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Foreign Language Study Gains Support

Recent activity in Congress and in federal agencies indicates that a new emphasis on foreign language education is emerging—a result of the findings of the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies, which decried the lack of foreign language ability or interest in the United States.

Representative Paul Simon (D-Ill), a member of the President's Commission, has proposed making the study of foreign languages and cultures for "both national and international concerns" a research priority for the National Institute of Education (NIE). The proposal was passed by the House Education and Labor Committee as an amendment to its reauthorization bill for NIE.

In a similar vein, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), in its revised 1981 budget, has acted to strengthen the position of intercultural research. Its proposed Intercultural Research Program in the Division of Research Programs will seek to increase "understanding of the traditions, cultures, and values of foreign countries as a base for the study of contemporary international affairs and to foster this nation's standing in international scholarship by providing support to American scholars to pursue basic research abroad in all fields of the humanities."

Representative Leon Panetta (D-Calif), also on the President's Commission, has introduced HR 6905, the Foreign Language and International Studies Incentive Act, to provide financial incentives for college students to study foreign languages and international education, in order to reverse the trend of "more and more Americans" who "are entering and graduating from college with a modicum of international education at a time when world developments demand a global outlook." Both the U.S. "national security" and "national economic well-being" require greater emphasis upon foreign language and cultural study, according to Panetta.

The bill gives priority to students who have served in

the armed forces, National Guard, Reserves, Peace Corps, or under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act. The bill has been referred to the House Education and Labor Committee Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education; unfortunately, no early action on the bill is foreseen.

See FL Study—2, Col. 1

Oral and Literate Strategies in Discourse

by Deborah Tannen

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In my work in discourse analysis, I have found a crucial source of insight in research on oral vs. literate tradition. I shall summarize the main thrust of this research and then show how strategies that have been associated with oral vs. literate tradition are not linked to orality vs. literacy per se. Rather, they are found in both spoken and written discourse, as shown in my own research on indirectness, storytelling, conversational style, and spoken vs. written language.

The theory of oral vs. literate tradition suggests that knowledge in literate culture is seen as facts and information preserved in written records. In oral culture, formulaic expressions (sayings, clichés, proverbs) are the repository of received wisdom (Ong, 1967). In a larger sense, meaning in oral tradition is socially agreed upon, or highly context bound, and is associated with communication in the family and ingroup. In contrast, literate tradition is associated with formal schooling and rote memory (Goody, 1977) and assumes that sentence meaning derives from logical processes applied to the literal meaning of component words. Thus, literate tradition focuses on decontextualized content, while oral tradition emphasizes interpersonal involvement.

The value of an argument in literate tradition resides in its internal logic and consistency, whereas in oral tradition it resides in common-sense or experience-based validity (Olson, 1977). Children learn to use

See Discourse—2, Col. 1

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FL STUDY—from page 1

Rep. Panetta has also organized an International Education Group in the House in order to provide a focal point for information exchange among legislators and staff who are interested in the subject.

In November 1979, the House passed an amended Higher Education Act (HR 5192), which incorporates the provisions of the National Defense Education Act Title VI relating to foreign language and international studies. The language of the House bill strengthens the position of foreign language study within undergraduate international education programs and encourages the entry of international education graduates into business and industry. At this writing, consideration of a similar and more expansive bill is imminent in the Senate.

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In a related activity, *Verbatim's* editor Laurence Urdang has announced plans of a "Gala Verbatim Celebration of the English Language" to take place on Nov 14-15 at the Sheraton Convention Center in New York City. The celebration is intended to be part of the activities of the proposed National Language Week, which, if the President proclaims it, is planned for Nov 9-15, with the purpose of encouraging a broadening of awareness of the importance of language.

DISCOURSE—from page 1

language through strategies associated with oral tradition; strategies associated with literate tradition are learned later in life in some cultures, and, as Kay (1977) points out, the evolution of languages is toward literate-based strategies—in his terms, "autonomous" language. Literate tradition does not replace but rather is superimposed on and intertwined with strategies associated with oral tradition. Clearly, in modern Western society, many families teach children attitudes toward language and meaning associated with literate tradition.

This theory explains, then, the controversial and influential distinction made by British sociologist Basil Bernstein between restricted and elaborated codes. The elaborated code of middle and upper class speakers is simply the fully explained background information filled in by those who are applying strategies associated with literate tradition, while the devalued restricted code of working class speakers is the efficient context-bound strategy of oral tradition, capitalizing on the obviously shared knowledge of speaker and hearer. Recent work (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1980) has suggested that the failure of minority students in mainstream classrooms may result from the application of strategies associated with in-group talk in the school setting, where literate strategies are expected. For example, children attempting to answer short questions on a reading test may be unaware that they are to suspend all prior knowledge and answer in terms of just the information set forth in the question. Instead they may refer to their knowledge of the world around them to pick the best (but "wrong") answer to the question (Aronowitz, to appear).

In a comparison of the use of indirectness in conversation by Greeks and Americans (Tannen, 1976), I found

that Greeks were more likely to expect indirectness in requests between husbands and wives than were Americans in my study. In a further development of this work (Tannen, 1979a), I compared Americans of Greek descent both with Americans and with Greeks. I found that Greek-Americans expected communicative strategies which were closer to those of Greeks than those of Americans in my study, as reflected in expectations of indirectness in requests between husbands and wives.

An interesting finding of this study was the "brevity effect." Those Americans who made reference to the brevity of the response "OK" reasoned that because it was brief, it was casual and sincere; hence OK = yes. In contrast, all Greeks who referred to the brevity of the response "OK," explained that it was unenthusiastic; hence OK = no. In this sense, the Greeks expected more elaboration in expression of preferences in a family setting—but elaboration of the phatic or oral tradition component of language.

An unexpected further finding, moreover, was that the very strategies used in answering the questions I posed in this study were different among Greeks and Americans, and again the Greek-Americans often resembled the Greeks more closely than the non-Greek Americans. In examining a sample conversation and discussing their interpretation of it, the Greeks, and the Greek-Americans, were more likely to talk in personal terms: to project themselves into the situation and to talk about their own family interactional style. In this task, too, the Greeks (and Greek-Americans) were using strategies associated with oral tradition, while the Americans, in some sense, were using strategies associated with literate tradition, that is, approaching the task as a decontextualized and depersonalized one.

Another study focused on oral narratives told by Greeks and Americans about a film seen in an experimental setting (Tannen, 1980a). This study had two major findings. First, the Greeks tended to "tell better stories," constructing them around an interpretive theme, while the Americans tended to recall more details more accurately and list them as though they were performing a memory task. Second, while the Greek speakers tended to make judgments about the characters' behavior or the film's message, the Americans used cinematic jargon and made judgments about the filmmaker's technique. The Greeks, moreover, seemed concerned with presenting themselves as acute judges of human behavior and good storytellers, exercising strategies associated with the in-group setting or oral tradition. By performing a memory task and presenting themselves as acute critics of cinematic technique, the Americans in the study were exercising strategies associated with schooling or literate tradition.

Differences associated with oral and literate tradition may explain as well miscommunication between speakers of what is ostensibly the same language. In recent work on conversational style (Tannen, 1979 and 1980b), I analyzed two and a half hours of naturally occurring conversation among six native speakers of English from varying geographical and ethnic backgrounds. In that study, I began to define precisely what linguistic devices used by speakers made up their differing conversational styles. I looked at such features as pacing, rate of speech, overlap and interruption, intonation, pitch,

loudness, syntactic structures, topic, thematic cohesion, storytelling, irony and sarcasm, and so on. Building on the theoretical work of Robin Lakoff (1975, 1979), I began by hypothesizing that the speakers who used a style (I've dubbed it "high-involvement") which led some others in the group to perceive them as "dominating" were applying Lakoff's *camaraderie* principle, whereas those who used a style ("high-considerateness") which led high-involvement speakers to perceive them as "withholding" were applying Lakoff's *distance* principle.

This proved a valid hypothesis. Moreover, Lakoff's distinctions turned out to correlate with the oral/literate distinction. That is, high-involvement speakers honor above all the need for interpersonal involvement, reflecting the values of oral tradition. In contrast, high-considerateness speakers used conventionalized devices growing out of a strategy honoring above all the need to avoid being imposed upon. The relative devaluation of interpersonal involvement in favor of verbalization of content is associated with literate tradition. Applying these metastrategies, speakers in both groups habitually misinterpreted the devices used by the others. Of course, these styles are not discrete entities but idealizations of patterns. Each speaker had a unique personal style; all speakers were distributed along a continuum—in fact, along numerous continuua, each reflecting use of a particular device in response to particular situations.

Thus, for speakers of a high-involvement style, overlap is valued as a way of signalling conversational involvement, even if it temporarily obscures the relay of a fully developed message. However, for high-considerateness speakers, overlap is perceived as interruption and is rejected because it obscures the expression of complete thoughts—the application of "elaborated code" or strategies associated with literate tradition in an oral mode (Tannen, to appear a).

Finally, there has been much recent interest in understanding the relationship between spoken and written language. Clearly, spoken conversation and written expository essays represent opposite poles, but such mixed modes as formal lectures and written stories or letters violate generalizations about spoken and written language. Analysis suggests (Tannen, to appear b) that formal lectures reflect strategies associated with literate tradition in an oral mode, while literary fiction reflects strategies associated with oral tradition, eg. use of details and direct quotation, which contribute to the sense of identification upon which oral tradition (according to Havelock, 1963 and Ong, 1967) depends for its impact.

In all these areas, research supports and furthers Ong's (1967) and Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz' (1980) hypothesis that middle class, "mainstream" American culture has conventionalized strategies associated with literate tradition for use in many public and private settings, while devaluing strategies associated with oral tradition which have been conventionalized by members of many other cultural groups.

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The *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, which began publication in Spring 1980, requests papers (2,500-6,000 words) on all aspects of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Potential topics would include difficulties arising from or benefits to be gained from learning two or more languages from early childhood, problems of linguistic/cultural minorities and a national education system, maintaining identity while integrating into the local schools and population, the optimum time for second language teaching to begin, the advantages of being bilingual or multilingual and the advantages to the community from an interaction of cultures, etc. Papers already accepted for early issues include: "Bilingualism and Biculturalism as Individual and as Societal Phenomena" (Joshua A. Fishman); "Monitoring Attainment in the Welsh Language Schools" (Eurwen Price); "Education and Bilingualism on the Language Frontier in Switzerland" (J. Athol Hunt); "Linguistic Minorities in Britain" (Verity Khan). The journal will also publish short reports of work in progress and book reviews, and plans to publish letters from readers. Subscription rate is U.S. \$12.00 (£5.50); add \$6.00 (£2.10) for airmail. For subscriptions contact: Tieto Ltd, 4 Bellevue Mansions, Bellevue Rd, Clevedon, Bristol BS21 7NU, England. Editorial correspondence should be mailed to: Derrick Sharp, Dept of Ed, U Coll of Swansea, Hendrefoilan, Swansea SA2 7NB, Wales.