

## Most Commonly Used Transcription Symbols

.	(period) Falling intonation.
?	(question mark) Rising intonation.
,	(comma) Continuing intonation.
-	(hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off.
::	(colon(s)) Prolonging of sound.
<u>never</u>	(underlining) Stressed syllable or word.
WORD	(all caps) Loud speech.
°word°	(degree symbols) Quiet speech.
>word<	(more than & less than) Quicker speech.
<word>	(less than & more than) Slowed speech.
hh	(series of h's) Aspiration or laughter.
.hh	(h's preceded by dot) Inhalation.
[ ]	(brackets) Simultaneous or overlapping speech.
=	(equals sign) Contiguous utterances.
(2.4)	(number in parentheses) Length of a silence.
(.)	(period in parentheses) Micro-pause, 2/10 second or less.
( )	(empty parentheses) Non-transcribable segment of talk.
(word)	(word or phrase in parentheses) Transcriptionist doubt.
((gazing toward the ceiling))	(double parentheses) Description of non-speech activity.
#	(pound symbol) Creaky voice
\$ or £	(American or British money symbol) Smile voice
↑ ↓	The up and down arrows indicate a rise or fall in pitch.

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## Talking the Dog: Framing Pets as Interactional Resources in Family Discourse

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Based on examples drawn from tape recordings of two middle-class, dual-career White couples with children who audiotaped their own interactions for a week, I examined how family members mediate interpersonal interaction by speaking as, to, or about pet dogs who are present in the interaction. Analysis demonstrates that dogs become resources by which speakers effect a frame shift to a humorous key, buffer criticism, deliver praise, teach values to a child, resolve potential conflict with a spouse, and create a family identity that includes the dogs as family members. In this analysis, I contribute to an understanding of framing in interaction, including the relevance of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of polyvocality for conversational discourse and demonstrate how family members use pets as resources to mediate their interactions while constituting and reinforcing their identity as a family.

A couple who live together are having an argument. The man suddenly turns to their pet dog and says in a high-pitched, baby-talk register, "Mommy's so mean tonight. You better sit over here and protect me." This makes the woman laugh—especially because she is a petite 5 ft, 2 in.; her boyfriend is 6 ft, 4 in. and weighs 285 lb.; and the dog is a 10-lb. Chihuahua mix.

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A young woman, the only child of a single mother, is visiting home from college. At one point her mother tells her, "Pay lots of attention to the cat; she misses you so much."

These two anecdotal examples illustrate a phenomenon I have been examining in a large corpus of conversational interaction audiotaped by the parents in each of four families who carried or wore small digital tape recorders for a week, recording their own interactions at home and at work. The phenomenon to which I refer is a discursive strategy by which family members, in communicating with each other, speak through non-verbal third parties—preverbal children or pets. Elsewhere (Tannen, 2003), I examine the phenomenon more generally. In this study, I focus exclusively on examples in which the nonverbal third parties are pet dogs.

The term *resource*, as I am using it, has much in common with what Scollon (2001) following Wertsch (1998) calls "mediational means": "material objects in the world (including the materiality of the social actors ...)" through which "mediated action is carried out" (p. 4; where "mediated action," rather than a text or discourse, is the unit of analysis). In other words, in the examples I examine, one family member mediates interaction with a second family member by speaking as, to, or about a pet dog who is present. The analysis of ways in which family members speak through pets extends the understanding of what Gumperz (1982, p. 131) calls "contextualization cues": that is, how "paralinguistic and prosodic features" and other aspects of linguistic realization function to frame utterances and position speakers in interaction.

Arluke and Sanders (1996), in their analysis of interactions in a veterinary clinic, observed numerous instances in which pet owners speak for their pets. Bilger (2003) notes that "according to a recent survey by the American Animal Hospital Association, sixty-three per cent of pet owners say 'I love you' to their pets every day" (p. 48). In these instances of speaking for and speaking to animals, the animal is arguably (to use Goffman's, 1981, framework) the principal. In contrast, the phenomenon I address in this study is the discursive practice by which speakers talk to and through their pets to communicate to human family members. In the examples I present, dogs are not the principals in the interaction. Rather, they are resources for communication among humans.<sup>1</sup>

The two anecdotal examples I presented at the outset illustrate ways in which pets can become resources for communication between humans.

In the first example, when the 285-lb. boyfriend uses baby talk register while speaking in the second person to address the couple's pet dog, he uses the dog as a resource to (a) mediate a conflict with his girlfriend, (b) effect a frame shift from conflict to humor, and (c) frame the couple as a family. This last function is particularly interesting from the point of view of family discourse. Whereas the playful key in itself provides an indirect means to end the couple's argument, positioning their pet as their baby goes a long way toward redressing the threat to their unity and intimacy posed by the argument. This positioning is accomplished by at least two related linguistic strategies: first, the baby talk register, and, second, referring to his girlfriend as "Mommy." (This usage places the man in the mainstream of pet owners. Arluke & Sanders, 1996, report that "veterinary clients ... routinely referred to themselves as 'Mommy' or 'Dad'" [p. 68]; according to Bilger, 2003, "Eighty-three per cent [of pet owners] refer to themselves as their pet's mom or dad" [p. 48].)

In the other example described at the outset, the mother who tells her daughter, home from college, to pay lots of attention to the cat who missed her very much, does not address the cat directly but nonetheless uses the cat as a resource for communicating to her daughter. The daughter reported that she understood her mother to be indicating that she herself missed her daughter. By directing the daughter's attention to the cat rather than herself, however, the mother avoided potential conflict with her daughter who might well have protested a demand from her mother to "Pay lots of attention to me." I argue, perhaps a bit more tenuously, that by speaking for the cat, the mother constituted the dyadic pair (mother—daughter) as a triadic unit (mother—daughter—cat), perhaps thereby more closely approximating the popular conception of family.

In what follows, I present six examples taken from the tape-recorded conversations of two families to illustrate how family members use pet dogs as resources in their interactions. Specifically, the pets become resources by which speakers buffer criticism, effect frame shifts, deliver praise, teach values, mediate or avoid conflict, and both reflect and constitute the participants' family identities. Before turning to these examples, I briefly sketch the theoretical background against which prior research has addressed phenomena related to those illustrated by the examples I analyzed in this study.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: SPEAKING THROUGH THIRD PARTIES

### Ventriloquizing

In three of the six examples that follow, family members use pets as resources in their interactions by speaking *as* their pets. I use the term *ventriloquizing* to describe the discursive strategy by which a participant speaks in the voice of a nonverbal third party in the presence of that party. This strategy is situated at the intersection of two linguistic phenomena I have been examining for many years: on one hand, constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1989); on the other, framing in discourse (Tannen, 1993). "Constructed dialogue" is my term for what has been called (misleadingly, I argue) "reported speech," that is, animating speech in another's voice. Ventriloquizing is a special case of constructed dialogue in that a ventriloquizing speaker animates another's voice in the presence of that other. It is also a kind of frame shifting insofar as a speaker who utters dialogue as if it were spoken in the voice of another is assuming a new and different footing vis-à-vis the participants and the subject of discourse; "footing" is defined here, following Goffman (1981), as "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (p. 128). In other words, through realizations of pitch, amplitude, intonational contours, voice quality, pronoun choice, and other linguistic markers of point of view, speakers verbally position themselves as their pets. Put another way, talking through dogs is a kind of frame shifting insofar as a speaker who utters dialogue as if it were spoken in the voice of another is assuming a new and different footing vis-à-vis the participants and the subject of discourse.

To illustrate how I am using the term *ventriloquizing*, I briefly recap an example discussed in more detail elsewhere (Tannen, 2003). This example comes from a third family who participated in our study: Kathy, Sam, and their daughter Kira who, at the age of 2 years 1 month, was only minimally verbal.<sup>2</sup> In the following interchange, Kathy was at home with Kira when Sam returned from work, tired and hungry, and quickly began eating a snack. Kira, who had eaten dinner earlier with her mother, tried to climb onto her father's lap. Sam snapped, "I'm eating!" and Kira began to cry.

Speaking in a high-pitched, sing-song baby talk register, Kathy addressed Kira:<sup>3</sup>

- Can you say,
- I was just trying to get some Daddy's attention,
- and I don't really feel too good, either.

Kathy introduced this utterance by addressing Kira and asking "Can you say?" However, by using a baby talk register and the first person singular "I" (at other times, she animated the child using the second person singular "we"), she spoke as the child to accomplish a variety of communicative tasks at once. She (a) indirectly criticized Sam for snapping at their daughter and making her cry, (b) explained Kira's point of view to Sam, and (c) provided a lesson to Kira that she might one day convey her emotions and needs more effectively with words rather than with tears. (Elsewhere, Kathy states this lesson directly by saying to Kira, "Use your words"—an injunction that is common to the point of formulaic among preschool teachers and parents.) The lines indicated by arrows, spoken in the first person and in baby talk register, are those I would characterize as ventriloquizing because Kathy framed her words as Kira's. She spoke *as* her daughter.

A number of discourse analysts have addressed the phenomenon I am referring to as *ventriloquizing* with or without using this term or related ones. Schiffrin (1993) investigates the discourse strategy she called "speaking for another" by which, for example, a woman says on behalf of her guest, "She's on a diet," when the guest declines candy offered by the woman's husband. Scollon (2001), whose interest is "mediated discourse," notes a wide range of types and functions of baby talk in interaction. One such type is what he calls "through baby talk," in which "two participants are speaking to each other with the presence of the infant to mediate what might otherwise be impossible or difficult utterances" (p. 93). Scollon illustrates "through baby talk" with an example exchange in which he was carrying his 2-month-old daughter while making a purchase in a store. The cashier, after telling her customer the amount he owed, turned to address the infant in his arms by saying in baby talk, "Where's Mommy?" He replied, also in baby talk, "Mommy's at home." Scollon notes that both he and the cashier spoke *through* the infant to exchange information and concerns that would have been difficult to articulate directly. Scollon

paraphrases the cashier's "hidden dialogue" as "Where is this child's mother, who are you and why are you caring for the child?," and his own as "I'm the father; her mother's at home. And everything is O.K. with this relationship."

Bakhtin (1981) is frequently cited as the source of the concept and term *ventriloquate*. Bubnova and Malcuzyński (2001) explain that the term *ventriloquate* is actually the innovation of translators Emerson and Holquist and that the concept that has come to be associated with this term is not found in Bakhtin's own writing.<sup>4</sup> Bubnova and Malcuzyński present the passage from "Discourse and the Novel" in which this term appears, as translated into English by Emerson and Holquist. At this point in his essay, Bakhtin is discussing the use of language in prose literature:

The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, *through* a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely *ventriloquates*. (p. 299)

Bubnova and Malcuzyński note that the passage says, more literally "the language through which the author speaks is more densified, objectified, as if it would appear to be at a certain distance from his lips" (p. 31). They observe, further, that there is a Russian word for ventriloquism but neither the term nor any notion related to it appears anywhere in Bakhtin's works.

It is easy to see how the verb *ventriloquate* would seem an appropriate English word to convey the sense of using language in a way that appears to be "at a certain distance from" the speaker's lips. Bubnova and Malcuzyński emphasize, however, that Bakhtin's point in this passage is that an author of prose fiction finds the "language" of the novel given in the conventions of literary discourse. An author must speak *through* those conventions. This is therefore quite a different context than that of conversational discourse. Although Bakhtin apparently did not use the term and was concerned with literary discourse, one of the effects of what I am calling *ventriloquizing* in conversational discourse is precisely to make the words spoken "appear to be at a certain distance" from the speaker's lips in the sense of distancing the speaker from responsibility for the utterance.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although the term *ventriloquize* does not trace, after all, to Bakhtin, nonetheless Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality (by which authors speak through the conventions of literary discourse, thereby causing their words to appear

"at a certain distance" from their lips) does capture an aspect of interaction that is crucial for the understanding of how speakers use pets as a resource in communicating with each other. The term *ventriloquize*, following Bakhtin in spirit if not in terminology, captures the sense in which family members, by voicing their dogs, distance themselves (figuratively, of course) from their own utterances.

### Speaking Through Intermediaries: A Cross-Cultural View

Speaking through an intermediary is a phenomenon well documented in the anthropological literature. Many such examples come from societies in which it is taboo for individuals in particular kin relations to address each other directly; others simply illustrate the use of children and pets as intermediaries in conversational interactions. For example, Schottman (1993) reports a complex indirect discursive strategy among the Baatombu of northern Benin by which speakers who harbor grievances assign a proverb as a dog's name; they can then invoke the proverb to express their grievance simply by calling or addressing the dog. Haviland (1986) examines a multiparty interaction in a small Tzotzil-speaking Mexican village to support his claim that conversational mechanisms are designed around multiparty rather than dialogic interaction. At one point in the interaction, a man teases an 11-year-old boy by playfully offering his daughter as a prospective wife for the boy, adding, "But you must first test her to see if she is any good" (p. 266). The embarrassed boy does not respond, but his father provides a response for him: "'Am I just a baby that I'll take orders from your daughter?' you should say that" (p. 268). Haviland observes that on one hand, the father is teaching his son not to "let such joking remarks pass" (p. 279), but on the other, the father may also be indirectly communicating that he himself is not to be taken for a fool.

Another anthropological example comes from Schieffelin's (1990) study of Kaluli language development in interaction. Kaluli mothers, Schieffelin (1990) demonstrates, use the word *elema* to model for children what to say.<sup>6</sup> In the following example, a 9-month-old baby boy has taken Bambi's (the author's) net bag. His mother instructs the boy's 2-year-old sister Meli to chastise her baby brother by saying to Meli, "Don't take—elema." In response, Meli tells her baby brother, "Don't take!." The mother adds, "This is Bambi's!—elema. Is it yours?!—elema," and Meli repeats, "Is it yours?!" (p. 92). The mother then gently takes the bag away from the baby.

Americans might, in a similar situation, expect a mother to speak directly to her baby, instructing him not to take what is not his. The Kaluli mother is accomplishing the same result (indeed, she herself physically returns the bag to its owner), but she does so in a way that involves her other child. Thus, as Schieffelin shows, the Kaluli mother (a) teaches Meli a lesson in values, (b) encourages Meli's language development, and (c) socializes Meli into the older-sister role toward her brother—a role that, according to Schieffelin, is fundamental to Kaluli society.

Another aspect of Kaluli discourse is reminiscent of ventriloquizing. Schieffelin notes,

Kaluli mothers tend to face their babies outward. ... Older children greet and address infants, and in response to this mothers ... while moving them, speak in a special high-pitched, nasalized register (similar to one that Kaluli use when speaking to dogs.) These infants look as if they are talking to someone while their mothers speak for them. (p. 71)

The scenario Schieffelin describes is similar to examples I identify as *ventriloquizing* in intriguing ways. First, Schieffelin notes that mothers face their babies outward to involve children in social interaction from the very start of their lives and to teach them not only how to speak but also how to behave, how to regard others, what to value, and so on. Also of interest is Schieffelin's observation that the voice quality used to animate the infant's speech, that is, to *ventriloquize* the infant, is akin to the "special high-pitched, nasalized register" that the Kaluli use when speaking to dogs. This reinforces the claim that there is an organic relationship between the framing of speech as the voicing of infants on one hand and as addressed to animals on the other.

The finding that adults often address pets in registers similar to those used in addressing infants has also been documented for English speakers (Burnham, Kitamura, & Vollmer-Conna, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek & Treiman 1982; see Mitchell, 2001 for a comprehensive overview). Roberts (2002) examined videotaped interactions that took place in veterinary clinics and observed that veterinary personnel regularly use baby talk register to address pets and to "voice" pets to reassure pet owners as well as communicate to them face-threatening information such as criticism or disagreement. These findings are similar to the functions of talking to, as, and through pets that I describe in family discourse. My purpose, however, in

addition to examining how pets are incorporated as participants in interactions, is to understand how family members use pets as resources in their interactions with each other. This understanding, moreover, serves my larger purpose of illuminating the subtle shifts in framing and footing that characterize discourse among family members and the function of such frame shifts in constituting the family's shared identity.

## THE STUDY

The examples I analyze in this study are taken from the transcriptions and tape recordings of two families who audiotaped their own interactions for a week each. These were two of four middle-class, dual-career White couples with children all living in the suburbs surrounding Washington, DC who participated in a project titled "Mothers and Fathers at Work and at Home: Creating Parental Identities through Talk." The project was designed to investigate the linguistic means by which working parents integrate their home, family, and work lives through talk. Each parent was provided a small digital tape recorder to be worn or carried throughout the day, along with a large supply of digital tapes and instructions for using the equipment. The digital tapes recorded for 4 hours each, thus minimizing the requirement to interrupt interaction to change a tape.

In addition to self-recording, each participant was shadowed for a day by a research team member who wrote copious field notes describing the individual, the family, the workplace, and the other people and places that constituted the context for the recorded talk. Research assistants also logged and transcribed the tapes, yielding a corpus of over a million words. The families have remained available to project members who relay queries by e-mail and make occasional home visits to maintain contact. Of the four families who participated in the project, two had pet dogs. These are the two families whose transcribed interactions provide the data from which the examples I examine are drawn.

## TALKING THE DOG IN FAMILY DISCOURSE

In what follows, I present six examples to illustrate ways in which dogs become resources in interaction among human family members.

Among the interactional goals that are served by speaking through, for, and to the dogs, are effecting a frame shift to a humorous key, buffering criticism, delivering praise, teaching values, resolving potential conflict, and creating a family identity that includes the dogs as family members.

The first three examples come from a family consisting of Clara, Neil, and their son Jason who was 4 years, 10 months at the time of taping.<sup>7</sup> (All names of persons and pets are pseudonyms.) The family has two small dogs, pugs named Tater and Rickie, whom Clara herself, in an e-mail reply to a query, referred to as “my favorite family members.”

### Example 1: Buffering Criticism

The first example illustrates how a mother uses the resource of voicing the dogs to chastise her son and to encourage him to improve his behavior.

At the time of this example, Clara has been home with Jason and is frustrated because he has refused to pick up and put away his toys. She indirectly chastises Jason for his recalcitrance by ventriloquizing the dogs. I use the term *ventriloquizing* because in this example (and in the next two as well), Clara speaks *as* the dogs, animating their voices. By voicing the dogs, Clara frames her criticism in a humorous rather than an acrimonious key:

- 1) Clara: <to dog> What /do/ you have.  
           <high pitched> Come again?  
           Tater and Rickie! You guys, say,  
       —> <extra high pitch> “We’re naughty,  
       —> but we’re not as naughty as Jason,  
       —> he’s naughtiest.  
       —> We- we just know it!”  
           Okay, careful there Jason,  
           remember?

By using an extremely high-pitched baby talk register and by speaking in the first-person plural (“we”), Clara frames her utterance as the dogs’ discourse. In animating the dogs, she does not specify an addressee, but it is clear that Jason is the intended recipient of the communication. The markedness of Clara’s high-pitched animation of the dogs stands out not only in its own right but also because it contrasts noticeably with the lower pitched, more unmarked voice quality in which she addresses her son. When she ad-

dresses Jason directly (“Okay, careful there Jason”), she speaks at a far less marked pitch level, more as one would address an adult than as one would address a baby.

Clara’s conversational move is, on one level, face threatening and oppositional: She is chastising her son for failing to pick up his toys, and she is trying to get him to do so. Yet by ventriloquizing the dogs, she fundamentally alters the nature of her communication. For one thing, ventriloquizing introduces a note of humor because the dogs obviously can neither speak nor understand the words she is figuratively putting in their mouths. At a deeper level, one can observe that ventriloquizing is a form of teasing, a frame-bending speech move. In the terms Bateson (1972) used when presenting his theory of framing, teasing conveys affection on the metamessage level, whereas the words are hostile or adversarial on the message level. Moreover, by using indirectness, teasing, and humor, Clara buffers the criticism and deflects the confrontation constituted by that criticism. Her ventriloquizing lightens the mood and indicates that she is not deeply angry at Jason for failing to pick up his toys. She has found, moreover, that he is more likely to comply with her request if it is presented in this lighthearted manner than he would if she introduced a tone of serious anger.<sup>8</sup>

### Example 2: Ventriloquizing Praise, Constituting Family

In Example 2, Clara again ventriloquizes the dogs, but in this case, the interactive goal is to compliment Jason rather than to criticize him. This example shows, moreover, how animating the dogs also serves to integrate the dogs as family members. The behavior at issue is the same as it was in Example 1: picking up and putting away toys.

It is late Friday morning. Clara is not working on this day, and Jason has stayed home from school because he has been sick, so mother and son are going to go out for breakfast. In preparation for the outing, she again focuses on putting away toys, but this time Jason is cooperating rather than resisting. Indeed, he is not only putting away his own toys but offering to do the same with the toys “belonging” to one of the dogs, Tater. In response, Clara speaks first to the dog and then as the dog responding to Jason:

- 2) Jason: I’m gonna put some of Tater’s toys in there.  
       Clara: <exhales>

- Jason: Where's Tater's [toys?]  
 Clara: [Put] your shoesies on.  
 ((short pause))  
 Good job!  
 Jason: /I'm putting his-/  
 Clara: <high-pitched> Tater,  
 —> he's even puttin' your toys away!  
 —> Tater says,  
 —> <funny voice> "Yes, I never put them away!"  
 —> I consider my family to be a sl- a slew of maids,  
 —> servants."

In the first part of her discursive move, Clara addresses the dog ("Tater, he's even puttin' your toys away!") to praise her son. In the second part, she ventriloquizes the dog as if to provide a required response, an acknowledgment of the favor. However, rather than the expected "thank you," which would represent the dog expressing human-like gratitude, Clara animates the dog's indifference to Jason's good deed and further interprets that indifference as arrogance, which such ingratitude would be if Tater were a person rather than an animal.

By ventriloquizing the dog, Clara first and foremost introduces a note of humor. It is funny to represent a dog as an ungrateful family member. The key of humor is reinforced not only by the stance Clara creates for the dog—a persona so grand that he regards the other family members as his "maids" and "servants"—but also by the baby talk register created by the voice quality, high pitch, and intonation pattern in which she animates the dog. It is funny for a full-grown adult to speak in a marked high-pitch baby talk register. Clara also signals and creates a casual key by the deletion of the final "-ng" so that "putting" becomes "puttin'" ("he's even puttin' your toys away"). It seems that Clara uses this humor partly to amuse herself. At the same time, her discursive moves accomplish a number of other types of conversational work. For one thing, she teaches Jason a lesson in values: Family members should not expect other family members to pick up after them. The mechanism of this lesson is amusingly subtle. Whereas Jason's failure to put away his toys is faultable, a dog cannot seriously be faulted for the same lapse. Framing Tater as one who faultably expects others to function as maids or servants is a humorous way to convey this lesson to Jason.

I believe that ventriloquizing the dog in this context serves another interactive purpose as well: linguistically constituting the interactants as a family.

Clara and Neil have had one of the dogs, Rickie, longer—8 years longer—than they have had Jason. On one level, Clara and Neil enhanced their joint identity as a family with the *adoption* (Clara's term) of this first dog.<sup>9</sup> In this example, by voicing the dog, Clara integrates the dog into the interaction, thus constituting herself, her child, and their dogs as an intertwined unit—a family. Moreover, as Arluke and Sanders (1996, p. 67) point out, the very act of speaking for an animal constitutes a claim and demonstration of an intimate relationship with that animal. In this example, then, Clara is demonstrating the intimacy of her relationship with the dog, an intimacy that reinforces the family-member identity that she is creating for him.

In sum, this example shows that by ventriloquizing the dog Tater, Clara integrates the dog into the family, expresses her affection for and intimacy with the dog, and creates an identity for him as a family member at the same time that she uses the dog as a resource for praising her son, teaching him a lesson in values, and reinforcing the identity of the human-and-animal grouping as a family.

### Example 3: Framing the Dog as a Conversational Participant

Example 3 is a continuation of the same interaction between Clara and Jason. This segment involves the other family dog, Rickie. Here, Clara draws on the discursive resource of Rickie's growling and then barking, first, to incorporate the dog's vocalization as a conversational contribution and, second, to create an amusing imaginary scenario in which the small dog is reframed as a watchdog, and the sound of machinery outside the house is reframed as a threat to the family's safety:

- 3) Jason: I'm gonna need to put this box away.  
 ((short pause))  
 There's another box  
 that has the little aliens in it, ((dog growls))  
 and you [have to /???/]  
 —> Clara: [ <high-pitched> Rickie, you wild] little dog!>  
 Jason: I have a game that has aliens in it,  
 it's in the box.  
 Clara: Oh, okay. ((short pause, dog barks))  
 —> <high-pitched> Oh Rickie, you're so tough!



- > He says, ["I'm hearin' things"]  
 Jason: [/?/?/?]  
 —> Clara: "Yep, and there are those big machines out there,  
 —> and I'm gonna be defendin' this house  
 —> 'til I- 'til I : pass out!"

The sound of the dog Rickie first growling and then barking provides a resource for Clara to introduce humor by applying a watchdog schema to a dog who is obviously unsuited to this task. Although double the weight of the 10-lb. Chihuahua mix in the anecdote presented at the beginning of this article, Rickie is quite small and very old. At 12, he is suffering from back paralysis and is missing most of his teeth. The watchdog schema is therefore a ready source of humor; it is obviously funny to refer to the small, ailing Rickie as "wild" and "tough."

In addition to using them as a resource for humor, Clara simultaneously uses the growling and barking as a resource for framing Rickie as a family member. She ratifies the dog's vocalizations as conversational contributions by providing an account of their "meaning." According to the Web site PugsCom, "Behind a closed door, the pugs' deeper bark (than other small breeds) often sounds like a much larger dog than they are." This description explains in part why Clara might respond to Rickie's growl and bark by playfully exaggerating their import ("Rickie, you wild little dog!," "Oh Rickie, you're so tough!").

As in the preceding example, immediately after speaking to the dog, Clara speaks as the dog. By voicing Rickie's reply to her utterance, she frames the dog as a participant who both receives and contributes conversational turns. By ventriloquizing the dog, Clara interprets the cause of his growls and barks ("big machines out there") and reframes the dog's responses to outside noise as motivated in terms of human interaction ("defendin' this house"). As in the lines discussed earlier, Clara drops the *-ng* endings of her verbs, thereby creating a casual, playful key for her utterances ("I'm hearin' things," "I'm gonna be defendin' this house"). Thus, Clara draws on the dog's growls and barks not only as a resource for humor but also to frame the dog as a family member participating in the interaction. Moreover, I would argue that the interchange reinforces solidarity between Clara and Jason, as they share not only the humor of talking the dog but also the knowledge structure schema (Tannen & Wallat, 1993) that makes the humor comprehensible—that is, they share an understanding of a "watchdog script."

#### Example 4: Human Interaction as a Resource for Talking to Pets

The next example shows Clara using a dog as a resource in interaction with Neil and also using Neil as a resource in interaction with the dog. Here, Clara again uses the watchdog schema to introduce a humorous key, this time to criticize Neil for a small lapse. This interchange took place during the evening. Clara is at home, and Neil returns from a brief trip to the local convenience store. After a few shared observations about a topic of relevance to current events, the following exchange occurs:

- 4) Clara: You leave the door open for any reason?  
 ((short pause, sound of door shutting))  
 —> <babytalk> Rickie,  
 —> he's helpin' burglars come in,  
 —> and you have to defend us Rick.>

Here, Clara speaks *to* rather than *as* the dog, yet she uses the same high-pitched, baby talk register that she uses when she ventriloquizes the dogs. Rickie can no more understand her discourse than utter it—or than defend her and Neil against burglars.

Clara's initial question to Neil ("You leave the door open for any reason?") is in itself an indirect linguistic strategy. Rather than tell him directly to close the door, she frames her complaint as a question about his motives. That Neil doesn't answer the question is not surprising because the question is most likely not a literal request for information but an indirect request for action—which Neil apparently provides by closing the door. (It is not possible to know for sure from the audiotape who closed the door.) Because the door is heard to be shut before Clara goes on to address the dog, one may well ask what purpose is served by Clara's utterances to the dog. On one level, I suspect Clara simply used the dog as a sounding board for her own inner dialogue. The watchdog schema provides a resource for verbalizing what would otherwise be unstated, although obvious: the reason why it's important to keep the door to the house closed.

I suggest, however, another possible explanation for Clara's utterance to the dog in this instance. The exchange regarding the door provides a resource for Clara to talk to the dog much as one talks nonsense to a baby: The subject of the talk is not significant, but the sound of the talk, with all its paralinguistic and prosodic richness, provides an occasion to express the



positive emotion—fondness, attachment—that the speaker feels toward the child or, in this case, the dog. At the same time, it does the important work of including the nonverbal family member in conversational interaction, initiating, as it were, the child (or the dog) as a family member. In the previous examples, one could say that the dog provided a resource for managing interpersonal interaction; that level is present in this example as well. However, this example also illustrates yet another function of talking the dog: a sense in which the interaction among humans provides a resource for a pet owner to express affection and attachment to the dog and to thereby enact the integration of the pet into the family. Just as humans reinforce their interpersonal connections through talk whether or not there is anything important to talk about at a given moment, humans similarly reinforce their connections to pets through talk whether or not there is anything to be communicated to the pet. Talking to the pet about something that just happened with a human, therefore, provides material for such talk.

### Example 5: Buffering a Complaint

The last two examples come from another family. Rachel and Gregory have three children; at the time of taping, the youngest was in high school, the next was in college, and the oldest was working as a professional musician. In a book examining family interaction (Tannen, 2001), I used examples from Rachel and Gregory's interactions to illustrate how a couple successfully avoided or defused conflict by using humor and apologies. (The fact that their children were teenagers or older and therefore required less labor-intensive care may well have played a role here). In Example 5, Gregory has been inconvenienced because Rachel neglected to tell him that she had taken the dog for a walk earlier in the day. Instead of lodging a complaint against Rachel, however, Gregory addresses his complaint to the dog, thus buffering (although still communicating) the criticism.

It is evening following a long day's work. Gregory was about to take the family dog out for his daily run when he passed Rachel, who informed him that she had already done that. The interchange proceeded as follows:

- 5) Gregory: I'm going to take him out.  
 Rachel: He's been out once.  
 Gregory: Oh, he has?  
 Rachel: We had a long walk this morning.  
 Gregory: Oh, I didn't know that.  
 Rachel: Sorry.  
 I meant to tell you.

- I kept forgetting to tell- <she laughs>  
 → Gregory: <to dog> Well why didn't YOU tell us?  
 → We'll do a short one then, okay?

Gregory has reason to be annoyed at Rachel. Her having forgotten to tell him she'd taken the dog for a walk has inconvenienced him. (He says, as shown in Example 6, that he would have continued working longer had he known.) Gregory could well have directly registered a complaint as an accusation, "You should have told me," or a challenge, "Why didn't you tell me?" Instead, he made a statement about his own ignorance ("Oh, I didn't know that"). As with the preceding examples, addressing himself to the dog rather than his wife introduces a note of humor. In this case, addressing the dog also provides a way for Gregory to avoid directly blaming Rachel when he asks the dog, "Well why didn't YOU tell us?" Because it is obvious that the dog could not have done so, this utterance does indirectly address the complaint to Rachel. However, its being indirect rather than direct, mediated by a humorous discursive move, takes the sting out of the complaint. The dog provided a resource for accomplishing this mediation.

Also interesting is Gregory's use of the plural "us" rather than "me." It seems clear that when he asks the dog "Why didn't you tell us?," the plural "us" refers to one person, himself. This usage strikes me as akin to the use of first-person plural in expressions such as "Give us a hug." It is a form of speech reminiscent of adults speaking to children (Wills, 1977; Wodak & Schulz, 1986) or perhaps to other adults toward whom they feel affection. In this sense, Gregory, like Clara in the preceding examples, creates a family-like atmosphere of affection and inclusion in the way he addresses the dog as well as in the fact that he speaks to the dog at all.

### Example 6: Occasioning an Apology

The last example shows how talking to a dog becomes the means by which a potential conflict is deflected and then resolved. In other words, the dog becomes a resource for resolving a conflict.

Example 6 is a continuation of the interchange presented in the preceding example. Gregory lets Rachel know that he's been inconvenienced:

- 6) Gregory: I would've stayed and worked if I'd known.  
 → <to dog> Now I got you all excited.  
 Rachel: Sorry.  
 Gregory: Well I probably should've asked you.

Gregory's expression of frustration is in two parts. The first part is the fact that he stopped work earlier than he otherwise would have in order to take the dog for a walk ("I would've stayed and worked if I'd known"). The second part is his explanation of why he cannot simply undo this effect by abandoning his plan to take the dog for a walk and returning to work. (Gregory's office is in his home.) The reason he cannot do this is provided in an utterance addressed to the dog ("Now I got you all excited"). His compromise is to take the dog for a walk but a shorter one than he had intended.

The potential for conflict between Rachel and Gregory is buffered by the way both produced their succeeding utterances. Rachel apologizes for her lapse and its consequences ("Sorry") and Gregory responds by assuming part of the blame ("Well I probably should've asked you"). This brief exchange illustrates the two-part nature of a canonical apology routine in which each party takes responsibility for some degree of fault, so neither is left in the compromising position of taking all the blame. This couple often offered and accepted apologies; I have identified this as an element in their apparently harmonious household (Tannen, 2001). Example 6 shows that the dog provides a resource by which apologies are occasioned and freely exchanged. One could argue that Gregory set the scene for Rachel's apology by downplaying the gravity of her offense, and this he did in part by addressing his complaint to the dog rather than to her. Talking to the dog introduced a note of humor and deflected the confrontation through a third party. Rachel's apology then set the scene for Gregory's balancing admission that he too was guilty of a lapse in assuming, without asking, that the dog needed to be taken for a walk.

This example shows, then, the complex negotiation of complaint, explanation, apology, and redress by which a potential conflict was resolved. In accomplishing this negotiation, Gregory used the dog as a resource by which to mediate the potential conflict.

## CONCLUSION

The six examples I have presented illustrate how family members who tape-recorded their conversations over the course of a week used their pet dogs as resources in mediating their interactions with each other. I have demonstrated in these examples that talking through dogs accomplishes multiple intertwined and overlaid interactive feats. Among the interactive goals that family members accomplished by using dogs as re-

sources are occasioning a switch out of an argument frame; rekeying the interaction as humorous; buffering criticism; reinforcing solidarity among family members; delivering praise; teaching values to a child; providing the occasion to talk as a way of enacting affection for pets; reinforcing a couple's bond by positioning them as "Mommy" and "Daddy" to their dog; resolving a conflict by conveying and triggering an apology; framing pets as family members; and reinforcing bonds among individuals who live together by exhibiting, reinforcing, and creating their identity as a family.

My purpose has been to examine and explore the linguistic strategies by which family members use dogs as resources in their interactions with each other. Examples of family members talking as, to, or about their dogs in the dogs' presence constitute instances of the continuous, seamless shifts in framing and footing that characterize conversational discourse in general and family discourse in particular. Examining the use of pets as interactional resources thus adds to the understanding of framing in discourse. The analysis also enriches the understanding of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of polyvocality and its relevance to conversational discourse in the sense that talking through pets allows speakers to distance themselves figuratively from their own utterances. The analysis also contributes to the understanding of family discourse by demonstrating how pets are framed through talk as family members. Thus, talking the dog is a resource by which individual speakers accomplish interaction while reflecting and constituting their family identity.

## NOTES

- 1 This is not to argue that the dogs function exclusively as resources nor that speakers might not also be communicating to the pet. As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, a human who interrupts a family argument to speak to a pet might after all be trying to reassure the pet that all is well. This possibility is not denied by my focus on the way in which the speaker is using the pet as a resource for negotiating the argument with the other person, that is, by rekeying the interchange as humorous. Focusing on one aspect of an utterance—the way in which it is used to mediate human interaction—does not imply that the utterance might not be doing other interactional work as well. Quite the contrary; one can assume that any utterance is doing multiple interactional work. In terms I developed elsewhere (Tannen, 1994), every utterance is ambiguous (it can be intended or interpreted to have one meaning or another) and polysemous (it can be intended or interpreted to have more than one meaning at once).

- 2 Alexandra Johnston is the research assistant who shadowed the father in this family, transcribed the interchange from which this example comes, and brought this example to my attention.
- 3 Transcription conventions, as developed by Kendall and Tannen, are as follows:
  - > Arrows at left highlight the lines that are under discussion
  - ((words)) Double parentheses enclose transcriber's comments
  - /words/ Slashes enclose uncertain transcription
  - /? ? ? ?/ Question marks within slashes indicate indecipherable talk, one question mark per second
  - A hyphen indicates a truncated word or a glottal stop: abrupt cutting off of breath
  - . A period indicates falling, final intonation
  - , Commas mark phrase-final intonation (more to come)
  - ? A question mark indicates rising intonation
  - ! An exclamation point indicates an animated tone
  - WORD Capitals indicate emphatic stress
  - <laughs> Angle brackets enclose descriptions of vocal noises as well as descriptions of the manner in which an utterance is spoken
  - words [words]
  - [words] Square brackets enclose simultaneous talk. The overlapping talk is also lined up vertically on the page.
- 4 I would like to acknowledge the path by which I traced this paper in order to thank those who played a part. Cynthia Gordon posted an Internet query to which J. Brody (personal communication, October 2, 2001) replied in a message that directed our attention to the Bubnova and Malcuzyński (2001) paper and to Pierrette Malcuzyński herself.
- 5 This is particularly pleasing to me, as it is in keeping with my (Tannen, 1989) claim that the discourse strategies one considers quintessentially literary are pervasive and automatic in conversational discourse.
- 6 Schieffelin (1990) used the phonetic symbol /e/ for the vowel sound that I am representing with alphabetic "e" in "elema" and "Meli." Schieffelin (1990) notes (p. 254) that this sound is pronounced like the *e* in English "bet."
- 7 Cynthia Gordon is the research team member who shadowed Clara at home and at work, transcribed these interactions, and brought these examples to my attention.
- 8 An e-mail query confirmed my hypothesis that Clara had learned by experience that her son was more likely to comply with her requests when she framed them in this way. Clara replied to my query in an e-mail dated March 1, 2004, "My style was to indirectly get the point across to Jason in a way that did not raise his defensiveness or encourage him to assert his independence through refusal. The dogs, cats, and others came in very handy. In the situation you reported, I feel sure from his reactions that Jason typically knew what I was doing, but he found the whole thing so comical that he went along."
- 9 In answer to an e-mail asking how long Clara and Neil had had the dogs, Clara (personal communication, April 22, 2003) replied, "Rickie was born on 2/2/88, and we adopted

him when he was about 6 months old. Tater was born on 12/8/98, but we adopted him from Pug Rescue in July of 99, so he was about 6½ months when we adopted him." Although using the verb *adopt* to represent the acquisition of pets is commonplace and therefore arguably formulaic, I believe it also functions to indicate a level of commitment to the acquired animal and perhaps to "family-ize" the unit created by the addition of a pet to a household.

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