclude by noting a parallel between these remarks and the change from the egalitarian ethos of traditional Ilongot society to the increasingly authoritarian orientation which is emerging with its incorporation into the lower strata of Philippine life.

To paraphrase the judgment, to silence a traditional egalitarian voice in favor of a modern hierarchical one is to lose something of value.

A related type of cultural criticism is made by Basso (1970, 1979) as he uses two of his ethnographic studies of Western Apache communication, in part, to correct Anglo misimpressions of the Apache. In his classic study of silence, Basso 1970) begins by noting common misperceptions of Apache as reticent, then proceeds to show the places and cultural meanings of silence within the Apache social world. What he demonstrates is the use of silence by Apaches as a way of being respectful, appropriately modest, and sensitive socially, when in an ambiguous social relationship. Thus, silence for the Apache, the Anglo and others are told, is a function of social and cultural place, not an aspect of personalities nor an entire way of life. Similarly, Basso (1979) confronts the alleged common Anglo misperception that "the humorous side of Indian life has not been emphasized by professed experts" (quoting Vine Deloria, Jr. in Basso, 1979, p. 3). Or, put more generally in the foreword to Basso's (1979, p. ix) book by Hymes, "the great capacity of Indian people for creative wit has been obscured by the image of the Indian as silent stoic." Thus, at one level, Basso's display of Apache joking performances provides resources which can help correct the common misperception of Indians as silent stoics. But further, one cannot help reading these Apache jokes, if one is White or majority in some way, without being chilled by 'the portraits' Apaches draw of 'the Whiteman.' White interaction patterns are portrayed in Apache jokes as self-centered, reckless, ill-tempered, arrogant, and insulting. Given that Apaches must interact with Whites in hospitals and schools, among other places, the puzzlement and oppression they feel in such situations comes – as a result of Basso's analysis – into sharper focus. Thus, a critical assessment operates in Basso's studies in different and complementary directions, as a correction of stereotypical images (Indian

as stoic and humorless), and as a sensitizer to deeply grounded, generally unquestioned, and from the Apache view, oppressive Anglo ways.

To gain perspective on communication patterns used by the Anglo American, public scenes where these patterns are used must be studied. Engaged in such study, I have sought to identify normative judgments about, and cultural meanings of, such communication (Carbaugh, 1987, 1988c, pp. 127-176), and ask about the type of person symbolized in pertinent American speech (1988c, pp. 21-120). This type of study enables critical assessment in multiple ways. First, it paints a speech community of individuals with a cultural brush. The theoretical perspective thus frames one kind of picture, a communal look at individuals. From point one, then, the people are not represented or mirrored as they might have it 'as individuals,' but are drawn at another level, 'as communal actors,' in an effort to produce a portrait enabling both a distance from, and perspective to be gained upon, that which 'the people' naturally and typically do. There is an assumption of movement designed into such study from point one. The assumption asserts that a cultural portrait can produce corrective insights, theoretically and practically, about the personalized and individualized American scene. This amounts to what one might call 'internal juxtaposition,' contrasting two frames (e.g. the folk psychological and academic cultural) within one speech field, resulting in movement from one toward the other. Second, through a "cross-cultural juxtaposition" (cf. Marcus & Fischer, 1986, pp. 157-163), the American case gains a perspective through distance. By comparing relative exotica, for example American speech of the person as "an individual" with Hindi speech of the person as "a dividual" (Carbaugh, 1988c, pp. 39-40, 115ff.), one gains perspective through distance. With each of these techniques – of internal and cross-cultural juxtaposition – there is movement, from a psychological to a cultural view and from one view of the person to another. These are but two examples of critical techniques for "defamiliarization" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, pp. 137-164). And each is evident in varying degrees in some of the studies reviewed above. The point being made with regard to the American case is this: ethnography can distance cultural actors from that which they have created as a way of creating new insight, and gaining perspective, enable

assessments to be made more reflectively, judgments to be made more ably, discriminations to be drawn more finely, especially with regard to what is better and worse. As anyone who has done such ethnography knows, creating such a 'discourse of distance' is itself a critical movement, for it calls to the fore – in a new way – features of cultural life which others might want to remain hidden.

The more general point is this: whether one contrasts speech styles from within a community in order to document and lament the passing of one (Rosaldo, 1973), or contrasts one cultural way with another in order to move and help correct misimpressions and oppressions by the 'other' (Basso, 1970, 1979), or whether one moves a system's sense of itself in order to help it evaluate itself as a system (Carbaugh, 1987, 1988c; cf. Huspek, 1988), in moments such as these the ethnographer has adopted, even if quickly, a critical voice.

In each such case, the object of criticism is a non-academic cultural practice, the locus of criticism derives from a more-or-less standard ethnographic ethic, and the voice is expressed relatively directly. Perhaps Hymes (1983, p. 190) put the ethic most succinctly:

> What ideal or vision do we entertain in terms of language? Two ingredients of a vision, I think, would be a kind of negative freedom and a kind of positive freedom. . . .the freedom to have one's voice – manner and matter – heard and the freedom to develop a voice worth hearing.

In each case discussed above, voices risked not being heard or being heard less, and voices were in need of qualitative enhancement. These propositions, sometimes implicit, and non-essential but productive for ethnography, derive from the application of such an ethic. From this ethical juncture ethnographers have created a voice, a voice that assesses patterns within communities, patterns of contact with communities, patterns that ground communities. In each case, distance from the pattern is created in order to inspect it more reflectively, more closely, more critically. From such a stance, the practice and theory of communication can be enhanced. In creating these moments, the ethnographer adopts a voice of cultural criticism.

CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY: A REFLECTION

This essay could be read as an exercise in critical ethnography, a formulation of and critical reflection upon some fundamentals of ethnographic inquiry. As such, the inquiry has explored some places and types of criticism within some ethnographic research, with special attention given to criticism as something analytically distinguishable from describing, theorizing about, and explaining communication practices. Thus, in addition to formulating types and dimensions of ethnographic criticism – the objects, loci, and modes of natural, academic, and cultural criticisms – the essay also reflects upon three orienting distinctions that are key to ethnographic inquiry.[2] In short, ethnographic description (or representation of communication practices) has been distinguished from ethnographic theorizing (conceptualizing communicative units, relations among units, etc.), both of which are necessary for but distinct from explanation (accounting for variations within and/or between units). Each of these three provides essential orienting positions for some basic ethnographic purposes. Each, as well, is distinct from a critical position (evaluating from an ethical juncture), its types and dimensions. Reflecting upon each, asking when to do them, or when one should do one rather than the others, is to engage in a kind of critical ethnography, a critique of basic philosophical premises in ethnography. Engaged in such reflection, ethnograhy can turn back upon itself, critically assessing the shifting grounds upon which it moves.

But the discussion may sound a bit like sweeping corners in a dust storm. Can description be distinguished from theorizing? Of course description is informed theoretically. And yes, explanation derives from description and may work toward critical ends. But each summarizes a particular kind of claim, making use of communicative data in distinctive and interdependent ways. The room of ethnography requires this interdependence of floor, ceiling, and wall. But, because these are related does not therefore require their conflation. Ethnographic homes are built a brick at a time, and one must distinguish among basic materials of construction; one must also

sweep some corners now and again. Critically assessing these acts of ethnographic construction can help us understand both the role of criticism in ethnography, and the relations among description, theorizing, explanation, and criticism.

To conclude, I want to tell of conversations I heard where the grand critical pillars stood towering over an ethnographic brick or two. It was early 1982, just prior to doing my first full-blown ethnographic field work, when I attended a small conference. Discussions there centered upon 'power,' how 'institutions' oppressed people who worked within. The important points for focusing communication inquiry, according to these discussions, were gender issues and power, social status/class and power, and political resources and power. I listened and studied these ideas carefully, then went to the field. For about three months, my field notes reflected those concerns, where I attempted to develop themes of 'political sensitivity,' 'gender politics,' 'managerial power,' and so on. Eventually, I came to realize that my terms were imposing meanings and tensions onto those of the 'natives.' Over the next several months, I was able to discover their world in their own terms and tensions (Carbaugh, 1988b). My point in telling this story is to highlight a premise in some critical voices that is often left unquestioned, namely, criticism equals an unveiling of power, a display of resources distributed unequally. When this premise is applied unquestioningly, one sometimes strains to hear a cultural voice through a political earpiece, assuming power (and sometimes economics) is salient to a world when its members deem it perhaps secondary, or even unimportant. In other cases, the political voice may be deliberately silenced; the silencing becoming a dynamic worthy of study. In such cases, if one creates a critical voice from some political stance, one renders a world in terms distant from its home. If forced into ethnography, such a presumption risks muddling the cultural voice, obscuring another voice in terms of our own, thus rendering the cultural as something unworthy of study for its own sake, in its own terms. Such a tack is, according at least to Hymes, a 'cardinal sin.'

Concerns political and cultural may of course overlap, as when a communal voice gives expression to oppression and limited distribution of resources, as the Apache case makes evident. But such

overlap is not necessary, not something to be assumed *a priori*. It is something to be discovered, an empirical question in need of response. If it is the case that some peoples have other issues, other tensions, more important than 'politics' or 'economics,' then our ethic must embrace these, giving them a voice, and one worth hearing. And further, if such political and economic issues have a cultural currency, they could be studied that way, as culture speaking about itself, rather than speaking only about politics, power, or economics. This is not of course an argument against political and economic criticisms of communication, only an effort to argue for the cultural voice as something distinctive, something not heard when the listening is done only with political and/or economic ears. To listen fully to culture, one must be positioned there, in the meaning-filled world listening for the meanings created within it, from the standpoint of those who create them, rather than standing elsewhere, hearing culture only as a place solely political, or an echo economic. These are creative readings of the cultural voice, yes, and sometimes important as that. But they are not the same as the cultural voice, and at times drown it out.

By discussing the primary goals of ethnography, as well as the dimensions and types of criticism that come into some ethnographic reports, I hope to have breathed some life into the critical voice as it is heard within some ethnography. Even if the critical voice is nonessential and somewhat peripheral to the fundamental purposes of ethnography, it is not excluded. When it occurs, it needs to be understood. Too often, critical judgment seems untutored in the lessons ethnography can teach.

NOTES

1 As Katriel's (1985) study suggests, the cultural study of plaintive speech, if it occurs, reveals moments of such natural criticism.

2 These 'orienting distinctions' identify, more precisely, functions of communication, or distinctive types of claims, within ethnographic reports.

REFERENCES

Basso, K. (1970). To 'give up on words': Silence in Western Apache culture. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 26*, 213-230.

_____ (1979) *Portraits of 'the whiteman': Linguistic play and cultural symbols among the Western Apache*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness* (pp. 55-310). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carbaugh, D. (1987). Communication rules in DONAHUE discourse. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 21*, 31-61.

_____ (1988a). Comments on 'culture' in communication inquiry. *Communication Reports, 1*, 38-41.

_____ (1988b). Cultural terms and tensions in the speech at a television station. *Western Journal of Speech Communication. 52*, 216-237.

_____ (1988c). *Talking American: Cultural discourses on* DONAHUE. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Cushman, D. & Tompkins, P. (1980). A theory of rhetoric for contemporary society. *Philosophy and Rhetoric, 13*, 43-67.

Dewey, J. (1930). *Construction and criticism.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Graham, L. (1988). John Searle's speech act theory: The illocutionary act. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Seminar on Cultural Universals, New Orleans.

Huspek, M. (1988). Language analysis and power. *Semiotica, 72*, 341-359.

Hymes, D. (1962). The ethnography of speaking. In T. Gladwin & W. Sturtevant (Eds.), *Anthropology and human behavior* (pp. 13-53). Washington, DC: Anthropological Society of Washington.

_____ (1983). Report from an underdeveloped country: Toward linguistic competence in the United States. In B. Bain (Ed.), *The sociogenesis of language and human conduct.* New York: Plenum.

_____ (1987). Tonkawa poetics: John Rush Buffalo's 'Coyote and Eagle's daughter.' In J. Sherzer and A. Woodbury (Eds.), *Native American discourse: Poetics and rhetoric* (pp. 17-61). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Katriel, T. (1985). 'Griping' as a verbal ritual in some Israeli discourse. In M. Dascal (Ed.), *Dialogue: An interdisciplinary approach.* (pp. 367-381). Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.

_____ (1986). *Talking straight: 'Dugri' speech in Israeli Sabra culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keesing, R. (1975). Explorations in role analysis. In M. Kinkade, K. Hale, & O. Werner (Eds.), *Linguistics and anthropology* (pp. 385-403). Lisse: Peter De Ridder Press.

Marcus, G. & Cushman, D. (1982). Ethnographies as texts. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 11*, 25-69.

Marcus, G. & Fischer, M. (1986). *Anthropology as cultural critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Parks, M. (1982). Ideology in interpersonal communication: Off the couch and into the world. In M. Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 5* (pp. 79-107). Brunswick, NJ: Transation Books.

Philipsen, G. (1975). Speaking 'like a man' in Teamsterville: Male role enactment in an urban neighborhood. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 61*, 13-22.

_____ (1976). Places for speaking in Teamsterville. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62*, 15-25.

Rosaldo, M. (1973). I have nothing to hide: The language of Ilongot oratory. *Language in Society, 2*, 193-223.

_____ (1982). The things we do with words: Ilongot speech acts and speech act theory in philosophy. *Language in Society, 11*, 203-237.

Scott, R. and Brock, B. (1972). *Methods of rhetorical criticism*. New York: Harper & Row.