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The issue of Selection of Objects of Analysis in Ethnographies of Speaking

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Ethnographies of Speaking

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Ethnographies of speaking can position culture in one of two ways vis-à-vis communicative practice. Some use communication practices observed in a community as data that are informative about the cultural beliefs and values of its members. Other studies use what is known about the cultural beliefs and values of community members to reveal the meaning and interconnections among recurrent communication practices in the community. Regardless of which element — communication or culture — is foreground and which is background, claims about the cultural values of a community have to be made, and the empirical basis for this is the observed practice of its members. Yet methodologically and analytically, discovering cultural values from communication practices in a community is problematic. Communication practices are invariably local and situated: They occur within and as components of specific interactions. Cultural values and beliefs, conversely, are by definition transcendent of specific interactions. They encompass aggregates of

interaction across time, place, and individuals. Thus, studying communication and culture as interwoven systems creates a need to move analytically between situated observable practices and the transcendent cultural beliefs that contextualize them and contribute to their meaning.

Methodologically, in seeking to find that which is transcendent and symbolic, that is, cultural, in an empirical reality of varied and complex talk practices, some empirical objects are selected for analysis from the total stream of observed action. Although presumably, almost any aspect of communication practice could be examined for its cultural significance, there is the practicality that some aspects or particulars are more revealing than others of a community's shared values and beliefs. Personal address, silence, speech act performance, and ritual insults, for example, are all communication practices that have been selected from the stream of everyday language and social interaction, and examined for the insights they yield about culture grounded in concrete instantiations of practice.

The basis for making such selections of empirical particulars to guide inquiry into culture are the focus of this article. I argue that the traditional basis for selection of objects for ethnographic study is an unsystematic and largely intuitive one, often revolving around practices in the community under study that are striking to the researcher as contrasts to practices in his or her own culture. The solution I propose is to ground the selection aspect of ethnographic practice in a more neutral and explicit procedure, grounded in either universal pragmatics or conversational structure.

This discussion is framed in a case in point, the cultural study of directive performance, in order to illustrate different methodological approaches to establishing links between culture and communication practice that reflect these distinct approaches to selection. As a first step in constructing an argument about ethnographic selection, then, it is useful to give a brief overview of why the performance of directives has come to be regarded as potentially revealing of culture.

DIRECTIVE PERFORMANCE AS CULTURALLY REVEALING SPEECH ACTION

The phenomena described by Searle (1975, 1976) as directives (attempts on the part of one person to compel action on the part of

another) reveal any number of things about the workings of language, including the construction of meaning on several levels. First, directives present an interesting pragmatic problem. How utterances without explicit directive content are unproblematically interpreted as directives has been extensively explored as a rich instance of how people use and make sense of indirect speech. Second, the varied possibilities for formulation of directives serve as a relational indicator on an interpersonal level in that they are central to relational definition, acting as an index to the goods and services that interactants routinely expect to be provided by others as a constitutive element of a particular relationship. More specifically, because compelling the actions of another implies power or rights to do so, directive performance is a sensitive—if enormously complicated—reflection of power relationships between individuals. Finally, because situational context is a crucial factor in strategic selection among alternative utterances, the interplay of situation and directive form presents a rich complexity of pattern and variation to be studied. Selection of an appropriate formulation is a crucial decision, because the likelihood of success in compelling the desired action may rest on asking, or telling, in an appropriate fashion. Because directives are an avenue for definition of situations, they have been examined for the illumination they provide into cultural beliefs and premises.

On this level of analysis, it is an empirical question whether these aspects of directives apply universally to performance, that is, whether they are culturally neutral. Alternatively, there may be cultural variations in their application, based on communal understandings about personhood, desirable relationships among persons, power and the appropriate constructions and uses of it. In fact, empirical work to date strongly indicates that directive performance does have important cultural roots. The question of interest here is what basis there was, or can be, to single out directive performance from the stream of observed practices in a community as being suggestive of culture-specific meaning.

Three sources of contrast from which analysis of culture may proceed, focused around the particular phenomenon of directives, will now be described and illustrated. The three bases for selection of objects of ethnographic study, discussed in this article as approaches to the study of directives, embody different fundamental conceptual assumptions about the intersection of communication conduct and culture: What is knowable, what is real, and what counts as a valid illumination

of spoken life. A comparison of their advantages and disadvantages, with an eye toward productive combination and cross-fertilization, addresses the question of how to move analytically between observable communication practice and underlying cultural beliefs. By honing in on the amount of selection of an object of study, these conceptual differences are highlighted. Each approach to selection is elaborated through examination of directive data from two cultures: the United States and Colombia.[1] The first is a traditional ethnographic approach, based on an assumption of cultural differences in ways of speaking. The second and third begin with formulated universals, such that contrasts between proposed universal components of social interaction and observed patterns of performance in a community are the starting point for analysis.

THE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE
OF ETHNOGRAPHY

To examine talk from a cultural perspective, ethnographers of speaking traditionally approach talk "from above" (Sigman, 1987; also comparable to Cicourel's, 1980, "top down" approach to discourse analysis). To take this perspective is to assume that coherence is a quality of conversation as a whole, derived from a history of episodes. "Culture," in a traditional ethnographic sense, is that set of premises and beliefs that are (a) deeply felt, that is, imbued with some elements of symbolism beyond the physical present, not accidental or merely habitual (Carbaugh, 1988a); (b) widely accessible, that is, available/understandable within a community that transcends individuals, dyads, and the physical present (Carbaugh, 1988a); and (c) reflected in, constitutive of, and somehow retrievable from participants' talk.

There is a commitment in the ethnography of speaking to stay close to the talk—to focus on the spoken life of members of a speech community rather than on economic, political, material, or other aspects of their social lives. At the same time, there is an assumption that beyond observable aspects of talk are communal understandings of personhood, relationships, power, and talk itself that inform individuals' interpretations of discourse.

Building from the immediately empirical facts of talk to discovery of the larger patterns of value and belief that are invoked by the talk involves three component tasks, conducted concurrently or in sequence: *observation, selection,* and *reflection.* The observation component is to acquire the empirical base for cultural analysis, a record of locally situated activities that may be narrowly or broadly focused. It is common to begin broadly, immersed in the widest range of experience in a speech community that is accessible to the researcher. Participant observation is most frequently the basis for this component, in which the logical extreme is to be a native of the community.

The second component, selection — of particular interest here — is to narrow focus to one or more communication practices from within the observational record. That may be, for example, a linguistic or discursive practice (such as ritual insults, described among African-Americans by Labov, 1972; Abrahams, 1976; Baugh, 1983; or gossip, described by Arno, 1980; Brenneis, 1984; Goldsmith, 1989/90); a native term or set of related terms (e.g., Katriel & Philipsen's, 1981, analysis of the term *communication* among North Americans), or values explicitly stated by members of the community during communication episodes (e.g., views of the "self" and the value of "openness" among participants on the *Donahue* show; Carbaugh, 1988b). Alternatively, a pervasive linguistic element such as personal address (R. Brown & Gilman, 1960; Jonz, 1975; Scotton & Zhu, 1982), silence (Basso, 1970; Philips, 1976), or speech act performance (Ahern, 1979; Rushforth, 1981; M. Rosaldo, 1982) may be tracked across situations and participants.

The third component, reflection, is to develop a representation of communal understandings based on analysts' and informants' insights into patterns in the specific practices selected for analysis. For example, once a native term has been selected as culturally significant, informants' perspectives on how they understand the term as part of a larger system of values and beliefs are sought. Uses of the term and related terms, within interaction itself and as an interpretive construct, add further to the schema of properties and contexts for use that constitute the cultural meaning of the term. Natives' explanations and interpretations of rituals, discursive practices, and particular episodes of talk are elicited and integrated with (or tested against) researchers' inferences and analyses. In this analytic move from talk to culture, ethnography has traditionally privileged abstraction of cultural principles that is heavily interpretive. The interpretations may be the natives', the re-

searcher's, or collaboratively constructed. In any case, talk-about-talk is a crucial evidential link between interaction and claims of cultural values.

Perhaps because of the interpretive nature of the ethnographic enterprise, data collection typically has been aimed at acquiring those interactional moments that seem culturally rich, or have the potential for illuminating the generally unspoken premises of belief, value, and symbolism that inform the phenomena of interest. Analysis aims to integrate data of both kinds—both talk and talk-about-talk—into a coherent and compelling case that a specified set of premises has meaning, and/or that particular norms have discursive force (Philipsen, 1987) among members of a speech community.

Ethnography as traditionally practiced is elastic in its moves between observation, selection, and reflection. There is broad latitude for what counts as data and how to move from localized instances to claims about cultural values and premises. A fundamental premise of this approach to the study of communication and culture is that speech communities differ in their ways of speaking and the values they attach to them (Hymes, 1962, 1972). A primary basis for selecting objects of study is logically, then, one of contrast between a community's ways, and alternative ways that exist in other communities. This does not contradict the ethnographic commitment to study speech communities on their own terms, and not only (or always) in comparison to others. It is to emphasize that selection among observed phenomena is an inescapable aspect of any method of social science research, and that contrast is virtually always the basis for selection in ethnographic research, even if implicitly.

Perhaps because ethnographers often (though not always) study cultures other than their own, whatever speaking practice provides the most striking contrast with speaking practices in the researcher's own culture may be selected as a fruitful focus for investigation. That may be a native term that has no parallel in the analyst's language; a discursive practice that happens more or less frequently, very differently, or not at all in the researcher's speech community; or, if the researcher is a member of the community under study, a distinction observed by way of exposure to other cultures.

Such is the case with the two directive events presented here. They were collected as part of a larger corpus of data and selected for the contrasting efforts they reveal of members of two cultures as people

attempt to compel the actions of one or more others. A concrete instance of directive performance is presented, in each case, as a member of a category of similar actions. The cross-cultural comparison is on the level of the speech event, that is, the kind of directive action being performed, as labeled by a native term used in connection with the episode.

Recomendarle a Alguien: A Colombian Directive

A "recommendation" with regard to obtaining a job or entry to an educational institution can mean much the same in urban Colombian society as it does in U.S. society: A written or spoken testimonial from someone familiar with the candidate's qualifications is submitted to the person or committee charged with selection. In that sense, "to recommend someone" (*recomendarle a alguien*) is less an act of directive performance than expressing an opinion that has been solicited.

Although that meaning of *recommend* is substantially similar to its cognate in U.S. English, there is another use of the term that is striking in its distinctiveness, where *recomendarle a alguien* carries a great deal more directive force. An example of this speech event, and commentary from another informant experienced in such matters, show its function and force. The example is given first in the original Spanish, followed by an English translation.

(1a)
((LG and D are professors at a public university in Bogotá. D is, in addition, coordinator of the evening classes, which constitute a parallel administrative unit to the daytime program. Admissions to their department, Advertising, are quite competitive and an entrance interview is one of the major determinants. Such interviews take place in groups of four or five students answering general questions from two interviewers—in this case, LG and D. After the second group of the day had left, as LG and D were filling out rating forms on the applicants, another professor from the department, P, came in.))

1	P:	Oigan, se me olvidó decirles que en ese grupo había una
2		recomendada, una hija de un consulado.
3	D:	Esto me parece tráfico de influencias. ((wry smile))
4	P:	((shrugs)) De todos modos es mejor si pongan una
5		buena calificación en la entrevista, en todo caso saben
6		que va'entrar, que llegaron las llamadas de todas
7		partes (.) de la rectoría, de la decanatura, bueno (.)
8		de dónde haya sido.

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 9   LG:   Y no se sabe de quién fue la recomendación?
10   P:    No. Muchas veces uno nunca sabe, y es mejor así,
11         mejor no saber
12   D:    ((looks ruefully at LG)) Entonces, porqué nos ponen a
13         hacer entrevistas, es lo que yo siempre me pregunto.
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(1b)

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 1   P:    Listen, I forgot to tell you that there was a recomendada
 2         in that last group, the daughter of a diplomat.
 3   D:    That sounds to me like influence trafficking. ((wry smile))
 4   P:    ((shrugs)) In any case it's better if you put a high
 5         score here in the interview, you know that this person
 6         will get in anyway, calls came in from everywhere (.)
 7         from the president's office, from the dean's office (.)
 8         well, wherever they came from.
 9   LG:   And no one knows who the recommendation came from?
10   P:    No. Lots of times one never knows, and it's better that
11         way, better not to know.
12   D:    ((looks ruefully at LG)) So why do they have us do
13         interviews, is what I always ask myself.
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D's answer in line 3 ("That sounds to me like influence trafficking")
shows an orientation to P's announcement that there was a
"recomendada" as a directive. Directive force is not contained in the
form of the utterance, such that the basis for participants' under-
standing of it as such is not clear from the utterance alone. Yet it seems
to count as a directive to the two interviewers to give that individual a
high score on the interview, regardless of her actual performance.

A comment from another informant, at another place and time,
further illuminates the directive force that the term *recomendada* can
have. M, a profesor at a private university, was on his way to administer
make-up final exams. Such exams typically are oral; students who have
a failing grade in the course after the regular final can take the make-up
and, if they pass that exam, receive a passing grade in the course as well.
M remarked that there were always *recomendados* among students who
took such exams:

> Vienen recomendados por padrinos — el decano, el rector, un profesor. Una
> vez entró un colega mía y me dió un papelito, y dijo "Le recomiendo que
> me llame en este teléfono," y había un número de estudiante allá. Yo les
> hago preguntas fáciles para que puedan pensar que sí se les hizo exámen.

They come recommended by "godparents"—the chair, the president, a faculty member. One time a colleague of mine came in and gave me a piece of paper, and said, "I recommend you call me at this number," and there was a student ID number written there. I give them easy questions so (at least) they feel like they've taken (some kind of) exam.

I asked him if it ever occurred to him to give the exam as he would to other students, and if the *recomendado* failed, he or she failed. M shrugged and replied:

Yo hago favores para cobrar favores. Si uno no colabora ((pauses; jerks a thumb backward over his shoulder in a gesture that suggests "you're in the street")). A veces me da rabia que las cosas funcionan así en este país, que el mérito no cuenta para nada. Cuando me da rabia les paso a todos.

I do favors so I can ask favors. If one doesn't cooperate ((pauses; jerks a thumb backward over his shoulder in a gesture that suggests "you're in the street")). Sometimes it makes me mad that things work this way in this country, that merit counts for nothing. When I get mad I just pass them all.

M suggests that *recomendaciones* need not come from an organizational superior to count as directives that the recipient is strongly compelled to fulfill. According to a number of other Colombia informants, such directives do, in fact, almost always receive compliance. Despite M's disapproval of the system, he makes use of it himself to obtain (presumably) similar "favors" for his own students. Refusing to go along with the system would change nothing about the system except his place in it: He could lose his job for denying the goods sought by the *recomendado*.

Use of the term *recomendada* in the first instance (1a) drew my attention because of the accompanying comment by the professor (lines 4–5): "In any case it's better if you put a high score here in the interview, you know that this person will get in anyway . . ." A *recomendación* of this nature was clearly distinct from some other instances of recommendations that I heard of in Colombia, in which testimonials of candidates' abilities were offered as informational, perhaps advisory statements. In this case, it was plain that the *recomendación* would, in fact, override the judgment of the interviewers. This kind of *recomendación* was also significantly different from any use of the English cognate, **recommendation**, I had ever heard.

As such, *recomendarle a alguien* seemed a fruitful starting point for

further analysis, an avenue through which to pursue its meaning with informants, analyzing regularities of its use to discover the values and beliefs in which it was situated. Contextualizing it further within the broader interpersonal ideology of urban Colombians requires, unfortunately, a rather brief gloss of complex patterns described and substantiated in more detail elsewhere (cf. Gutierrez de Pineda & Vila de Pineda, 1988; Beltrán Urán, 1989; Vélez, 1989; Fitch, 1989, 1990/91, 1991). Put simply, Colombians' perception of the nature of personhood is that persons are first and foremost sets of bonds to others. Individuals are essentially incomplete entities, incapable of realizing many of life's most crucial activities without cooperation and assistance from others. The number and quality of relationships that one has with others are viewed as a primary predictor of the efficacy of one's actions. Connections with adequately powerful others, committed to one's own success and happiness, enable accomplishment of virtually any objective, even those prohibited by law or constrained by competition.

The directive expressed in a *recomendación* relies upon and evokes that common understanding and does so effectively even when those performing or receiving the directive seem to disapprove of the practice. It is in that sense that *recomendarle a alguien* is proposed as a culturally revealing type of directive. When the action recommended is to perform a task carefully and dependably, the relational aspect is that the hearer is implicitly reminded that more than the task itself is at stake. If the hearer fails to follow through on the task as desired, the importance of the task to the speaker is not paid sufficient homage and the relationship between speaker and hearer may suffer as a result.

Recomendarle a alguien is thus a relatively strong directive among Colombians. Refusal typically carries a high price, although the precise action desired by the speaker may not be specified. Two assumptions are central to directives of this kind. First, persons may compel the actions of others on behalf of someone to whom they are connected. Second, reciprocal obligation within an extended relational network is a legitimate basis of power from which to deliver directives, with definite expectations that they will receive compliance.

The following instance from the United States might seem unremarkable to a native, but it provides a parallel case of contrast to the cognate directive event in Colombian usage that, taken together with related data, suggests that a cultural principle is also involved in the United States.

To Make a Suggestion: **An American Middle-Class Directive**

A U.S. middle-class directive, *to suggest,* provides a contrast to *recomendar* in that the strength of the directive is left ambiguous or disguised, whereas the desired action may be directly expressed. Although suggestions are not always labeled as such in the context of the directive utterance, the following instance from the U.S. data provides a useful example of *suggesting* as a speech event because it is, repeatedly, so labeled.

(2)
((E and M are co-workers in a manufacturing company. Both have been key players in the organization's attempts to make certain changes in its climate, such that much of their interaction centers around that joint effort. Roughly speaking, M is of superior status in the organization than E. They belong to different units within the organization; M is director of her division, E reports to someone at the same rank as M. E is male and has been with the organization for several years; M is female and has only been directly employed by the organization for a short time. They are both in their mid 40s.))

1	E:	Here's a suggestion—a strong suggestion, just to file
2		away in your memory bank. I read it in one of the Tom
3		Peters books, there was this company that puts out its
4		directory listed alphabetically by peoples' *first* names. I
5		thought that was a great idea, lots of times I can =
6	M:	= reinforces first-name basis =
7	E:	= think of somebody's first name because that's what I
8		call 'em every day, but I have a *heck* of a time thinking
9		"now what is her last name, didn't she get married?"
10	M:	Sounds like a good idea, we really need some
11		lateralization around here. There's a ridiculous amount
12		of hierarchy for an organization of 400 people.
13	E:	So that's just a suggestion, but file it away in your
		memory bank.

In standard American English, *command* and *suggest* are generally understood to be two different types of directives. Distinguishing features include (a) a suggestion may more readily be ignored or refused than a command; (b) a command more often comes from superiors, whereas suggestions come from peers and subordinates (though suggestions may come from superiors as well, it is difficult to imagine

commands from subordinates); and (c) a command is believed to carry greater force than a suggestion, that is, there is a greater obligation to comply and a potentially greater sanction if compliance is not forthcoming. Given those characteristics, what is the culturally understood force of E's utterances? Does labeling this event a "suggestion" make it one, or is there some possibility that it is a disguised command?

What made this directive sequence interesting was the ambiguity created by contradictory cues as to its directive force. Twice E says that this is a *suggestion,* presumably to rule out an interpretation of the directive as a command. However, E emphasizes the *directive* nature of the utterance: "a strong suggestion, just to file away in your memory bank." When he repeats his defining qualifier ("that's just a suggestion") he also repeats the desired action ("file it away in your memory bank.") Although arranging the directory by first name may be optional and thus a suggestion, that M should consider seriously E's idea to do so is repeatedly specified.

E is male in an organization that is over 90% male, and he has several years of employment and interpersonal history with the company. M is female, part of a division of the company generally described as a support service, and she refers to herself earlier in this same conversation as "the new kid on the block." Despite M's insistence that this is a suggestion, given the relative positions/identities of M and E, there could well be a command implied in this sequence.[2] Although the directive to arrange the directory by first name is refusable, and thus a suggestion, the invocation to entertain the idea very seriously (and probably be prepared to offer good reasons if the directory is not someday arranged by first name) is quite likely a command.

As in the Colombian instance, in which *recomendar* became interesting when it was used in a way that **recommend** would not be used in English, this use of *to suggest* was interesting because its cognate in Colombian Spanish, *hacer una sugerencia,* would not be used to camouflage a command. Commands are sometimes made indirectly, to be sure, but labeling something a suggestion disqualifies it from being anything *but* that. The recipient is completely free to disregard it, whatever their status relative to the speaker.

The contrast between U.S. and Colombian usage thus raises the question whether there is a *cultural* reason for E's use of the label "suggestion" for this directive. It is possible that he does so for situation-specific reasons or that this "suggestion" is literally that, and

no more than that. To label something as a suggestion when it may be a command—and the contradictory insistence to "file it away in your memory bank" does raise that possibility—parallels other directive force disclaimers encountered frequently in the U.S. data and nonexistent in the Colombian data. Phrases such as "Well, if I were you, I would . . ." and "I'm not trying to tell you what to do, but . . ." often preceded directive utterances that clearly left little room for refusal. Taken as part of such a pattern, this instance of the speech event of *making a suggestion* may reveal American cultural beliefs about personhood, relationships, and power.

Considerable empirical evidence suggests that a fundamental belief in persons as autonomous individuals who, ideally, are "free" to act in accordance with inner states and desires rather than the wishes of others is a characteristically American belief about the nature of personhood (see, e.g., Sennett, 1978; Katriel & Philipsen, 1981; Yankelovich, 1981; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Carbaugh, 1987, 1989). Directive acts, juxtaposed against such a belief system, present a communication event that is potentially problematic. To the extent that compelling another individual to act threatens the autonomy of the individual, directives intrinsically violate that central premise of personhood. If the directive is expressed in a way that seems to allow for refusal, however, or that connects with the hearer's own desires, the violation may be reduced.

To make a suggestion thus seems to be a kind of directive that is far more consonant with the American view of personhood than *to command*. The fact that there are aspects of this directive—and countless others—that create ambiguity about whether E's insistence that it is "just a suggestion" can be believed, underscores the connection between *suggesting* and the value placed on individualism and autonomy. If E's real intention is closer to a command than a suggestion (or if there is something close to a command embedded in this sequence of utterances), he faces a cultural imperative to disguise that intention—which he can readily do by labeling the directive explicitly and repeatedly as "just a suggestion."

Comparative Analysis of Directives

There are a number of differences between *recomendarle a alguien* and *to make a suggestion,* as well as similarities, that suggest the

TABLE 1
Comparison of *Recomendar* and *Suggest*

	Recomendar	*Suggest*
Range of applicability	small	large
Frequency of occurrence	infrequent	frequent
Possible to refuse?	difficult or	actual rights to
	impossible	refuse vary
Relational price for noncompliance	high	varies
Strength of directive force	very strong	ambiguous
Action required by hearer	not specified	clearly specified

appropriateness of comparing the two. The differences are summarized
in Table 1.

Each of these speech events locates one kind of directive within a
system that encompasses other kinds, of both greater and lesser force.
The force that each of them has, in turn, seems related to underlying
premises about the nature of human selves and the desirability (or
feasibility) of compelling their actions. *Recomendarle a alguien* has,
according to the informants consulted, close to an imperative force, and
that force is derived from the reciprocal obligations entailed by being
part of a ubiquitous interpersonal network. *To make a suggestion* is less
forceful than a command, but more specific than a hint. Labeling an
utterance as a suggestion when it may actually be a stronger attempt to
influence a decision suggests a belief that individual rights, such as to
make decisions that fall within one's job description, supercede inter-
personal relationships, creating a need to deny even low levels of
obligation to comply. The distinctiveness of each system emerges most
clearly from the contrast to a different one.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Method of
Selection**

A traditional ethnographic approach allows for description of
specific communication behavior on a level that permits detailed
comparison (although because the situations discussed were meant only
to serve as an example, less detail was included than might be done with
these speech events). Focusing on the speech act level allows for

comparison of different kinds of directives without attempting, at the same time, to specify all of the contextual factors that co-occur with them. Defining suggestions as distinct from commands does not require, for example, determining from mutually exclusive categorizations of data whether commands frequently, sometimes, or never take place between peers. This approach also avoids the need to distinguish directive types on the basis of linguistic features alone, a process that presents difficulties such as metaphorical and teasing usage, context dependence, and so forth. There is, in short, a commitment to understanding utterances or sequences that convey directive intention as categories of talk that have a coherent place within a broader system of other kinds of speech acts. There is a further commitment to explaining the logic of the system as a whole, before the particulars of one system are compared to the particulars of another.

Selection of an object of study from among multiple and varied possibilities is one of the least formulaic aspects of ethnographic research. The very latitude in the kinds of data on which claims can be based and the mandate to study cultures "on their own terms" can, at the same time, make the link between concrete practices and transcendent values tenuous and, at times, overly subjective. As noted earlier, culture transcends specific interactional moments at the same time that it is constructed through talk. A complex array of historical and symbolic knowledge is brought to bear on interaction. The path from a collection of similar instances of talk to a claim about cultural meaning is by no means straightforward.

Ethnographers expect to specify with clarity and precision how they collected and analyzed their data, but accounting for how they selected their object(s) of study from among all the possibilities is a more slippery matter. Wherever the strongest case that an object has symbolic, cultural weight can be built, and however that case can be constructed from among widely varied sources of data, an analytic toehold is possible. A danger in that basis for selection discussed by R. Rosaldo (1989) and others is that, in the effort to find order in a cultural milieu, systems of meaning may be "discovered" that exist more in the mind and experience of the researcher than of the natives. He questioned the premise that there is as much order in cultural systems as previously assumed, or that it is discoverable by outsiders. The emphasis on discovering common threads in culture may lead to overlooking

other important connections through which shared meaning is constructed, as well as the aberrations and disharmonies that are equally pervasive in social life.

The risk inherent in selecting objects for study based on the sharpness of contrast between the practices of one culture and the practices of another is that the nature and importance of that difference may be a product of the researcher, or a function of the fit between a particular researcher and a particular culture, than illuminating of the culture under study. That risk exists as much among ethnographers who study their own culture as among those who study different cultures.

Many ethnographers suggest and employ procedural safeguards such as triangulation (Philipsen, 1977; Philips, 1983; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989) whose aim, when rigorously pursued, is to prevent such impositions of meaning from outside. There is a restlessness among others, however, regarding the traditional epistemological stance and related research practices of ethnography. The energy generated by that restlessness seems to surge in two directions. One is a kind of postmodern/critical questioning of the premises of ethnographic practice and writing, focused as it historically is on discovering common threads in culture while overlooking the role of the researcher as integral to that discovery. That enterprise is explored in depth elsewhere (by Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988; R. Rosaldo, 1989; and others) and is not pursued further here. The second direction is toward a tighter connection to interactional moments and a fixed referent as a basis for selection and contrast or communicative practice. The two approaches that remain to be discussed offer this latter solution to the problem of selection in investigation of culture and communication.

SYSTEMATIZING THE SELECTION
OF OBJECTS OF ANALYSIS

It has been noted that ethnography begins from an assumption that a primary characteristic of language use is its variability across speech communities. In contrast, some other approaches to language use begin with an assumption or claim that certain components of social discourse are inherent in communicative practice. Those components—practices,

principles, exigencies—are presumably (or observably) universal, although there may be certain theoretically specified areas where variation across cultures is possible. Thus, a universal frame can be employed to direct the researcher to examine the observational record of a culture for certain kinds of data. Any such data that depart from what has been set forth as "universal"—or in some cases, patterns of occurrence of certain features—are worthy of selection as points of departure for further inquiry about the culture.

M. Rosaldo's ethnographic study of the Ilongot tribe of the Philippines (M. Rosaldo, 1973, 1980, 1982) offers an illustration of how cultural variation from what was posited to be a universal aspect of directive performance was the starting point for cultural analysis. She criticized speech act theory as developed by Searle (1975, 1976) as not truly universal, but as reflective of a specific cultural perspective on how people do things with words. A substantial part of her argument is based on Searle's proposition that directives are ordinarily performed indirectly, because uttering them directly would be awkwardly forceful and rude. M. Rosaldo's focus on directive performance, and the cultural understandings of directives to create and maintain relationships, proceeds from the sharp opposition between actual Ilongot use of forthright directives and the indirectness proposed by Searle as somehow inherent in the nature of directives.

Among the Ilongot, forceful commands such as "Pound me rice" or "Go fetch some water" are far more commonplace than requests phrased more indirectly. In private life, commands are "a sort of prototype of all language (just as, one imagines, the declarative sentence is for us)" (M. Rosaldo, 1980, p. 73).

In this community, straightforward, brusque commands in private are not interpreted as unduly harsh. They are, rather, argued by M. Rosaldo to be required by certain basic characteristics of personhood and relationships. Peoples' "hearts," according to the Ilongot, are unstable and require direct guidance by way of explicit commands, in order to avoid disintegration of social life into chaos. Beyond their function of instructing persons in what actions should be performed, commands are the basis for formation of important relationships. By attending to the commands of others, persons develop an attitude of responsibility and commitment to caring for them. Yet those who do not comply with commands in private life, even if they are children, do not necessarily receive punishment or disapproval on the basis of noncom-

pliance alone. Despite the frequency of direct commands, even young children must be coaxed and persuaded to fulfill the wishes of adults, because no speech is understood to be truly coercive.

M. Rosaldo's account of Ilongot directive performance provides an example of how a universal theory served as a starting point for cultural analysis. Although her argument is that speech act theory does not in fact describe Ilongot use of directives accurately, the theory does provide a fixed point of orientation from which to select objects of analysis. The selection is made on the basis of variation from that theory, as much as from M. Rosaldo's lived experience of first U.S. and then Ilongot culture.

To elaborate on this point, I move to a comparison of directives that merit selection for cultural analysis on the basis of their fit within a set of universal principles theoretically conceptualized as politeness.

Politeness/Directness as Universal Versus Cultural Practice

Politeness theory (P. Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) and cross-cultural realization of speech act research (CCSARP; cf. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989) begin from the observation that speech acts may be performed directly or indirectly. An assumption common to both of these perspectives is that interaction involves choices that will be received as more or less polite, and that *that* is a universal aspect of interaction, although which matters raise politeness issues, and how those issues are addressed through language use, is culturally defined.

From both of these perspectives, selection between alternative forms of directives involves striking a balance between competing objectives: face wants versus efficiency, in the case of politeness theory; and politeness versus clarity, in CCSARP work (see Blum-Kulka, 1987, 1990). Each presumes that universal aspects of directives as speech acts exist and may serve as a parsimonious starting point for describing particular cultural preferences, as well as the values and beliefs that account for those preferences.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is built on the idea that interactants seek to satisfy one another's "face wants," both negative (the desire not to be imposed upon) and positive (the desire to be

approved of). Efforts to satisfy those wants are described as "face redressive strategies." Selection of a face redressive strategy (e.g., use of an indirect directive rather than a direct one) is based on assessment of three variables: the relative power (P) of speaker and hearer, the social distance (D) between speaker and hearer, and the magnitude of the imposition (R) involved in making the directive. One way to examine directive use on this basis is, therefore, to analyze whether the strategy selected in each instance (42 specific categories are described, with a number of variations) is what is predicted given assessments of P, D, and R in that instance. Another way is to monitor tendencies to use one type of strategy more often than another — to focus on avoiding imposition rather than indicating approval, for example — as indicative of "cultural ethos": "the affective quality of interaction characteristic of members of a society" (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 243).

Alternatively, the CCSARP approach categorizes gradations in directness of directives by means of a nine-level system of "request strategies" designed to provide a cross-linguistically valid scale of directness. The categories are mood derivable, explicit performatives, hedged performatives, locution derivable, scope stating, language-specific suggestory formula, reference to preparatory conditions, strong hints, and mild hints. The degree of imposition involved in the directive is further manipulated by way of "mitigators" such as avoiding naming the speaker, making the request into a question, seeking involvement in the goal addressed by the directive, and so forth. Once a sufficient body of directive data from a particular speech community is analyzed according to these categories, preferences for direct or indirect forms are revealed and systematic comparison across cultures and languages is made possible.

Both of these approaches formulate a set of uniform factors that serve as a starting point for investigation within a culture. Both center around a system of categories for description of speech acts intended to capture patterns of usage that supercede (or provide some way to encode) language differences, as well as contextual variation. There is a presumption that cultural beliefs and values can be deduced from patterns of directive use in a speech community based on the pragmatic structure proposed in the theory.

Because politeness theory proceeds from a more elaborate theoretical base, it serves as a useful illustration of how a universal pragmatics approach may provide grounding for contrasts in ethnographic re-

search. Two directive sequences, one from Colombian data and one from U.S. American data, are presented next, followed by discussion of the advantages and limitations of this approach to the task of selection.

Colombian Data

(3)
((Preschool teacher, to mother of child, as mother drops child off for the day))

> T: ¡Le digo que se tiene que levantar más temprano y tenerle
>   aquí a tiempo! ¡Si vuelve a llegar tarde no se lo recibo!
>
>   I'm telling you, you have to get up earlier and have him
>   here on time! If you get here late again I won't let him in!

((Mother does not make eye contact with teacher as she buttons child's sweater, kisses him goodbye, and leaves.))

The teacher's directive as issued seems dramatically at odds with the predictions made by politeness theory. It can be classified as bald on record, imperative plus threat (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 97). This is the most unredressed form of directive possible within the politeness framework, implying that there is little or no face threat involved in the directive. Yet according to some elements of the politeness formula, redress should accompany the directive. There is substantial **distance** between speaker and hearer; they know one another only as role incumbents (parent/teacher) in a large and impersonal system. The **imposition** implied by the directive to "have him here on time!" is potentially quite large, if the parent lives far away and is dependent on public transportation.

The **power** dimension is more complex. In a sense, the teacher should be the parent's subordinate, as an employee paid to care for the child. If power were being defined that way by these people, a less-powerful, nonintimate speaker would not be issuing a directive of considerable imposition with no redress or mitigation.

This anomaly or deviation from politeness theory warrants selecting such directives for further inquiry into cultural beliefs. It is possible that such inquiry would reveal that the speaker is for some reason defined as more powerful than the hearer in this instance. The preschool setting is, after all, the professional domain of the teachers, such that enforcing the rules and policies of the institution could regularly be pursued with

this level of sternness. Alternatively, such inquiry could reveal the teacher to be of higher social status than the parent.[3] If either of these is the shared belief of the teacher and parent, the unredressed directive is then consistent with politeness theory in that persons of significantly more power, as that culture defines it, may issue bald on record directives with impunity.

American Data

(4)
((Professor, talking to receptionist))

Professor: I have to get this exam done. Would you mind-
           if anyone calls could you-
Receptionist: Uh, uh, sure. ((A few minutes later, the phone
           rings.)) No, I'm sorry, Professor [X] isn't here
           right now, can someone else help you?

In this instance, the professor never utters a directive in a literal sense. The professor does not specify an action that he wishes to compel such that the receptionist's way of complying—by saying Professor X is absent when such is not the case—is the receptionist's decision, not the professor's. The strategy employed in issuing the directive may thus be categorized as off record; invite conversational implicatures (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 213–215).

As with the Colombian instance in (3), this directive seems at first glance to contradict the predictions of the P. Brown and Levinson scheme. It provides a contrast with this scheme, that is, that serves as a useful starting point for further analysis. The speaker is clearly more **powerful** than the hearer, in organizational terms. Their relationship involves some **distance**: They are professional and courteous, but relatively impersonal toward each other. In (4), the **imposition** is the part of the equation open to question. By not specifying what the receptionist should do to deflect calls, the professor leaves it open for the receptionist to decide how to do so. This might reduce the imposition by opening up different options: Tell people the truth who call, that the professor is busy and can't be disturbed; tell a lie, that the professor isn't in; and so forth. Conversely, he might increase the imposition by spelling out the demand further, saddling the receptionist with the

uncomfortable moral dilemma of whether to lie and, eventually, a troubled conscience brought on by a decision to lie.

Comparative Analysis

Naturally, drawing broad-based cultural comparisons from single instances is risky. If the contrast in directive performance evident in these two examples were shown to be a pattern of differences across a broad sample of data, however—if U.S. speakers consistently chose higher-numbered strategies than Colombians did—a cultural difference might be extrapolated. Higher numbered strategies, according to the logic of politeness theory, correlate with greater attention to face wants and greater total "weight" of the speech act (when the speaker is less powerful than the hearer, when the distance between speaker and hearer is great, when the imposition required by the directive is large, the "weight" is high). If the data were drawn from a representative sample of Colombia and U.S. culture (further assuming that both of those entities could be satisfactorily defined and somehow obtained), a claim might be advanced that Colombians do directives in ways that are less face redressive than Americans do. Cultural explanations could then be developed from the reflection process as to why that occurs. Colombian culture may be more oriented to positive face than U.S. culture, for example, so that directives generally are not viewed as impositions and, thus, carry less face threat. Americans, however, may constitute a negative face-oriented culture that views any attempt to compel the action of another a threat to autonomy. They may be predisposed to take any imposition as a more serious face threat and thus offer more redress when they perform directives.

A similar analysis using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) categories as a basis likely would yield consistent findings. Quantitatively, Colombians probably perform directives more directly than do Americans. A reasonable explanation for that difference is that Colombians are more relationally oriented, such that directing the behavior of other persons is intended and interpreted positively, as a sign of connection and caring. By contrast, individualistic Americans would be more disposed to view overt directives as unacceptably direct control or imposition on another, such that they avoid or disguise them when possible.

It should be emphasized, however, that in both the Colombian and

the U.S. directive events, preliminary assessment of the weight of the face threat warrants selecting such events as a basis for further inquiry regarding the cultural understandings that constitute P, D, and R. Those questions for further inquiry could only be answered through some kind of reflective step: grouping of like instances together, querying informants for their interpretations, and so forth.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Universal Approaches to Directives

The primary advantage of etic coding schemes such as these as a selection premise for ethnographic research is that they offer a fixed referent for exploration of contrast, a precise and specific mode of comparison across cultures. Large amounts of data may be analyzed with relative efficiency, producing relatively precise indices of the kind and amount of differences in directive use. In the case of politeness theory, the point of contrast may be divergence from the predictions of the theory, focusing investigation on explaining what cultural values and beliefs about P, D, and R might account for the type of redress offered.[4] There is some hope, from this perspective, of pinning down the elusive, sometimes inchoate "flavor" of interaction in a speech community in ways that contribute as much to an understanding of language and culture generally, as to an understanding of *this* culture and its enactment in *these* patterns of language use.

The disadvantages of this approach are the logical consequences of its advantages. Such schemes as politeness theory winnow communicative practices down to a finite number of mutually exclusive types of and categories of practice, reducing comparison across cultures to crude bipolar oppositions: orientation to positive face/negative face; preference for direct/indirect formulations. As M. Rosaldo (1984) pointed out, "durable dichotomies" such as guilt versus shame, individualism versus collectivism, and so forth, may indeed have universal validity on some level. But cultural analysis that reduces the particulars of a community's practices to a spin on a universal theme will inevitably leave much unsaid about specific configurations of social forms, beliefs, and the historical context that accounts for them. Similarly, Hymes (1986) suggested that although models such as politeness theory serve well as explanations for the presence of universal devices and dimen-

sions of social interaction, they do not explain the patterns of difference in organization and significance of those devices in particular communities. The loss of that much detail, in the service of cross-cultural comparison, may eviscerate the explanatory power of culture altogether if rigorously pursued in this way. In other words, it may not be possible to arrive at culture by proceeding strictly from a speech act/politeness route.

By channeling observation and selection in a theory-driven way (strategy types employed under conditions of P, D, and R in politeness theory, or for CCSARP, of nine categories directive forms fit into), the selection component of ethnography becomes more independent of the researcher, the setting, and the particular informants consulted. The reflection component is still necessary for explaining in cultural terms the patterns of communication performance documented in this way. To ascertain the way P, D, and R are assessed in any detail, for example, further information from informants is needed. Use of a universal pragmatics framework serves as a heuristic from which further analysis proceeds, offering a promising combination of methods.

Structural Devices Versus Cultural Practice

Conversation analysis (CA) rests on a move that is significantly similar, for the point at hand, to that of pragmatic theories such as those described earlier. As a method of communication study, it focuses on identifying principles and devices for structuring and coordinating talk that presumably apply across languages, cultures, and situational specifics. To the extent that there is observed variation in the specific aspects of those principles and devices, those variants are selected for further analysis and cultural explanations are sought to account for them.

Traditionally, CA focused on examination of talk in English, among Americans. Some analysis was done with conversations in other languages (see, e.g., Godard, 1977; Hopper & Doany, 1988; Sifianou, 1989), sometimes with the aim of challenging the universality of features characteristic of American English conversation. Yet until recently, the idea of discovering culture through examination and comparison of conversational practices was not systematically explored.

Michael Moerman's *Talking Culture* (1988) and a subsequent

colloquy in *Research on Language and Social Interaction* (Vol. 24, 1990/91) have established the blending of ethnography and conversation analysis as a promising, if still somewhat tentative, venture. The utility of conversation analysis to ethnography, Moerman pointed out, is that "traditional explainers of social action as 'class', 'ethnicity', 'values', etc., are not *things,* but processes—processes manipulated or, more radically, composed during the course of interaction . . . [Transcription] can hold the smoke of interaction still for study" (1988, pp. 2–3). At the same time, Moerman argued, conversation analysis that remains devoid of cultural context loses its power to capture speakers' situated meaning.

Examination of structural and coordination devices that are presumed to be universal provides, as do the universal pragmatics theories examined in the last section, a fixed system of principles within which to select objects for cultural analysis. In this section, I discuss preference structure, particularly preference for agreement, as a conversational principle that opens the door to a very focused exploration of the cultural context underlying directive sequences.

A Colombian Directive Sequence

Mario and Jorge are distant relatives. This conversation takes place in Jorge's home, where Mario is a frequent visitor.

(5a)

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 1  M:  Qué tiene que hacer hoy hermano.
 2  J:  Pues lo mismo que no me han dejado hacer en todos estos
 3      días, estudiar.
 4  M:  Ah entonces camine, hacemos la vuelta del seguro.
 5  J:  Cuál seguro, no friegue. ¿A dónde?
 6  M:  Pues lo del carro, allí no más a la empresa de seguros.
 7  J:  A dónde, ¿allá por el tránsito? Se me tira todo el día.
 8  M:  No: eso es rapidito. Camine que es allá en la 25 no más.
 9  J:  No, no friegue, yo tengo mucho que hacer.
10  M:  No, caMIne, qué va, yo ya tengo el cuento listo. Espere
11      voy al baño y nos vamos.
```

((Jorge sighs deeply and leaves with Mario))

(5b)

1	M:	What do you have to do today, brother?
2	J:	Well, the same thing they haven't let me do every day,
3		study.
4	M:	Oh, in that case come on, we'll do the errand with the
		insurance.
5	J:	Which insurance, don't bother me with this. Where?
6	M:	The car thing, here close by at the insurance company.
7	J:	Where, over there close to the transit authority? My
		whole day will be wasted.
8	M:	No: this is real fast. Come on, it's just there on 25th
		[Street]
9	J:	No, don't bother me, I have a lot to do.
10	M:	No, come ON, what do you mean, I have the story all ready
11		to go. Wait, I'll go to the bathroom and we'll go.

((Jorge signs deeply and leaves with Mario.))

The conversation begins with a presequence that Drew (1984) described as a commonplace indication that an invitation is about to take place. The opening turn—"What do you have to do today?"—functions as more than a request for information, although it does solicit Jorge's report of intended activity. It attempts to establish Jorge's availability, which seemingly is denied by the report of a definite task plan with overtones of urgency: "the same thing they haven't let me do every day, study." Mario immediately suggests that Jorge come with him to do an errand, and the invitation (if, in fact, an invitation is what this is—a point to which I return shortly) is specifically constructed to arise from the report: "In that case . . ." Despite the announcement of an intended activity, Mario talks as though the invitation were interactionally generated (Drew, 1984) by Jorge's response. Mario's issuing the invitation directly after Jorge's announced plan to study suggests his belief that an alternate suggestion for activity might be well-received. Maybe studying is something Jorge would gladly put off in favor of running an errand with Mario.

Ordinarily, the preferred answer to an invitation is acceptance, not rejection. "Preference," that is, in the conversation analytic sense—not a personal, subjective, "psychological" desire or disposition, but a formal property of conversation in which, when alternative but unequal courses of action are available to participants, there is evidence from the sequential organization of turns as to which alternative is institutionally

preferable (Pomerantz, 1984). Jorge's response in line 5 pairs a rejection — "Which insurance, don't bother me with this" — with an opening to be asked again: "Where?" There is no hesitation and no further account. The refusal turns (lines 5, 7, 9), in other words, are not constructed as dispreferred responses. Mario in turn responds only to the latter part of these utterances, with information in lines 6 and 8, for instance, that minimizes the time commitment involved in running the errand: "The car thing, here close by at the insurance company" (line 6).

Rather than a time-consuming task that will eliminate all possibility of studying, the errand is one for which Jorge has some previously established contextual knowledge: It's "the car thing." Jorge continues to offer objections, giving reasons why he cannot go along on the errand. Each time, however, he leaves openings for Mario to continue brushing aside his objections by diminishing the implied imposition, and to repeat the directive. In line 7, for example, Jorge protests that his day will be wasted. Mario rebuts in line 8 that it's close by and "this is real fast." Similarly, in line 9 Jorge ends his turn by saying he has a lot to do. Mario dismisses that claim in his next turn and ends the exchange abruptly: "No, come ON."

Throughout the sequence, there is an absence of hedging or hesitation that would suggest sincere disagreement. Despite the repetitions of "no, I can't go, no, it's too far away, no, I have a lot to do" on Jorge's part, the two seem to have worked in close cooperation to construct this directive sequence and Jorge's compliance. The conversational principle of preference for agreement has been studied in detail elsewhere, as a possibly universal conversational mechanism by which people coordinate social action. Exploring this conversation in terms of that principle has been useful to warrant selecting such instances of interdependent, serialized ways to bring off a directive for further cultural analysis.

One possible cultural explanation of the absence of hedges or hesitations is quite simple. Perhaps this sequence involves a kind of action in which the preferred response in this culture is not agreement, but disagreement, similar to self-deprecation (Pomerantz, 1984) or some kinds of argument (Bilmes, 1991). There may be something about invitations or requests in Colombian culture that reverses, in any general sense, the usual preference for agreement. Such a proposition would require a great deal of examination of request/invitation sequences contained with informant interviews to confirm or reject. Alternatively,

and more simply, this exchange may lack the usual markers of dispreferred responses because there is a shared presumption to which the participants are co-orienting. Jorge does protest the interruption to his plans, but so weakly that the refusals are being treated as "pre-acquiescence."

At this point, an interaction has been observed and selected for further examination based on its divergence from a conversation analytic principle, preference for agreement. Reflection on the exchange is, ethnographically, the logical next step to expand on the analysis. In this instance, it is possible to draw upon both participants' interpretations of the event (following Arliss's, 1989/90, proposal) and on similarities between other such events observed and commented upon in Colombian culture. The first question that would be addressed is intended meaning, whether Mario is issuing an invitation or asking a favor. Presented later with a transcript of the conversation, Mario said that, in fact, he considered asking Jorge to come with him as asking a favor: "I knew there would be a long line, there always is, and if he didn't come with me who would I talk to?" Jorge said he also construed the invitation as a favor to Mario, one that he did not feel free to refuse: "I felt sort of obligated to go with him because he's been doing dental work for me for free. Also I didn't want to seem like a gringo, insisting that my plans and things I need to do here are all that's important."

Both parties to this conversation construed the invitation and its eventual acceptance as Mario asking for a favor and Jorge granting it. In a culture in which doing things in the company of others is generally preferred to doing them alone, issuing an invitation routinely counts as asking a favor. Mario's reason for wanting Jorge to come along is less related to the task at hand than the social aspects of performing the task. Having someone to talk to will make the long wait more bearable. Jorge's sense of obligation to return recent favors received from Mario, by putting aside studying in order to keep Mario company on an errand for which his assistance is not required, is a specific instance of the general importance attached by Colombian informants to interpersonal connections over tasks that benefit only the individual. The relational duty of "keeping someone company" is expected, under normal circumstances, to take precedence over activity that benefits only an individual.

So far, the interpretations of participants in this conversation have been described as particular to them. Yet the sequence may also be described as culture-laden, beyond dyadically constructed rights and

obligations. The desire for company while running errands, performing onerous tasks, or merely spending time at home is expressed in numerous instances in the Colombian data. The native term for doing so is simply *acompañar*, to keep someone company, and is frequently described as a favor by the person keeping company to the person being accompanied. There are specific relational goals that may be accomplished by way of keeping someone company on occasions such as that facing Mario. Relational debts are repaid, rights to future favors of this and other kinds are established, and the relationship is strengthened through co-presence, though there is no expectation that the relationship itself will be discussed during the event.

It is important to emphasize that the cultural significance I claim for this event is established by reflections after the fact by participants in the conversation. I have integrated data from naturalistic talk with participants' elicited interpretations of that data, following the move demonstrated by Arliss (1989/90) to illuminate shared understandings of the interaction. In this case, the shared understanding I seek is cultural, rather than relational. Making the case that this is a *culturally* shared understanding, not purely one negotiated within this particular dyad, rests upon the similarity of this communication event to many others observed and reported over the course of extended fieldwork in the speech community. Part of the meaning I impute to the instance itself, in other words, is its occurrence as part of a pattern. When a conversation analyst selects an instance of talk to explicate some feature of sequential organization, such as preference for agreement or disagreement based on what has occurred in the utterance just prior, she or he draws on similarities between that instance and others that demonstrate the same feature. In a cognate way, I draw upon this instance of co-constructing a directive sequence and others described as "requests to keep someone company" to interpret it as a culturally significant kind of favor.

A U.S. Directive Sequence

(6)

1   Fred: I just finished up the coffee, should I make more?
2   Gladys: Well, if you do make some just make six cups.

3	Fred:	Well, it doesn't make sense to make any if no one's
4		going to drink it.
5	Gladys:	Yeah, but Chuck will be back in a few minutes,
6		he might want some.
7	Fred:	Well, just tell him that I didn't make any more
8		because I didn't know if anyone would want coffee
9		or not.

This conversation occurred in the context of a sign posted in a common gathering place of the unit of an organization. The sign may be considered as the first turn in the sequence presented because it is here that the clearest directive is issued. The sign is posted over the coffee pot and reads: "If you take the last cup, please make a fresh pot!" It is a directive aimed specifically at no one but, potentially, at anyone who drinks the last cup of coffee. To the extent that Fred is a communicatively competent member of the group, the question in line 1 ("I just finished up the coffee, should I make more?") seems superfluous in the context of that sign. If the expectation is that *whoever* drinks the last cup should make a fresh pot, and if, as Fred freely admits, he has drunk the last cup, why is this conversation happening at all?

In line 2, Gladys reinforces the directive in the sign by encoding a presumption that Fred is in fact expected make coffee:"If you do make some, just make six cups." She has offered agreement, which should be the preferred response to an offer. At this point, the two seem to have co-constructed a directive: Fred should make more coffee. In the next turn, however, Fred counters the directive with a disagreement ("Well, it doesn't make sense to make any if no one's going to drink it"). Gladys's response is to challenge Fred's reasoning: Chuck, who is not there to speak for himself, may want some coffee. Because it is a dispreferred response, justification is offered. Without explicitly reminding Fred of the sign, Gladys has reiterated the directive by giving the reason behind it: The person who drinks the last cup owes it to others, who may still want some, to make more. At this point there is no consensus between Fred and Gladys, even though two turns before it seemed there was. Fred ends the sequence with a decisive move in the negative direction — "just tell him that I didn't make any more" — and a repetition of his reasoning why not.

Each turn in this sequence after the first one begins with "well" or "Yeah, but" — a series of hedges that suggest each is a dispreferred response. That there is disagreement about whether Fred should make

coffee is fairly clear. Why the disagreement is happening is not. The directive of the coffeeroom sign is clear, so the evidence in the interaction that interested parties are in conflict over what the sign requires of Fred warrants selection of this case for further cultural analysis.

Discovering whether there is something cultural about the delicate dance happening here might proceed through exploration of the historical circumstances of the coffeeroom sign's appearance and the social negotiation of its moral force (of which this conversation is one concrete instance). Asking members of this unit, and/or others with similar stated or unstated rules, is a straightforward enough way to uncover that history. The implication of doing so, however, is to move beyond naturally occurring conversation into talk of another kind: talk that is considered admissible as evidence by ethnographers but not, traditionally, by conversation analysts. In the absence of such data, the social/experiential background for this conversation can never be more than speculation. I offer an account for the event based, admittedly, on impressionistic grounds, not as an argument so convincing as to rule out all others but rather as an illustration of why the conversation might be of interest at all.

One reason for the sign that specifies the action of making coffee as the logical consequent of having drunk the last cup may be that the presence of such a sign removes responsibility for coffeemaking from one particular person, or kind of person, and places it equally on all coffee drinkers. In some offices, making coffee is viewed as a menial task that is relegated to certain people whose time and effort is valued less highly than others'. Presence of this kind of sign negates any assumption that only certain people—the less important or powerful ones—should be troubled with the job of making coffee. That premise is replaced by one that assigns the possibility of coffeemaking equally to all who drink coffee. Making a fresh pot is action associated not with a role but with a previous action, under the autonomous control of every individual: drinking the last cup.

Removing some outward and visible signs of status distinction is, in turn, consistent with North American ideals of egalitarian relationships among individuals. By the same token, placing responsibility for making coffee on the person who chooses to drink the last cup, rather than assigning it as part of the enactment of a particular role in the group, is consistent with a value system in which persons are viewed

primarily as unique individuals, and only secondarily as role incumbents. Similarly, coffeemaking may have been explicitly removed from the role expectations of a particular group of people — say, secretaries — on the grounds that secretaries are professionals and making coffee is a nonprofessional task. Removing that expectation may rest on an egalitarian premise — that the value of an engineer's time does not outweigh the value of the secretary's time, in an interpersonal sense, as measured by who can be held responsible for making coffee.

If such a cultural principle can be shown to exist, corroborated with data from other sources, an explanation for the disagreement markers in this instance emerges. Given the presence of a sign that specifies responsibility for coffeemaking, Fred would seem to be shirking that democratic responsibility unless he can claim an immediate cause ("maybe no one will drink it") to override the general rule as stated on the sign. The conflict that results is thus about the sufficiency of his reasons.

To the extent that signs of this kind appear over coffee pots in other North American offices, the interactional moment presented here can be claimed to have meaning that transcends these individuals and this institution. That meaning, I suggest, is a cultural premise of equality and democracy that runs counter to assigning some menial tasks to subordinate persons. The claim that the premise is interactionally relevant in this instance rests on Fred's invoking the rule of coffeemaking in his first utterance: "I just finished up the coffee," and on indicators that subsequent turns that call into question whether he will make coffee are preferred by Gladys. A possible *cultural* premise to explain the puzzling fact of evident conflict is that assigning a task based on autonomous action of individuals is more egalitarian than assigning it to role incumbents. It rests further on a contrast: In all the varied kinds of professional settings I have observed in Colombia, not one such sign appeared. When there is coffee (and it was far more ubiquitous there than in the U.S.), there is a role incumbent whose job it is to make it (and often serve it), each and every time.

Comparative Analysis

The most obvious feature that these two examples have in common is that directive intentions are expressed not in single utterances, but in

co-constructed sequences that occur over several turns. It may be that directives universally occur as trajectories more often than as single utterances (much as Hopper, 1992, suggested that speech acts are generally accomplished by interactive work of more than one speaker). There is a striking similarity in the jointly constructed nature of these directives. There is no single "directive utterance" to which is immediately responded with explicit compliance or refusal. In each instance, there is resistance from the recipient of the directive, and some effort to minimize the imposition implied by the directive by the person who issues it. Together, they suggest that to compel the actions of another requires collaboration from both sides. The collaboration rests on (a) a shared cultural code of the rights and obligations of people in a relationship (e.g., "keeping people company on tedious errands is a favor expected in many intimate relationships" or "distribute the performance of tedious tasks according to individuals' actions, not hierarchical position") and (b) communicative competence that enables interactants to bring the code into play at sequentially relevant points in conversation.

At that point, similarities end and differences between the two sequences become salient. In the Colombian case, disagreement is not accompanied by signs that there are dispreferred responses. In the U.S. case, there are numerous hedges that suggest there *are* dispreferred responses. I have argued that there are culturally specific aspects to these directive performances that account for their sequential organization. An alternative explanation would be to encounter a superordinate rule of conversational preference that encompasses both occurrences. What these instances may show are the kind of situational-logic deviation into preference for disagreement demonstrated by Pomerantz (1984) for self-deprecation and by Bilmes (1991) for argument. Further investigation of this kind might lead to discovery of culture-specific situational logics, as distinct from conversational principles that supercede culturally defined situational logics. These examples are meant to suggest that preference for agreement is a device used to construct understanding of utterances as directives, and responses as acceptances or refusals, regardless of the language in which they occur. From that fixed point of reference—preference as part of the conversational structure that enables construction and interpretation of directives—both similarities and differences may be revealed.

Advantages and Disadvantages

An issue that has been difficult to resolve in the course of this work on directives is how exactly to define a directive. The traditional approach suggested by speech act theory, and followed by universal and comparative approaches such as politeness theory and CCSARP, is to consider directives as *a kind of utterance*. Considerable attention has been paid to the resources people draw upon as they make sense of utterances that, by their linguistic formulation, do not seem to be directives – but are unproblematically understood as such. Yet this view of directives leaves much to be desired. There are any number of utterances that are linguistically formulated as directives, for example, that are not obviously interpreted as such, for example, B's utterance in (7).

(7)

   1 A: I got tickets to the Elton John concert tomorrow.
   2 B: Get OUT of here!
   3 A: No, really, I did.

There are other instances of utterances whose directive potency seems to be assessed differently depending on who says them, or who they are said to.

(8)

   1 A: (adult) I'm hungry.
   2 B: (adult) Want me to make you a sandwich?

as opposed to:

(9)

   1 C: (child) I'm hungry.
   2 D: (adult) No you aren't, you just had dinner.

In these cases, there may be cultural resources that are drawn upon in order to make sense of the utterances as directives: understanding of the importance of children's needs as opposed to adults' needs, familiarity with the idiomatic nature of "Get out of here!" besides its literal

meaning, and so forth. Beyond these shared understandings of personhood and relationships, however, there are plainly some structural features that are crucial to assigning meaning—directive or otherwise—to these utterances.

The most promising aspect of a culturally situated conversation analytic approach is that it positions the question of what is or is not a directive squarely within the talk itself. The placement of utterances in conversational and relational sequences, and the negotiation of interactional moments by participants, are demandingly detailed grounding for cultural claims. Conversation analysis enables—even obligates—a closer look at the delicate interactional dances people engage in as they try to compel the actions of others, rather than focusing entirely on the values and premises that constitute the code—the tune for the dance.

A barrier that continues to constrain attempts to meld conversation analysis with ethnography is fundamental disagreement about what kinds of claims may be made about "context." Although there is considerable variation among its practitioners, for the most part conversation analysis restricts consideration of context to the specifics made relevant in a particular text. The commitment is to a talk-intrinsic notion of context (see Schegloff, 1987; Mandelbaum, 1990/91; Hopper, 1992; for a more thorough development of that position). Due to that view, it is difficult to establish patterns that are clearly communal, rather than individual or dyadic. Ethnographers, by contrast, have traditionally attempted to keep their analysis close to spoken life by immersing themselves in the totality of it. That practice has meant attending to what is not said, as well as what is; eliciting metacommunication; and collecting reactions to spoken events as well as attending to the events as they happen. These practices led quite logically to a talk-extrinsic view of context in Moerman's (1988) synthesis of ethnography and conversation analysis. He proposed that the complexities of social life may only be understood within a context that is historical and communal, taking into account the social roles constructed through talk across time as well as their local enactment in the service of immediate goals.

There is not, at present, a way of reconciling these views of context that satisfies both parties. Conversation analysts' interest in the social world created through talk stops short (with some exceptions; see, e.g., Pomerantz, 1984; Goodwin, 1990; Mandelbaum & Pomerantz, 1991) of talking about the expectations and inferences of participants, focusing

instead on the ways that shared knowledge functions to structure talk. Those shared understandings are, conversely, what ethnographers are most interested in pinning down. To conversation analysts, ethnographic argument thus frequently sounds like imposing something on the talk that is not observably there. By the same token, conversation analysis often sounds like reduction of richly textured cultural moments to a hollow technical apparatus that poses almost arbitrary limits on what can, and cannot, count as data. So far, the endeavor to blend the two approaches into something that satisfies both sides remains more an intriguing challenge than a realized accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored three bases for the selection of objects of study for ethnography of speaking as an issue that has profound implications for analytic movement between localized instances of talk and claims about transcendent cultural meaning. Because the practice of ethnography rests so fundamentally, even if implicitly, on contrast between cultures that is striking to the researcher, I have argued that it is potentially unsatisfying to rest the selection aspect so consistently on talk practices of one culture versus another. Both universal pragmatics theories and sequential/structural analysis of talk offer fixed referents on which to base cultural contrasts that are more explicit and less subjective, and thus ultimately can result in making those comparisons — and the practice of ethnographic research — more systematic.

A final step in making this point is to suggest the kind of ethnographic work that would combine some of the spirit of each of the approaches described here. Three kinds of data constitute the observation/selection/reflection sequence described earlier as characteristic of ethnographies of speaking. First, instances of the phenomenon of interest are needed. These might be broadly defined (e.g., directives, argument, advice) or more narrowly constrained (e.g., requests from a superior to a subordinate when status difference is ambiguous, disputed recollections of an event, responses to solicitations for advice). As suggested in the discussion of conversation analysis, a move toward making detailed transcripts the basis for those observations grounds the empirical record more firmly in localized instances of talk. Second,

participants' reflections on specific instances in which they were in-
volved could add perceptions and interpretations of the particulars of
those events. Finally, community members' insights on a broader level
are of interest: which instances may be meaningfully grouped together
and why; how a specific instance may support, illustrate, or violate a
premise understood as applicable to that category of speech action;
which other alternatives might be available to the speaker under the
circumstances; and what is revealed by selection of one alternative over
others.[5]

Beginning with these kinds of data, there is no inviolate sequence in
which analysis must proceed, although this is certainly the point at
which disciplinary roots will be most prejudicial. The analytic moves
would basically be these:

1. Code instances into some universal category scheme, such as
politeness or speech acts, to get a broad sense of the patterns of
frequency (of facework strategies, directness, speech act type, etc.).

2. Interrogate both the interactional data and the reflections on
talk offered by informants for culture-specific categories, such as native
terms for talk (see Carbaugh, 1989).

3. Examine instances of talk with an eye toward the sequential
organization features in operation. Assuming there will be correspon-
dence of organization across languages allows a metric and structure for
precisely locating and examining socially important tasks, such as
co-construction of speech acts. Locating them in this way holds the
analyst accountable for similarities across cultures as well as differences
between them. That accountability, in turn, focuses cultural claims
more precisely on what influence beliefs and values may be demon-
strated to have, beyond and within the structural properties of talk.

This analytic sequence allows for a number of points for cross-
cultural comparison. Frequencies of occurrence along theoretically
relevant dimensions of variation may be specified, as well as the number
and meaning of native terms for talk relevant to the phenomenon as
etically defined, and functional similarities and divergences in the uses
of conversational devices when those are associated with particular
interactional tasks.

Culture is a phenomenon whose impact on communication practice
is still under exploration. Perhaps the most that can be done in an

examination of methodological questions such as this is to illuminate some of the many directions from which a multifaceted dimension of social life may be examined. An overriding theme I hope to have proposed here is that ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, and conversation analysis, themselves enterprises born of cross-fertilization of disciplines, may productively cross some methodological boundaries to pursue common aims. There is, after all, little to be said for purity, methodological or otherwise, when that purity leads to the sterile splendor of isolation.

NOTES

1   The corpus of data from which these examples are drawn came from two studies. Study One was conducted in a medium sized western U.S. city and surrounding communities between 1990 and 1992 by the author and eight dedicated undergraduate assistants. Data consisted of directive sequences transcribed from approximately 20 hr of tape-recorded interaction and drawn from fieldnotes of approximately 150 hr of observation of public interaction in classrooms, business organizations, restaurants, stores, and so forth. There were 25 hr of interviews with individuals, dyads and two focus groups that produced approximately 90 pages of notes and transcripts (only the two focus groups were transcribed in their entirety).

    Study Two was conducted, using approximately the same procedures, in Bogotá, Colombia, during a 3-month period in 1992. For that study, the author worked with seven research assistants, two masters' degree students, and five graduates of masters' degree programs in linguistics and psychology. Data consisted of directive sequences drawn from 110 hours of observation, conducted under similar circumstances as the American data, and 10 hours of transcribed naturally occurring conversation. There were 25 hr of interviews, with individuals and in three meetings of a single focus group, that produced 291 pages of transcripts (both individual and focus group meetings were transcribed in this case). A fuller report of the two studies may be found in Fitch (1993).

2   A piece of information that might be very useful in addressing this question would be the perceptions of each of the participants. In this instance they were not available, and even if they had been, they would likely be inconclusive. E might well claim that his utterance was intended just as he labeled it: a suggestion, and nothing more. M could just as easily perceive the utterance as a command, disguised in a euphemistic disclaimer.

3   There was, in fact, considerable evidence to suggest the latter. The preschool was located in a lower working-class neighborhood and was supported by the government, such that teachers' salaries were relatively high.

4   Alternatively, one might argue that divergence from the predictions of politeness theory reveals cultural bias in the theory, and I and others have done elsewhere (Katriel, 1986; Arundale, 1993; Fitch & Sanders, in press). The likelihood of such cultural bias does not, in my view, obliterate the usefulness of politeness theory as a fixed point of reference, as I am suggesting here.

5   This is not to suggest that cultural premises can always be elicited through interviews. I am presuming some kind of interactive cycle between analysis of data and elicitation/response, such as that described in Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (Spradley, 1979, 1980).

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