Toward the Ethnography of Communication Disorders

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During the 1960s, Dell Hymes raised the call for the ethnography of communication as a named field of inquiry. This field has helped bridge the gap between linguistics and anthropology by examining the role of communication in the conduct of social life. In keeping with this spirit, we are calling for the ethnography of communication disorders—a domain which focuses on the relations between communicative competence, incompetence, and disorder.

... dichotomous characterizations of language behaviors (collected in controlled circumstances of the yes-no, present-absent, and right-wrong type), although convenient, neat, and attractive to computer programmers, are recognized as data which usually are conservative estimates of the child's communicative competence. When linguistic aptitudes are studied devoid of their functional potency in sterile, stilted, and controlled settings, such underestimates are not surprising. As Greenfield and Smith (1976) suggest, ... students of child language have come to realize that abstracting language from its lived context destroys just what one wishes to study in the first place" [p. ix]. ... We appear to be in the midst of a reorganization of the acceptable strategies that may be employed in the study of behavioral science. A renewed recognition of the indispensable value of factors previously thought to contaminate and confuse scientific inquiry is at hand. (Abkarian, 1977, p. 453)

Abkarian's sentiments have foreshadowed a growing uneasiness about the ecological validity of traditional assessment, intervention, and research practices in the field of communication disorders. Damico (1988), Hamayan & Damico (1990), Kent (1990), and Lund & Duchan (1988), for example, express concern for assessment models which literally fragment language behaviors into discrete, quantifiable components which bear little resemblance to the intricate manner in which language users function in the real world.

Concurrently, traditional intervention models which fail to consider the broader sociocultural context within which communicative competence is acquired have been questioned (Rice, 1986). Consider, for instance, that ways of speaking common to the therapy room may be so removed from how communication works in more everyday, routine contexts as to block generalization (Davis, 1986; Ripich & Panagos, 1985). Awareness of the particular characteristics of traditional therapy discourse (Hubbell, 1981; Kovarsky, 1990; Muma, 1978; Panagos, Bobkoff, & Scott, 1986; Prutting, Bagshaw, Juskowitz, & Umen, 1978) has motivated efforts to move beyond standard treatment contexts by proposing alternative client-, peer-, classroom-, and family-centered intervention models (Davis & Wilcox, 1981; Duchan, 1986; Dunst, Wortman Lowe, & Bartholomew, 1990; Fey, 1986; Hubbell, 1981; Norris & Hoffman, 1990; Simon, 1987).

Along with changes in assessment and intervention practices, concerns for our traditional research methods have surfaced. Amplifying cries for more person-centered research practices in the allied-health professions, Kent (1990) has called for a phenomenologically grounded reorientation of our own clinical sciences which would take greater account of the client's real-world experiences, values, attitudes, and beliefs. At the same time, our traditional experimental methods, with their emphasis on the operationalization of behavior for predictive purposes, seem to exclude from analysis many complex communicative phenomena. Such phenomena are highly resistant to quantification but are necessary for a more detailed understanding of communicative competence and incompetence (Eastwood, 1988; Kovarsky, 1989c).

In sum, inconsistencies do exist between the reductionism of the experimental laboratory and the socially complex world of communicative competence/incompetence where clinicians, clients, and researchers live. Although scholars in other fields have dealt with these inconsistencies by turning to research paradigms better suited to illuminating the intricate relationship between communication and social life (Baugh & Sherzer, 1984; Bauman & Sherzer, 1989; Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1983; Coffman, 1983; Green & Wallat, 1981; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1962, 1982; Labov & Fanshel, 1977; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986; Spindler & Spindler, 1987), the discipline of human communication disorders is still in its infancy (Damico, Maxwell, & Kovarsky, 1990).

Building upon these concerns for ecological validity, our purpose is to introduce concepts and methods from ethnog-
raphy and the ethnography of communication which are sensitive to the relations between language and social life. In doing so, we propose a new area of inquiry within our own discipline—the ethnography of communication disorders.

The body of this article is divided into four main sections. In part one, ethnography is defined and situated as a phenomenologically centered research genre derived from anthropology. Next, in part two, methods of data collection and analysis are considered, and characteristics particular to ethnographic accounts are presented.

In part three, the ethnography of communication as a formal domain of inquiry is discussed with an eye toward the notion of communicative competence. Finally, in part four, ethnographic concepts and practices are discussed in relation to what they can contribute to the study of communication disorders. We propose that certain types of inquiry into communicative competence, incompetence and disorder represent explorations into the ethnography of communication disorders.

**SITUATING ETHNOGRAPHY: PHILOSOPHICAL AND DISCIPLINARY ROOTS**

To begin with, we will review some diverse paradigms of thought that have undergirded research and clinical practice in Communication Disorders. Our aim is to situate ethnography in the history of scientific and philosophical thought, and to describe the philosophical assumptions that it entails.

Every field of intellectual inquiry makes certain assumptions about knowledge and how knowledge is acquired. Epistemology, the study of the ways of knowing, developed in response to queries raised by the Sophists, 4th and 5th century Greek scholars. The Sophists voiced their doubts about whether one could really know anything. As a result, epistemology surfaced and epistemologists began examining foundations and methods of acquiring knowledge. Epistemological study continues to this day and, in a very abbreviated form, is discussed here because of its relevance for understanding our own research practices.

Scientists and practitioners in Communication Disorders have not, typically, been educated about their epistemological groundings. For the most part, we have subscribed to one paradigm without inspecting its underlying assumptions or imposed categories of thought. Gaining a perspective on the ever-growing knowledge base of our field necessitates an awareness of its underlying epistemological assumptions. In this way, we become more attuned to the possibilities for increasing our understanding of communication disorders.

Paradigms of thought and research change and develop over time. Sometimes these changes are characterized as revolutions (Kuhn, 1970) where abrupt transitions occur between sets of assumptions about knowledge. Others believe that divergent paradigms emerge, shift, and coexist in a constant process of waxing and waning (Erickson, 1986; Lakatos, 1978; Schweder, 1986). In keeping with this latter perspective, old paradigms are rarely replaced because they are proven false. Rather, “especially in the social sciences, paradigms don’t die; they develop varicoses veins and get cardiac pacemakers” (Erickson, 1986, p. 120). To situate ethnography as a research approach, we first identify major paradigms of thought in human science.

**Physical sciences encly.** Although Communication Disorders sounds like a human science, historically the field has emulated the physical sciences and derived its methodology from them. One of our colleagues has accused the human sciences of having “physics envy.” If our clinical research practices do, for better or worse, emulate the physical sciences, then we need to inspect those assumptions associated with the physical sciences. Below, we discuss early notions of the physical sciences, and then move to a consideration of more recent, 20th century developments in physics. Many of the ideas presented subsequently reflect the writings of Capra (1982) and Polkinghorne (1983).

**Early paradigms in the physical sciences.** Galileo was one of the first physical scientists. He began to combine scientific experimentation with the use of mathematical language in order to formulate the laws of nature. Somewhat later, Francis Bacon described the purpose of science as the control and domination of nature. Rene Descartes, another early physical scientist and philosopher, espoused the firm belief that scientific knowledge was certain. Isaac Newton, for his part, formulated general laws of motion governing all objects in the solar system, from stones to planets. His universe was a large mechanical system whose operation was governed by mathematical laws. Physical phenomena were reduced to the movement of the particles. Newton’s ideas dominated physics for most of the 18th and 19th centuries.

**Atomic physics and quantum theory: A paradigmatic shift in the physical sciences.** In the 20th century, Albert Einstein’s work in physics stimulated a major paradigmatic shift into the physical sciences. Exploration into the atomic and subatomic world brought Einstein and other physicists face to face with strange contradictions. Atoms were found to be two things at the same time—particles and waves. Their duality led to the formation of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. In short, physical phenomena could no longer be depicted as certain as Descartes had considered them. The work of the modern physicist, Neils Bohr, complicated and refined the picture of physical matter and the universe even more. He demonstrated the complimentarity of particles and waves so that we now conceptualize electrons as relationships. More recently then, the physical sciences have dealt with a universe which is not constructed from isolated units. Instead, the universe is seen to be comprised of a complicated web of relationships creating a unified whole. Furthermore, with this reconceptualization of physics has come the idea that the observer (researcher) is not only necessary to witness atomic phenomena, but the observer actually brings it about. The upshot of this is that we can no longer speak of natural phenomena without acknowledging the role of the viewer upon what is viewed. Recognizing the inevitable influence of the ob-
The Human Sciences

At this point, we turn specifically to the human sciences to ascertain whether the assumptions underlying research in this domain have undergone similar paradigmatic shifts. We also want to explain how ethnography fits into the history of the human sciences. To some extent, human sciences are like the little sister of physical sciences, running hard to catch up, but later to learn. For even after the physical sciences have changed their assumptions, particular fields of study within the human sciences, like Communications Disorders, have continued to base their perceptions of knowledge and the world predominantly on outdated assumptions from 19th century physical science. As Shweder (1986, p. 175), the anthropologist, wrote about paradigm change in the human sciences:

It is worth noting that modern physics, since at least the work of Niels Bohr, has moved away from mechanistic imagery and the idea of objective predetermination and toward what has aptly been labelled as the physics of possibility, ambiguity, and uncertainty. It would seem that our mythic idealizations of science change quite slowly.

Paradigmatic shifts in the human sciences. The concept of studying humans is an old one. Thomas Hobbes, a contemporary of Galileo was the first scholar to assert that humans could be studied. He suggested that this should be done using the methods of the physical sciences. Since this first assertion, four different paradigms of thought can be traced in the human sciences. These paradigms have shifted back and forth, as if in constant dialogue, over the last 150 years. Ideas have surfaced, altered, and resurfaced. The four paradigms of thought are positivism, anti-positivism, logical positivism, and post-positivism.

Positivism (1830–1850). Auguste Comte introduced the word “positivism” when he suggested that fictitious speculations about humans be given up in favor of “positive” scientific study. This type of study, which rejected metaphysical explanations of human behavior, was to be modeled after research paradigms in the physical sciences. For positivists, scientific explanation was best accomplished by establishing mathematical laws. This era of thought had a reformist quality to it. The implication was that if problems were solved with suitable scientific methods, the human condition could be ameliorated.

This was perhaps best captured by the 19th century treatise of Emile Durkheim (1935) where the goal was to uncover objective facts, existing external to the self, which determined social behavior. Here, there was little concern for the subjective states of individuals and how they internally experienced the world.

Antipositivism (1890–1930). In contrast to the positivists, at the end of the 19th century the antipositivists called attention to a sphere of reality they considered special to human beings. Even though the antipositivists did not develop a systematic alternative to positivism, they introduced a number of concepts that continue to resurface. It is their ideas that underlie the ethnographic approach to knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey (1900), for instance, described a philosophy of human science in which life experience was seen as full of conscious meaning. For him, understanding was acquired by deep investigation within a very broad context. Husserl (1931) proposed a phenomenological approach to science. Phenomenological science, he asserted, was a science of the essential structure of consciousness where the external physical world was mediated by internal perceptions. The primary experiences of the human actor in situations and the subsequent internalization and understanding of those experiences from the actor’s own frame of reference were valued by phenomenological philosophers as knowledge (Maxwell, 1990).

Logical positivism (1920–present). To the earlier ideas of the positivists, the logical positivists added two new elements. Bertrand Russell (1929) described the essential role of logic in scientific thinking, and Carl Hempel (1942) depicted experimentation as a deductive system of inquiry in which a law-like experiment is proved true or false. What emerged as logical positivism has been called the “received view” (Agar, 1986, p. 11), and encompasses the assumptions that underlie and guide the majority of research efforts today in our social and behavioral sciences, including Communication Disorders. The emphasis is placed on collecting and analyzing quantitative data in order to prove or disprove a priori hypotheses which can be operationally defined.

Postpositivism (1940–present). Unlike the logical positivists, postpositivists have raised questions about scientific objectivity and experimentation. They contend that human beings cannot stand outside of their social situations, cultures, languages, and ways of communicating when conducting research. Science is seen as a human activity taking place in historical contexts. Postpositivists have considered knowledge as converging on truth with no absolute certainty attainable. From their perspective, science proceeds by induction rather than deduction. Theory derives from or is “grounded” in data and partial formulations. Partial formulations, not only universal laws, are acceptable. Polkinghorne (1983, p. 238) succinctly summed up the post-positivistic sentiment when he wrote, “a model of science which cannot include ambiguous, interpretable statements gains precision in analysis, but loses the character of the experienced world.”

The phenomenological view of the world held by postpositivists seeks to understand human conduct by exploring the internal ideas, feelings, and motives which move people to act in the ways that they do (Douglas, 1970). The goal is not to attain objective social facts which exist external to the self; but rather, the quest is to interpret human behavior and experience from the actor’s (or native’s) own frame of reference.

Ethnography as a human science is characterized by antiand post-positivistic assumptions about knowledge and science. The ethnographer’s task is to observe, record, and interpret the experienced world from the perspective of
Disciplinary Roots in Anthropology

During the 1920s, with the efforts of Malinowski and others, ethnography gained prominence as a research genre better suited to depicting native ways of life than the diaries of missionaries and traders (Clifford, 1988, p. 26). Although ethnography has not always been phenomenological in nature (with early efforts often directed toward collecting and cataloguing various types of detailed information about primitive societies), our perspective is in keeping with the more recent, interpretive approaches to the study of culture: "Believing . . . that man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance that he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be, therefore, not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Although anthropologists are now embroiled in a period of critical self-examination regarding the nature, purposes and scope of the ethnographic enterprise (Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988), in keeping with Geertz' notion of culture, we define ethnography as the process of documenting and interpreting human action and social life in writing (-graphy) in its cultural context (ethno-).

To further illuminate the nature of ethnography, five of its fundamental characteristics, as well as some specifics of its methodological approach, are treated separately below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Observer Paradox

Although traditional experimental research methods control variables in order to test predictions, ethnography is more concerned with describing and interpreting behavior rather than manipulating it (Geertz, 1983; Genishi, 1982). Ethnographers seek to represent human interaction with minimal disruption. However, they recognize that the mere act of observing human social behavior can change its nature (Baugh, 1984). Here we have what is referred to as the "observer paradox." To reduce the intrusive effects of the observer paradox, one strategy of ethnographers is to avoid making a priori hypotheses. As Hymes (1982, p. 34) has stated, such predictions "are believed by ethnographers to reflect more the conceptual framework of the investigator than that of those being observed."

Partiality

A second characteristic of ethnography is its partiality (Clifford, 1988; Geertz, 1988; Moerman, 1988; Tedlock, 1983). Recently, cultural anthropologists have been critically examining their own partiality and exploring its consequences (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Crapanzano, 1980; Marcus & Cushman, 1982). With the growing realization that ethnography is an interpretive enterprise (Geertz, 1983), questions about the believability of informant reports (Barnes, 1984) and fieldworker bias (Sass, 1986) have led to concerns regarding the authenticity of ethnographic texts (Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Such concerns require fieldworkers to pay careful attention to the process of establishing evidentiary adequacy which, in large part, necessitates progressive problem solving.

Progressive Problem Solving

The construction of an ethnography is progressive in nature. Data collection and analysis are intertwined phenomena. As ethnographers collect data, they form educated hunches, make guesses or formulate hypotheses, and develop emerging concepts by sifting through and analyzing their data. Their analyses and subsequent hypotheses then feed new collection of data. This circular process spirals onward until the description is judged to have obtained sufficient evidentiary adequacy.

Thick Description

Geertz (1973) coined the term "thick description" to denote that ethnographic descriptions must be rich, not only in detail, but also in meaning and interpretation. The idea is not to simply record behavioral responses ("thin" descriptions). Instead, the ethnographer seeks to uncover the possible, layered interpretations of social behavior from the native point of view ("thick" description). To construct thick descriptions, ethnographers must constantly sift through social actions in order to illuminate plausible interpretations of behavior. Such sifting through requires long-term contact, allowing the fieldworker to collect empirical data and to become "steeped" in the people and situation being studied (Maxwell, 1990).

Macro and Micro Levels

Ethnography can be micro, macro, or both, in scope. Some ethnographic studies investigate groups and events that are relatively large (macro) in scale. On the other hand, microethnographic investigation involves the study of more limited numbers of events and/or people, allowing for more fine-grained analyses. Some studies combine both approaches, where the macromodels of certain events are linked to a macroview of the larger societal or cultural context.

Although the five characteristics described above represent only some of the traits contained by ethnographies, they are nevertheless fundamental to this form of socially constructed research.
ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

Methodological aspects of ethnographic research have been described by a number of investigators (Agar, 1986; Erickson, 1986; Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Gilmore & Glathorn, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Pelto, 1970; Schieffelin, 1979; Spindler & Spindler, 1987; Spradley, 1979 & 1980). Writings on ethnographic methodology in Communication Disorders are only just now beginning to emerge (Crago, in press; Damico, Maxwell, & Kovarsky, 1990; Kovarsky, 1989c). Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to deal with ethnographic methodology in detail, the notions of data establishing authenticity, collection, analysis, and presentation are briefly presented. As was pointed out, these processes in ethnography are highly interrelated and interwoven.

Data Collection and Establishing Authenticity

Ethnographic data collection is guided by three basic tasks:

1. identifying a full range of events
2. collecting recurrent instances of events
3. looking at events at a number of different levels in the social or cultural system.

Methods and strategies for gathering information are crucial to the ethnographic enterprise and include participant observation, machine recordings, ethnographic interviews, and archival documentation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Heath, 1982; Spradely, 1979, 1980). Another level of data collection and analysis becomes available when the fieldworker reviews recordings or field notes with key people in the situation. The strategy of eliciting and recording people’s reflections on themselves and others has been called lamination (Agar, 1986) or indefinite triangulation (Circourel, 1974). Readers are referred to Erickson (1986) for a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these different data collection strategies.

The basic idea is to compare and contrast these various data sources through the process of triangulation. In navigation and surveying the term triangulation refers to the process of locating geographic position. By fixing more than one point in space, exact positions can be located with more confidence than by relying upon a single landmark. Accordingly, there is greater chance for error if only a single data source is relied upon. Because of this, fieldworkers triangulate a variety of data sources in order to illuminate the phenomena under investigation and to evaluate the validity of their own inferences. In other words, what reliability and validity are to the quantitative paradigm, triangulation is to ethnography which seeks to provide authentic interpretations of native behavior and ways of life.

Confident interpretation (Maxwell, 1990) emerges in ethnography when the evidence for the researcher’s asser-

ions is adequate. Erickson (1986) and Crago (in press) describe what form this adequacy must take and how evidentiary inadequacy can jeopardize research conclusions. In general, it is the process of data analysis, realized in connection with the triangulation of a variety of data sources, which provides the evidentiary adequacy needed to insure authenticity.

Analysis

Analysis in ethnography is a process of establishing coherence out of the data that has been collected. It is quite different from procedures where statistics are used to make probability statements. Data are analyzed throughout the research from the time the data collection begins until it has been completed. Progressive analyses influence intermediate stages of data collection (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Primary data collections are reviewed several times to formulate and modify descriptive categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988), as well as to establish congruities and incongruities between the data sources.

The ethnographer then proceeds by a process of inferential abstraction and reduction to study the categorized data and arrive at behavioral patterns or themes (Crago, 1990). Developing a series of hypotheses which are progressively verified (or disproved) by successive data collections (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) helps in the establishment of both categories and themes. Agar (1986) describes data analysis as the resolution of the researcher’s schemata (categories and themes) with "strips" of data. This resolution can lead to coherence of understanding and interpretation which the ethnographer attempts to present to an audience in writing.

Presentation

The ethnographer seeks to create an authentic picture through writing. The descriptive, particularistic quality of ethnographies is produced by providing the readers with sufficient details and concreteness, allowing them to identify with the situations being described (Heath, 1982). The sights and sounds of everyday life need to be captured. In other words, part of the ethnographer’s task is to interpret, for the readers, the experience of being there in the actual situation.

By providing images and dramatizing the mutual involvement of actors within specific scenes, presentational description balances structural information (Hymes, 1982). Malinowski, influenced by the work of Ernst Mach, viewed the imagination as an actual physiological entity to be stimulated so that readers could apprehend the native point of view: "... the ethnographer must undertake the work of convincing readers by managing their imaginations in a way that would allow them to conceptualize in images what the text could not present in full." (Thornton, p. 8)
Because the use of concrete details helps audiences to identify with the scenes being described (Tannen, 1989), thereby allowing them to gain insight into how other people live their lives, ethnographic writing sticks close to the data (Geertz, 1973; Crago, in press). It is constructed from narrative vignettes drawn from the triangulation and analysis of observational notes, interviews, transcribed machine recordings, interpretive commentary, and theoretical discussions (Erickson, 1986).

Together, the five fundamental characteristics and three methodological points presented above provide an entry-level conception of ethnography. Although language always played a role in the ethnographic process, it was not until the 1960s that a subdiscipline was specifically founded to study the detailed relations between language use and culture: the ethnography of communication.

**THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION**

The call for the ethnography of communication as a topic for inquiry within anthropology was raised by Hymes (1962, 1964) to address issues which seemed to fall between traditional linguistic concerns and anthropology:

That it is hard to understand what people do if one does not know what they say; that records of what people say and can say are a natural part of the study of their way of life; that linguistics ought to be, for anthropologists, first and foremost a way of coping with language as part of ways of life; that the techniques for coping with language are a part of cultural anthropology, not some other, esoteric discipline; these things tend to be forgotten, uncomfortable. Monoglotic ineptitude and theoretical snobbery, as between cultural anthropologists and academic linguistics, allow much of both anthropology and linguistics to fail. . . . The linguistics elaborates formal models that answer to needs for bookkeeping and simplification of manipulable data, rather than to the actualities of language as a means of human life and personal identity. (Hymes, 1987, p. 17)

Hymes was interested in bridging the gap between conventional linguistic descriptions in which language was characterized as an abstract, self-contained code and anthropological, which failed to fully account for the complex relations between language and culture. Ethnographies of speaking/communication were to provide detailed “description[s] in cultural terms (ethnography) of the patterned uses of language and speech (speaking)” (Sherzer, 1977, pp. 4–5).

Methodologically, one of the most prominent units of analysis in ethnographies of speaking is the speech event. Speech events are “activities or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech” (Hymes, 1972a, p. 56). The important notion is that it is the speech that constitutes the event (Duranti, 1985). Hymes (1962, 1964) proposed that the patterning within speech events, along with their connection to social life, could be illuminated by describing relations between a set of 16 components which, for convenience, were abbreviated into the following SPEAKING mnemonics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S (situation)</th>
<th>1. Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P (participants)</td>
<td>2. Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (ends)</td>
<td>3. Speaker, or sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (act sequence)</td>
<td>4. Addressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (key)</td>
<td>5. Hearer, or receiver, or audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (instrumentalities)</td>
<td>6. Addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (norms)</td>
<td>7. Purposes-outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (genre)</td>
<td>8. Purposes-goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Message form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Message content</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Key</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12. Channel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Forms of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Norms for interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Norms for interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Genre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 1.** The Speaking Mnemonic
Below, each letter of the mnemonic is briefly reviewed and illustrated with cultural and clinical examples.

S: Situations

Situations within which speech events occur can be characterized according to both setting and scene. The setting refers to the spatial and temporal boundaries of a speech event. Traditional speech-language therapy lessons within the public schools typically last from 30 to 50 minutes (the temporal dimension), and take place within a small room at a therapy table (the physical dimension). Participants often signal their entry into therapy lessons by sitting down at the table, where intervention materials are (or will be) placed in view of the client (Panagos, Bobkoff, Kovarsky, & Prelock, 1988). Spatiotemporal boundaries not only occur around the edges of speech events (Young, 1982), setting them apart from other varieties of conversation, they can also internally mark transitions between activities. Internal bracketing devices (Goffman, 1976, p. 291; Schiffrin, 1987) such as “okay,” “so,” and “now” can mark transitions between therapy activities within a lesson (Kovarsky, 1990).

The scene represents the culturally bounded definition of a situation, which is not always isomorphic with the physical setting. At the termination of a therapy lesson within the same physical setting, for instance, the scene may shift to discussions of a client’s plans for the weekend (Kovarsky, 1989a).

P: Participants

To capture the potential relationships between speech event participants, Hymes (1972a) distinguishes between four components: (a) the speaker or sender, (b) the addressee, (c) the hearer, receiver, or audience, and (d) the addresser. Among the Kaluli of New Guinea, mothers hold their babies up facing outward toward others while speaking for them in a high-pitched, nasalized voice (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1982, pp. 26–27). Although the infant’s mother is the actual speaker or sender, it is the baby who assumes the role of addressee.

In university communication disorders training programs novice clinicians often evaluate and treat language, fluency, or voice clients in rooms under the watchful gazes of their supervisors who frequently remain hidden behind one-way mirrors in observation corridors. Here, the clinician is the speaker and the client is the addressee, while the supervisor is the audience critically evaluating the novice’s performance.

E: Ends

The analysis of speech events requires an understanding of both the “outcomes (the purpose of the event from the cultural point of view) and goals (the purposes of the indi-
Inuit mothers produce a form of "loving talk" (nillijuusiq) where nonsense utterances are squawked or screamed at their children as a way of signalling affection (Crago, 1988). During therapy lessons, contextualization cues accompanying "okay" (i.e., vertical or lateral head nodding, intonation, and stress) help indicate whether or not a child's performance is being positively or negatively evaluated by a clinician (Kovarsky, 1989b). A description of keys, which includes the notion of contextualization cue, should contend with the diverse, culturally situated ways in which messages may be framed for interpretation.

I: Instrumentalities

Instrumentalities consists of both the channels and forms of communication. The channel refers to the way messages travel from one person to another and may include "oral, written, telegraphic, semaphore, or other medium[s] of transmission" (Hymes, 1974, p. 58). Although some therapy lessons rely primarily on the oral channel, others emphasize literacy instruction and involve substantial amounts of reading and writing, sign language, or require augmentative communication systems. Furthermore, a variety of linguistic resources, or forms of communication (including dialects, codes, varieties, and registers), may be realized within a given channel of communication.

N: Norms

Norms are those general, expected standard rules for participating in speech events. Competence with the rules governing interactional etiquette includes, among other things, knowing when to remain silent or speak, and how speaker turns are to be allocated. Cross-cultural variations in norms for interaction were revealed when Philips (1972, p. 377) compared the performance of native American Indian children within four different participation structures, or "ways [teachers have] of arranging verbal interaction with students." She observed that children reared on the reservation did best when participant structures in the classroom more closely resembled interactional patterns within the Indian community.

Norms for participation can also be witnessed in therapy lessons. In one phase of a metalinguistic intervention project (Prelock, 1990), children were required to violate a norm for therapy interaction by purposefully mispronouncing words. There were instances when the children refused to participate in this violation, saying "I don't want to do that one" or "that's not the right thing." Although they all made significant gains in articulatory behavior, their beliefs regarding how they were typically expected to interact influenced their performances during therapy.

G: Genre

Although genre refers to categories such as "poem, myth, tale, proverb, riddle, curse, prayer, oration, [or] lec-
ture" (Hymes, 1974, p. 61), there is no one-to-one correspondence between genre and speech event. A speech event may contain several genres or a speech event may be characterized as its own distinct genre. On one level, a therapy lesson may contain activities involving distinct genres like riddles or knock-knock jokes. On another plane, speech-language therapy lessons might be represented as one form of a professional, consultative genre where the primary purpose is to provide a client with assistance in return for financial remuneration—thereby sharing some similarities with psychotherapy or doctor-patient discourse (Ferrara, 1958). In other words, the notion of genre provides a level of abstraction where the whole speech event, or aspects of it (such as riddles within a therapy lesson), can be compared and contrasted with other speech events.

The components of the SPEAKING mnemonic, as a whole, provide one means for examining the detailed relations between language use and culture by focusing on the speech event as the unit of analysis. In sum, the ethnography of communication:

in its attempts to describe what other subfields of linguistics leave out or take for granted, . . . stays within the tradition of what Luria back in 1978 called 'romantic science.' Its goal is not to strive for simplicity measures or one-dimensional patterns, but rather to capture, through ethnography and linguistic analysis, the inherent 'heteroglossia' of any (one) language (Baldvin, 1981), [and] the complexity of the human experience as defined and revealed in everyday discourse. (Duranti, 1988, p. 225)

Hymes' groundbreaking work in defining the ethnography of communication helped set the stage for the study of language use in a variety of domains. This has included, among other things, inquiries into the role of language in various workplaces, such as medical, educational and legal contexts (Fassold, 1990; Ferrara, 1988; Green & Wallet, 1981; West, 1984). In addition, Hymes' conception of speech events, and the types of linguistic resources necessary to participate in them, played an important role in his later formulation of communicative competence:

Within the developmental matrix in which knowledge of the sentences of language is acquired, children also acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. . . We have to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires [communicative] competence as to when to speak, when not, and when and what to talk about with whom, when, where, [and] in what manner. In short a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others (Hymes, 1972b, pp. 277, 286)

This view of communicative competence then helped inspire studies of childhood language socialization (Crago, 1988; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1982; Schiefelin & Eisenberg, 1984; Schiefelin & Ochs, 1986; Ward, 1971).

Taken together, all these lines of inquiry reveal that language functions as a social resource binding members of communities together in a variety of different relationships. In particular, the notion of communicative competence and its contribution to participation in social life must
be wrestled with by researchers and clinicians alike when trying to understand communicative incompetence and disorder. We propose that a new line of inquiry which borrows both from ethnography and the ethnography of communication can help illuminate the intricate relations between the social worlds of communicative competence, incompetence, and disorder: the ethnography of communication disorders.

**TOWARD THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION DISORDERS**

Ethnography as a methodological approach, with its concern for triangulating multiple data sources over time (in order to draw valid inferences about human social activity), seeks to ascertain how people interpret behavior within the real world contexts of their daily lives. The ethnography of communication as a topic of inquiry "studies language use in social and cultural contexts" (Sherzer & Woodbury, 1987, p. 11). Together these two, related traditions provide a framework for examining the connections between communicative competence, incompetence, and disorder in a contextually inclusive and sensitive manner. We believe that the intersection of communicative competence, incompetence, and disorder constitutes the ethnography of communication disorders—a field of study which seeks to illuminate the culturally patterned nature of communicative impairments, as well as our professional efforts to treat them.

Rather than trying to lay out a more formal, *a priori* definition at this point, we would like to conclude with an exploratory perspective and suggest three general lines of inquiry which might be followed within the ethnography of communication disorders. First, information regarding the real world lives and experiences of communicatively disordered clients is vital in formulating valid intervention/assessment goals and procedures (Cheng, 1989; Kent, 1990; Westby, 1990). If language use is a social glue binding communities and individuals together in various relationships, then looking to the everyday lives of individuals outside of intervention/assessment settings can give us a sense of issues which need to be addressed in our professional encounters with clients. It’s not that individual therapy rooms are necessarily bad places to work on skills related to the development of communicative competence. Rather, we constantly need to triangulate what goes on inside these rooms in relation to what occurs in the outer worlds of people’s lives so that ecologically valid assessments and interventions can be constructed. Toward this end, methods of observation, interviewing and triangulation developed by ethnographers can be used to place our research and clinical practices with clients in their broader sociocultural framework.

Another domain of inquiry has to do with the notion of professional communicative competence and socialization. Just as children learn to "accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others" (Hymes, 1972b, p. 277), so too must clinicians (novices and experts) develop additional forms communicative competence in order to practice their trade. Examining how these skills develop and are manifested in a variety of contexts including multidisciplinary team settings, parent counseling interactions, clinical supervisor-student conferences, and classroom consultations (to name a few) can be used to inform our training of students, as well as the work of experienced clinicians in the field. Here, the speech event might provide a useful unit of analysis for describing the patterning of professional discourse.

Of particular importance to the concept of professional communicative competence, how face-to-face therapeutic interactions are handled with clients. Once again, the speech event may provide a bridge for comparing the discourse world of the therapy room to communication in other settings. In this way, we may gain a better understanding of issues in clinical efficacy that relate to the generalization of therapy gains in different communicative contexts.

Finally, there are questions about how we define and identify communicative disorder. How a community reacts to communicative competence and incompetence needs to play a central role in defining what constitutes a disability and the role of a speech-language pathologist. For instance, Inuit caregivers claim not to grieve about their profoundly hearing-impaired children who have communication problems (Crago, Hurtea, & Iyukawa, 1990). These children do not appear frustrated and have been observed to interact well with others. In such situations, what role a speech-language pathologist might play would have to be carefully considered. Clearly our notions concerning what constitutes a communicative handicap may be culturally constrained and contextually insensitive without information pertaining to community beliefs, values, and practices in relation to communicative competence and incompetence.

Furthermore, given that communication is culturally patterned, it makes little sense for clinicians or researchers to enter distinct ethnic groups with *a priori* taxonomies and ready-made checklists when attempting to determine a language disorder. In some rural Appalachian and Inuit communities, for instance, principles of egalitarianism and individualism manifest themselves through efforts not to appear superior or inferior to others (Crago, 1988; Keeffe, 1988). Under these circumstances, questions which ask community members to distinguish children as either strong or weak may create a culturally false dichotomy. Clinicians and researchers who enter situations like this and query caregivers about their children’s communicative strengths and weaknesses are asking culturally strange questions. Although these questions reflect the interpretive framework of the interviewer, they may produce odd responses which have little to do with a community member’s perceived communicative competence or incompetence.

Although asking questions in the same manner on more than one occasion may satisfy the traditional reliability constraints of a formal test, such practices can be ecologically invalid given the different culturally patterned beliefs and expectancies which interviewees bring with them to the
interview setting (Briggs, 1986). Simply transplanting a test developed in one culture and renorming it in another may allow behavior to be measured with reference to a normal curve, yet it does nothing to address the cultural validity of the items and frameworks used to assess communicative competence.

Concerns regarding how communication disorders are defined and identified, and our role as a helping profession in relation to these issues, require clinicians and researchers who are willing to become fieldworkers. As fieldworkers they will need to triangulate a variety of data sources in their efforts to uncover community standards by which communicative competence and incompetence are judged.

In closing, given the field's growing concern for the ecological validity of its own practices, the purpose of this paper has been to describe concepts from ethnography and the ethnography of communication with an eye toward what they might contribute to the study of communication disorders. The role of communication in the conduct of social life is essential for understanding the connections between communicative competence, incompetence, and disorder. Because of this, we have proposed that the ethnography of communication disorders (as a subdiscipline) might pursue, at least, three general lines of study: (a) the interpretation of the real-world lives and experiences of those clients we seek to treat, (b) the acquisition of professional communicative competence, and (c) the identification and definition of communication disorder in cross-cultural perspective.

Although ethnography has been advocated throughout this essay, no single research genre is necessarily superior to another. Inquiry should be guided by questions worth asking and not by the constraints of any one investigative paradigm. Research that requires the operationalization of human behavior for predictive purposes may be better suited to traditional quantitative methods. However, questions concerned with the interpretation and contextualization of human experience, which demand consideration of the intricate relations between language use and the socially complex world in which we live, may best fit an ethnographic mode of representation.

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