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## 2

# A Comparative Analysis of Oral Narrative Strategies: Athenian Greek and American English

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As continuing interest in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis attests, linguists, along with psychologists and anthropologists, have tried to understand the relationship between language and cognition and to determine the influence of culture on thought. Scholars and laypeople alike are intrigued by apparent differences in the perceptions and behavior of members of different cultures. As Friedrich and Redfield (1978) point out, linguistic phenomena which continue to fascinate laypeople are particularly appropriate for scientific study, first, to apply the specialists' expertise to aspects of language whose obviousness to the nonspecialist is evidence not that they are insignificant but that they are "basic" and "true," and second, to reimburse the science of linguistics with the layperson's "visceral fascination."\*

Recent research documenting cultural differences has spanned a broad range of fields, including cognitive style (Cole and Scribner, 1974); nonverbal behavior (Hall, 1959; Erickson, 1976); and facial expressions (Ekman, 1973). In linguistics, work in discourse analysis has begun to shed light on text-building principles and mechanisms in written and oral language. Among the

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most important research in the area of narrative text-building is Becker's (1979) on Javanese, demonstrating that basic text-building constraints are cultural conventions. Whereas Western texts hinge on temporal unity and linear causality, Javanese shadow theater plots hinge on coincidence and are constrained with regard to place rather than time. For example, events in a Javanese shadow play must begin and end in a certain place and pass through a certain other place midway.

In a study of written expository texts, Kaplan (1966) examined 700 essays written by foreign students in English and compared them to essays published in those students' native languages. Kaplan concludes that each of the language groups he studied favors a unique, conventionalized rhetorical structure. In Arabic (and other Semitic languages) "paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions" (p. 6); Chinese and Korean writing "is marked by what may be called an approach by indirection" (p. 10); and "much greater freedom to digress or to introduce extraneous material is available in French, or in Spanish, than in English (p. 12). All these rhetorical strategies contrast with the favored American English structure which Kaplan characterizes as a straight line, to illustrate the notion of "coming right to the point."

Other research has illuminated various ways in which use of language in conversation is culturally influenced. Robin Lakoff (1979) demonstrates that style differences may grow out of differing notions of politeness which give rise to communicative strategies differing with respect to degree of involvement among interlocutors and between speakers and their subject matter. The work of cognitive anthropologists and ethnographers of speaking have made available insight into culture-specific definitions of speech events (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Bauman and Sherzer, 1974; Sanches and Blount, 1975). The recent work of John Gumperz (1977) identifies and analyzes the paralinguistic and prosodic mechanisms by which speech events (in his terms, "speech activities") are recognized and carried out.

Continuing in this fruitful tradition of discourse analysis, research done in connection with the present project afforded a unique opportunity for systematic analysis of how the same events are transformed into narrative by members of different cultures. The present paper compares the narratives told in English by students at the University of California, Berkeley, with those told in Greek by students at the Hellenic-American Union in Athens.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Hellenic American Union is a binational center in Athens, Greece. Participants in this study were women attending evening classes in the English language. Two were university graduates; seven were university students; four were employed high school graduates; and six were high school students. They ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-six, with a median of nineteen. American women participating, students at the University of California, Berkeley, were slightly older, ranging in age from eighteen to thirty, with a median of twenty-three. No attempt was made to choose speakers of "comparable" socioeconomic status, since our goal was simply to

To say that the events which inspired the narratives were the same—that is, the same film—is not to say that the movie-viewing event had the same significance for members of the two groups; it is highly unlikely that this would be so. The ways in which speakers defined the event surely played a key role in shaping their verbalizations. Similarly, it is not assumed that the content of the narratives is the same. Quite the contrary, the question of how the content of the film is transformed into narrative content is at the heart of our investigation. As suggested by previous work such as Becker's, and as supported by data from the present study, there can be no "identical content," since content itself is mediated by cultural and personal differences. Polanyi (1979) reminds us that "what stories can be about is, to a very significant extent, culturally constrained: stories, whether fictional or non-fictional, formal and oft-told, or spontaneously generated, can have as their *point* only culturally salient material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture to be self-evidently important and true."

Polanyi's observation about the point of a story is related to C. Wright Mills' (1940) notion of "vocabularies of motives." Mills' hypothesis is that speakers learn to express motivations or explanations of their own and others' actions in terms of justifications which they know will be regarded as reasonable by other members of their culture. Just as there are agreed-upon vocabularies of motives, so are there conventionalized ways of choosing particular elements of the action and setting experienced or seen for inclusion in verbalization (and indeed in memory), and of organizing those events into narratives.

The ensuing discussion compares narratives told by Greek and American young women in response to the question, "What happened in the movie?" It cannot be assumed that the narratives thus elicited represent "universal" narrative styles in the cultures involved. This is not to say that the narratives are not "natural." As Nessa Wolfson (1976) wisely argues, "natural" speech is simply speech appropriate to an occasion. An interview with a stranger in the presence of a tape recorder is a special sort of occasion; the present study demonstrates that the Greek and American women who participated did indeed "define" the task differently. How their approaches differed is the question to be answered by a comparison of the two sets of narratives which were naturally produced by members of two different cultures under comparable external circumstances.

discover different rhetorical systems. It turned out, however that the occupations of the fathers of the Greek and American subjects were roughly comparable, including such traditional middle-class occupations as businessmen and civil servants. Almost all the American women had been raised in cities, and most of the Greeks had been born and raised in Athens, except for one from Istanbul and four from Greek towns. It should be noted, however, that a typical Athenian has closer ties with rural life than do American city-dwellers, as Athenians often make "excursions" to the villages, and many have relatives living in the countryside whom they visit regularly.

## DIFFERENCES IN NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

There were two striking overall differences between the Greek and American oral narratives about the pear film. First, the Americans<sup>2</sup> tended to discuss the film as a film, whereas the Greeks tended to recount the events depicted without saying that they had occurred in a film.

The Americans used cinematic jargon to comment upon and criticize technical aspects of the film's production, noting, for example, that the soundtrack was out of proportion, the costumes were unrealistic, or the colors were unnatural. In fact, the film's sound effects formed the main point, or "coherence principle,"<sup>3</sup> for four American narratives, including one which will be presented. Still another American structured her narrative around repeated contrasts between what she expected to happen as the film progressed and what actually happened. Thus the coherence principle of her narrative was the re-creation of her experience as a film-viewer. Moreover, the film-viewer perspective was generally maintained throughout the American narratives, by direct reference as well as allusion to the fact that the events discussed occurred in a film.

In contrast, the Greeks tended to talk directly about the events depicted without noting that they were in a film. If they did make overt reference to the film as a film, they did so at the beginning or the end of their narratives, by way of introduction or conclusion, rather than maintaining the perspective of a film-viewer in the course of narration. Furthermore, if the Greek speakers made judgments about the film, they largely commented on its message rather than the technique of its production.

The second major difference between the two sets of narratives is related to the first. The Americans in our study seemed to be reporting events as objectively as they could, often describing actions in detail, worrying over temporal sequence, and so on. In general, they appeared to be performing a memory task. The Greeks, on the other hand, tended to "interpret" the events. They ascribed social roles and motives to the characters, and they offered explanations as well as judgments of the action. In general, they appeared to be telling a story. Whereas the Americans seemed to be trying to include as many elements from the film as they could remember, the Greeks tended to

<sup>2</sup>Throughout this chapter, the words *Greeks* and *Americans* refer to those Greeks and Americans who participated in our study. There is no implication that there exists a homogeneous "Greek" or "American" culture, nor that those in this sample are "typical Americans" or "typical Greeks." This chapter demonstrates that the Athenian women and Berkeley women who participated are members of groups that may be distinguished from each other by the ways in which they perform the narrative task at hand. Members of the two groups evidence such differences despite the fact that there are, no doubt, subcultural differences among members of each group.

<sup>3</sup>I have borrowed this term from Charlotte Linde who attributes it to Alton Becker.

omit details that did not contribute to the theme they were developing, with the result that the Greek narratives were significantly shorter. (The average number of "idea units"<sup>4</sup> for the American narratives is 125, as opposed to an average of 84 for the Greek. The American narratives range in length from a total of 61 idea units to a total of 256; the Greek range from 26 to 150).

These two striking differences: (1) the tendency to talk about the film as a film vs. talking directly about the depicted events, (2) the tendency to "report" in detail vs. "interpreting" events, may both be related to the apparently different definitions of the narrative acts being performed. Whereas the Americans in our study focused their critical acumen on the skill of the film makers and seemed to define the event as a test of memory, the Greeks brought their critical acumen to bear on the events and characters in the film and seemed to approach the task more as they would a narrative in conversation. In short, insofar as any verbal performance is an exercise in presentation-of-self (Goffman, 1959), it seems that the Americans were concerned with presenting themselves as sophisticated movie viewers and able recallers, while the Greeks were concerned with presenting themselves as acute judges of human behavior and good storytellers.

## SAMPLE NARRATIVES

Before we proceed with a more detailed presentation and analysis of these broad and other finer differences, it will be useful to see sample American and Greek narratives. First, an American example:<sup>5</sup>

E14 The movie opened up on this...nice scene,...it was in the country,...it was oaks,...it /was/ seemed like West Coast... Maybe it wasn't. ... But it was hills and dry grass,...um...and scrub.... But there was pear trees in it,...and that was odd.... And there was this man with a moustache and a hat, picking...unripe pears, ...um and he was in this...he went up the ladder,...in the tree,...cause the tree was high, it wasn't pruned,...like...they usually are,...to keep them prostrate,...but it was...it had a large...uh...tall trunk,...and he's [tense ambiguous] picking unripe...unripe pears.... And what I noticed...first off,...was that all the noises in the movie,...were

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter 1 for a discussion of "idea units."

<sup>5</sup>"E14" refers to the fourteenth narrative told in English. Narratives told in Greek will be denoted by "G" plus number. Thus "E14" also refers to American Speaker 14; "G10" is Greek Speaker 10. Pauses are uniformly represented by three dots rather than precise timing (which is available), since the present analysis does not make use of pause measurements.

u--m... out of proportion. . . Like you could hear the . . the creaking . . of the . . ladder, . . and the picking of the pears, and then from a long way off . . they zoomed in on a . . /on a/ . . a . . child on a bicycle, and you could hear the . . the gears on the bicycle going around, more than . . it was . . way out of proportion of everything else. . . And u--m . . this man came by, . . walked by, and he's leading a goat, . . that didn't want to go with him, . . /ah/ . . and this first . . Okay, . . let me see. . . . The man climbed down out of the tree, . . and put the pears in the basket, and it looked like he was . . giving birth. . . It did! . . He was just kind of . . [creaky voice] . . rolling them out of his pouch, in his . . in his apron, . . and u--m . . then this-- he came /back/ down, . . and put the pears in the basket, . . and he went back up the ladder, and you could hear the creaking, . . and then you could hear the goat . . a long way off, . . and it was braying. . . But it was . . a very . . like . . a lo--ng drawn-out bray, like the movie . . the sound track had been slowed down, so it was "buhhh" [creaky voice]. . . um . . And he went . . and he went by, and there was two baskets of . . pears there, and one empty one, . . and then this little kid came by, . . and you could hear the gears in the . . on the bicycle, . . and you could hear the crickets, . . and the . . grasshoppers, . . and the little kid came by, and he si . . and he . . hesitated, but then he stole, . . one of the baskets of pears, . . and put it on his . . bicycle and rode off. . . And as he was . . riding down the r . . this . . this uh . . dirt road, . . /it/ was full of rocks, . . you could hear the . . the rocks creak underneath, . . u--m . . this other little girl in pigtails, . . black pigtails, . . rode by, . . and he tipped his hat to her, . . and as he did that, . . lost his hat, . . and ran into a b--ig rock, and the . . pears spilled all over. . . Out of nowhere, . . he looks up, and out of nowhere, . . everyone else, . . even the viewers are s . . there's . . three other little boys, one's playing with this . . pongo? . . A little . . paddle? . . And a ball with it on /the/ end of the elastic? . . And you could hear this paddle-ball going, . . a--nd uh-- . . and they help him pick up the . . pears, and put them back on his bicycle, and dust him off, . . a--nd u--m . . then he goes off, and . . nobody ever smiles in the movie, there isn't any emotion on any /of/ body's faces. . . A--nd then they nowt . . they were walking along down the road, they notice his bicycle was there, . . I mean his hat was there, . . so they picked up his hat, and whistled to him. . . and they ran back, and you could hear the running. . . And it was just so much out of proportion, it was . . easy to notice. . . u--m . . And they gave him his hat, . . and

the . . the little . . boy that fell off the bicycle gives him . . gives them three-- . . pears, . . and they went back, . . a--nd . . then you switch back to the ma--n, that's . . climbing down out of the tree, again with another . . pouchful of . . of pears. . . And he kneels down to put the pears in the . . third empty basket, . . and he s . . scratches his head, and . . u--m . . he goes . . one two three, . . and but there isn't a third one there, and he scratches his head some more, and looks, and these little . . three little boys go by, . . just walking, not paying any attention, . . no--t paying any attention to the man, /and/ . . eating these pears. . . And that's the end of the movie.

Following is an example of a Greek narrative. (An English translation follows the Greek.)

G10 eh . . . *Itan ena--s . . uh erghatis, . . enas choriatis, . . foruse mia aspri podhia ke ena kokino mandili, . . mazeve kati achladhia. . . I skala olo ligho etreme, . . /iche fovo/ na pesi . . eh-- ta evale se ena*  
[laughter-----]

*kalathi, . . tria prepi na itane, . . tsk . . to ena to yemize, . . ke-- pernas perase ena pitsiriki, . . forondas ke afto mandili pali, . . ena podhilato, . . stin archi pighe na pari-- dhio tria . . ala tu arese olo to kalathi to pire olo. . . Ala eh . . pighenondas . . sinandise ali mia kopela, . . mia mikri stin ilikia tu, ke-- kitazondas to anapodhoyirise. . . tsk Tu epesan kato ta achladhia, . . vrethikan kati alisinomiliki tu, . . ke-- to mazepsan. . . Aftos omos dhe-- . . tus efcharistise as pume, . . ke [clears throat] . . tsk ke . . fevgfondas i fili tu ferane to kapelo pu tu iche pesi . . kathos tsughrise me tin kopela, . . ke tu to edhosan ke tote tus efcharistise. . . Fevgfondas afti per perasan ap ton anthropo, . . ke idhan oti-- . . idhe o anthropos oti troghane-- . . ta achladhia. Ke paraxenefstike. . . Yiati--elipan ta tria kalathia. . . /m/ Afto. . . Dhen echi alo.*

eh . . (There) was a-- . . uh worker, . . a villager, . . (he) was wearing a white apron and a red scarf, . . (he) was gathering some pears. . . The ladder kept shaking a bit, . . / (he) was afraid/ of  
[laughter-----]

falling, . . eh-- (he) put them in a basket, . . three (there) must have  
-----]  
been, . . tsk . . (he) was filling one, . . a--nd passes passed a kiddie, . . wearing a scarf too, . . a bicycle, . . in the beginning (he) went to take-- two or three . . but he liked the whole basket (he) took it all. [laugh] . . But eh . . going . . (he) met another girl, . . one

young in age, a--nd looking (he) overturned it. ... tsk The pears fell down, ... there were some other-- contemporaries of his, ... a--nd they gathered it. ... He however didn't-- ... thank them let's say, ... and [clears throat] ... tsk and ... leaving the friends brought the hat which had fallen ... as (he) crashed with the girl, ... and they gave it to him and then (he) thanked them. ... (As) they (were) leaving (they) pa passed by the man, ... and (they) saw tha--t ... the man saw that (they) were eating-- ... the pears. And (he) was surprised. ... Becau--se the three baskets were missing. ... /m/ That's it). .. (It) doesn't have (any) more.

Let us look more closely at some differences between these narratives, and between the two sets of narratives from which they come.

### MAINTENANCE OF FILM PERSPECTIVE

The ways in which these two sample narratives begin are typical. E14 (the American) begins with an overt reference to the film:

E14 The movie opened up on this ... nice scene,

She uses the word *movie* and emphasizes it by increasing her pitch and loudness on the word. Furthermore, she uses movie-specific jargon ("opened up," "scene") as well as a conventionalized rhetorical structure associated with telling about a movie (beginning with a description of the scene). In contrast, G10 (the Greek) talks directly about the film's contents:

G10 eh ... (There) was a-- ... uh worker,

In fact, fifteen Greeks (as opposed to four Americans) never mention the word *movie* or *film* (Greek *tenia* or *film*) at all. Furthermore, not only do more Americans refer directly to the film, but those Americans who do use the words *movie* or *film* do so more often than the Greeks who do. (See Table 1.)

Of the five Greeks who use the (cognate) word *film* or *tenia* ("film"), four use it only once; of these, two use it in their first sentences and two in their last sentences. The one Greek who refers directly to the film twice, does so in her first and last sentences. Thus the references to the film serve as opening and

<sup>6</sup>Transliteration is designed to reflect pronunciation as closely as possible. *ch* is the Greek χ, a voiceless velar fricative. *gh* is the Greek γ, a voiced velar fricative. *x* is the Greek ξ, pronounced like the English "x." *dh* is the Greek δ, a voiced interdental fricative, pronounced like "th" in "then."

TABLE 1  
Occurrence of Nouns *movie* or *film* (Greek *tenia* or *film*)

Number of speakers	Number of mentions per narrative:						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
American	4	8	2	1	2	1	2
Greek	15	4	1	0	0	0	0

closing devices, rather like a cinematic zoom-in and zoom-out technique. No Greek speaker refers directly to the film more than twice. In sharp contrast, six Americans use the word *film* or *movie* three or more times in their narratives. Of the eight who directly mention the film once, only half do so at the very beginning or very end of their narratives. The other four do so somewhere in the middle, indicating that the film-viewer perspective intrudes in the course of their narratives rather than functioning simply as an introductory or concluding device. E14, for example, uses the word *movie* five times:

- The movie opened up on this ... nice scene,
- And what I noticed ... first off, ... was that all the noises in the movie, ... were um-- ... out of proportion.
- like the movie ... the ... sound track had been slowed down,
- and ... nobody ever smiles in the movie,
- ... and that's the end of the movie.

By repeatedly referring to the movie, E14 maintains the "film frame," that is, the perspective of a viewer observing and recounting events in a film. (See Tannen, 1979b for explanation of use of the term "frame.") This may be considered a recontextualizing device. Each time she refers to the film, she is reminding the listener of the context of her story.

Although direct mention of the word *film* is the most obvious evidence that a film-viewer perspective is being maintained, the same function is served by indirect reference to the film as a film. Indirect references, or "allusions," to the film frame include the use of cinema-associated jargon or expressions, such as "the camera pans," "protagonist," "soundtrack," and so on. In the Greek narratives, allusions include use of the verb *edhichne* or *dhichni* ("[it] showed," "[it] shows"), in which the deleted subject "it" refers to the film. Allusions also can take the form of such expressions as "then we saw" or "you could see," since they presuppose an audience and, by implication, a film, as contrasted with direct statements, such as "then the boy got on his bicycle." For example, the following expressions in E14's narrative alluded to the fact that what is being told about is a movie:

- (a) this... nice scene,
- (b) they zoomed in
- (c) the... sound track had been slowed down,
- (d) the viewers
- (e) you switch back to

Her reference to herself as a viewer also activates the film-viewer perspective:

- (a) I noticed...
- (b) you could hear [repeated eight times]

All these references serve to remind the listener that what is being talked about is a film. This is not to imply that any speaker or listener might forget that the events described occurred in a film. The difference is simply in narrative point of view established by what is selected for verbalization.

Table 2 shows the number of times Americans and Greeks allude to the film as a film or the film-viewer perspective.

TABLE 2  
Number of Allusions to Film  
as Film or Film-Viewer Perspective

Number of speakers	Number of allusions:		
	0	1-8	10-15
American	1	14	5
Greek	5	15	0

Three-fourths of both groups have from one to eight such allusions in their narratives, but one-fourth of the Greeks have none at all (i.e., they never make overt reference to the fact that they are telling about a film); one-fourth of the Americans have between ten and fifteen allusions (they persistently maintain the film-watcher point of view).

Tallies of direct mentions of, and allusions to, the film as a film are a concrete indication of the point of view maintained in the narratives which can be seen on examination of the narrative content. For example, nine Americans and only one Greek mentioned that the film had no dialogue. In addition, a number of Americans also indicated their expectation that a character introduced into a film should play a significant role in the film's action, as seen in the following comments:

- E7 They don't seem to have too much to do,...with...what's going...on.

- E12 ...That was all that...you saw of her in the movie.  
E2 ...a-and uh-...you wonder how she's going to figure in on this.

No similar comments appear in the Greek narratives.

## DESCRIPTIONS OF ACTION

The difference between the "direct" point of view established by the Greek speakers and the "film-viewer" point of view preferred by the American speakers can also be seen in their descriptions. For example, a number of speakers in both groups describe how the man in the film picks pears. First of all, more Greeks than Americans choose to describe the man's pear-picking action. Most Americans (seventeen of twenty) report that he was picking pears without commenting about the way he did it. Of the three Americans who do describe his actions, only one comments on his movements:

- E12 ...And- uh-...tsk he was picking pears. ...Just rather slowly, and he did it.../ <sup>so</sup>that / you could hear the sound of the pears being... torn from the... tree, and he put them in an apron /that he had/,.../the whole idea/ he picked pears came down the ladder,...put them...one by one...into this basket. ...He...y you got...the feeling that he pretty much liked his pears,...because he was so...gentle with them /?/?/.

In commenting on the man's actions, E12 preserves the perspective of herself as a film-viewer, for she repeats "you could hear" and "you got the feeling..." This latter choice of phrase is particularly interesting, for E12 began by saying "... He..." but then aborted that beginning and switched to "y you got... the feeling." It seems that her first impulse was to report directly what the man felt, but that she then self-corrected to reflect her awareness that she was telling about her reaction, not what was shown in the film. This is in sharp contrast to the Greek renditions, which will be seen presently.

The two other Americans who describe the man's actions in picking pears make their comments about the film, not the man.

- E17 ...A-and...he's...it...the camera spends a lot of time watching him...pick these pears,

Here again can be seen the initial impulse to report directly ("he's..."). That is aborted, and E17 says instead "it" and then makes overt the referent of "it" with another self-correction ("the camera"). Thus we see an elegant example of the process of overt contextualization in action, as E17 formulates a statement about how the film was made rather than what the man did.

The third and last American who describes the pearpicker's actions begins by talking directly about the man but then comes up with a reminder of the film-viewer perspective.

E18 He's very deliberately... plucking the... the um... the pears off the tree, and... you know you hear this... s-- sharp little crunch as... as he pulls each one off, and he's doing it... very slowly, and putting them in [breath] his apron. [breath]... tsk And then... climbing very carefully... down the... the ladder, and placing them in baskets, and he'd never make it as a fruitpicker. ...[laugh] He would starve.

The last comment suddenly reimposes the film perspective, referring to the man as an actor, not a pearpicker. Once again, there is an implied criticism of the filmmaker: the film failed to be realistic in its portrayal.

In sharp contrast, seven Greek speakers interpret the man's behavior in picking pears without indicating that he was in a film. In a few cases, the way in which this scene is described sets the tone for the entire narrative. This is how G11 describes the man's motions:

G11 *Evlepe to... eh me mia evla--via xeris t'achladhi. Poli evlavika.*  
(He) regarded the... eh with a piety you know the pear. Very piously.  
[He looked at the pear with, you know, great piety. Very piously.]

As she says this, G11's voice takes on a soothing quality which is most pronounced in the onomatopoetic lengthening of the vowel on *evla--via* ("piety"). Her voice communicates great earnestness, with rises and falls in pitch which are generally more characteristic of Greek women's speech than of American women's, but which are particularly pronounced in this narrative. The fact that G11 is talking about a film is implicit in the very beginning of this passage, in the deleted subject of "(it) insisted," although even here one might argue that the deleted subject is "he" in underlying structure, referring to the man. After that, however, G11 goes on to talk about the man and his feelings directly, with no reference to herself as a film-viewer.

G11's description of the pear-picking action is part of her romantic interpretation of all the events in the film. G12 creates a similar effect:

G12 ... *Ke-- m tsk epemene oti-- afto pu ekane to zuse. ... To n-- dhiladhi-- m--... to oti-- kalierghuse ti ghi-- oti mazev' afta--... to sighomidhi, ... itane yi' afton kati to idhietero. ... Axize kati-- ... tsk to zuse afto pu ekane, tu arese.*

A--nd mm tsk (it) insisted tha--t that which (he) did (he) lived. ... That n-- in other words-- m--... the fact tha--t (he) was cultivating the ea--rth, that (he) was gathering the--se... the harvest, ... was for him something special. ... (It) was worth somethi--ng... tsk (he) lived that which (he) did, he liked (it).

G12 also speaks these lines in a way that communicates earnestness through voice quality, marked shifts in pitch, intonation, and elongation of vowels. Another Greek speaker interprets the pearpicker's motions differently:

G16 ... *tsk Ke-- ta mazevi-- etsi me--... me poli--... eh-- sa na ta theli dhika tu. Me poli etsi-- /s/ idhioktisias dh dhichni mesa.*

... tsk A--nd (he) gathers-- them like with--... with a lo--t... eh-- as if (he) wants them (to be) his own. With a lot (of) li--ke /s/ proprietariness (he) sh shows inside.

Still another Greek interprets the man's movements negatively:

G15 ... *I kinisis tu vasika-- mazev... mazevondas ta fruta dhen dhichni anthro--po... pu ta aghapai poli ta travai para poli... dhen xero. ... Dhen mu arese ghenika o tropos pu ta travaye.*

... His movements basically-- gath... gathering the fruits don't show (a) person... who loves them very much (he) pulls them very... (I) don't know. ... I didn't like generally the way (he) was pulling them.

The striking aspect of these descriptions is that the Greek speakers relate their interpretations of the man's feelings and their own feelings about the man's actions without noting that they are talking about a film which was intentionally made. Again, this is not to say that they have forgotten that they are talking about a film, but rather that they do not choose to focus on that element of the events, and that they consider it appropriate to attribute motivations and attitudes to the man as well as to verbalize their own.

The Greek speakers in our study did not maintain the film-viewer perspective throughout their narratives, yet they were evidencing a culturally agreed-upon film-viewer stance just the same. That is, they seemed to consider it appropriate to view a film for its "message" rather than its technique. G6 indicates an assumption that one is supposed to interpret the messages of a film when she says, at the end of her narrative,

G6 ... *Alo an /dhini/ tora--... o kathenas ales erminies.*



... (it's something) else now if each person /gives/ other interpretations.

This indicates that her interpretation of the film was the focus, or the coherence principle, of her narrative. A negative statement at the end of another Greek narrative reveals a similar expectation about interpretation of the film's "meaning":

G9 ... *Tora to topio vevea itan ore--o. ... Ala dhen xero na to exighiso.*  
... Now the landscape certainly was lo--vely. ... But (I) don't know (how) to explain it.

After saying a few more sentences about the landscape, she repeats, "but I don't know how to-- explain it." Her repetition of the negative statement indicates that she feels uncomfortable about not being able to explain the film's message. She seems to dwell on the landscape as a convenient substitute conclusion, given her inability to end with what she considers appropriate: a summary of the film's meaning.

Another way that the film-viewer perspective surfaces in verbalization is in the speakers' choice of verb tenses. The Americans exhibited a strong tendency to tell their narratives in the present tense, whereas the Greeks preferred the past. Table 3 shows the tenses used by speakers in our study. Thirteen Americans as opposed to three Greeks used only the present tense throughout their narratives. Eight Greeks as opposed to two Americans used only the past. In a pattern which is part of a general pattern of greater stylistic variation in the Greek narratives, eight Greeks and only one American switched back and forth between past and present tenses (shown in Table 3 as "mixed"). Of these eight Greeks, however, six used mostly the past tense (the percentages of idea units in the past tense for these six were: 56, 65, 71, 77, 81, 85). Thus a total of fourteen Greeks showed marked preference for the past tense. Furthermore, the number of Americans who preferred the present tense increases to seventeen when it includes the four who began by telling their narratives in the past but then switched to the present and stuck with it.

TABLE 3  
Verb Tenses Used in Narratives

Number of speakers	present	past	mixed	past → present
Americans	13	2	1	4
Greeks	3	8	8	1

Surely it is necessary to study the use of verb tenses in other contexts by both Greeks and Americans; it may be that the differences found here reflect habitual conventionalized choices.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear, for example, whether the Americans were using a "historical present" associated with telling about works of art, such as films, which are presumed to exist permanently, or, as seems more likely, the present tense of vivid personal experience narration. Nevertheless, the past tense of the Greek narratives is consistent with the perspective of recounting events which occurred once and are done, that is, events directly experienced rather than viewed in a permanent work such as a film.

### INTERPRETATION OF EVENTS

The tendency of Greeks to talk about events directly as opposed to talking about the film as a film can be seen in the ways in which both bring to bear the faculty I have called *interpretation*. I use this term to refer to cognitive leaps made by a speaker, resulting in her reporting information which was not actually depicted in the film, and which therefore represents the imposition of her own knowledge, experience, and expectations on what she saw. Interpretation, in this sense, takes many forms, ranging, for example, from (1) reporting as repeated events what appeared in the film as a single event (e.g., saying that the man went up and down the tree repeatedly, whereas the film showed him ascend and descend just once), thus altering the precise details of the film but not violating its intentions (it is often the case in a film, or in life, that an action seen to occur once may be safely assumed to occur repeatedly); to (2) inferring characters' emotions, thoughts, and intentions—that is, supplying information where the film gave none but not distorting events as they appeared; to (3) making value judgments about characters' behavior.

My notion of interpretation is closely related to what Labov (1972) calls *evaluative elements* in oral narrative. (See Chapter 1 for related discussion of interpretation as well). Labov defines evaluative elements as "the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of a narrative," or to answer in advance the question "So what?" Including such phenomena as subjective statements (e.g., "Here's the best part . . ."), negative statements, expressive phonology, and use of adjectives, such elements contribute to the "coherence principle"

<sup>7</sup>We cannot assume that tenses conventionally named *past* and *present* in English necessarily function the same way as tenses with similar names in Greek, nor that they divide up time in the same way. Nevertheless, the preferences which were evidenced in this study do seem to reflect more general story telling conventions. Kostas Kazazis (personal communication), who lived in Greece until the age of eighteen, notes that for a long time the American habit of telling jokes in the present tense ("There's this guy . . .") struck him as "strange" and "illogical." This suggests that the past tense is the conventionalized choice in Greek.



motivating the story. They are among the linguistic devices I have elsewhere discussed under the heading "evidence of expectations" (Tannen, 1979b), for they simultaneously create and grow out of speakers' cultural constructs. Such elements, then, furnish ready-made lenses for inspection of cultural differences.

For example, there are significant differences in the way G10 and E14 (the Greek and American speakers whose narratives were quoted in full) presented the incident in the film in which the boy gives pears to the three boys who have helped him after his fall from his bicycle. The American (E14) is typical of our American speakers:

E14 and the . . . the little . . . boy that fell off the bicycle gives him . . . gives them three-- . . . pears,

The Greek (G10) reports the event this way:

G10 and then (he) thanked them.

E14 described the events she saw in the film; G10 substituted an interpretation which she believed captured the significance of the events. Moreover, G10 had earlier commented, after reporting that the three boys helped the fallen boy,

G10 . . . he however didn't-- . . . thank them let's say,

Labov (1972) notes, as others have observed as well, that a negative statement expresses the defeat of an expectation that its affirmative would have been the case. In the example above, the negative statement represents G10's expectation that the boy would have thanked his helpers, and furthermore it constitutes a kind of moral censure, indicating G10's judgment that the little boy did not behave well, that he should have thanked the other boys (i.e., given them pears) as soon as they helped him up, rather than waiting until they had left and returned with his hat.

The preferred strategy of the American speakers was, like E14's, to report the exchange of pears without commenting on its significance, that is, without interpreting the actions in their narratives. The general tendency of the Greek speakers was to make explicit, like G10, that they regarded the exchange as a gesture of thanks. Two Americans and seven Greeks said that the boy gave the pears in order to thank the threesome. Two other Americans commented that the boy should have given the pears earlier, indicating indirectly that they considered the exchange a gesture of thanks. Two more Greeks indicated this interpretation by saying, respectively, that the boy gave the pears "as a gift" and that the scene in which the exchange took place was "a lovely scene." A

total then of nine Greeks and four Americans made overt their interpretations of the pear exchange. It seems safe to assume that any of the speakers, if asked, would have said that the boy gave pears to the three other boys in order to thank them for their help. The narratives show, however, that the Greeks more often chose to verbalize that interpretation. What we are concerned with is not the cognitive act of interpretation but its linguistic realization, that is, what speakers deem appropriate for verbalization in their narratives.

A strikingly overt form of interpretation is a moral judgment, a narrative act which is often accompanied by linguistic evidence of emotional involvement, such as, for example, hesitation, false starts, repetitions, and so on. Note the tremendous amount of such verbal fussing that G16 goes through in getting out the idea that the boy should have thanked his helpers sooner:

G16 . . . *ke-- tote to pedhi, . . . katalaveni stin a eno eprepe kanonika-- otan to voithisan na dhos na-- ton voithisan na ta-- dhos ta achladhia pa na ta vali sti thesi tus, eprepe kanonika . . . na dhosi na prosferi eh-- na-- . . . se ol se osa pedhia itane na prosferi-- ligha achladhia, ke dhen prosfere. . . . Ala otan idhe na t' tu xanapighan ton fonaxan yia na-- tu pane to kapelo . . . tote sa na katalave oti-- eprepe na prosferi stin archi, . . . ke prosfere meta ap' afti ti chironomia pu to xanafonaxan yia to-- . . . na tu dhosun to kapelo tu.*

. . . a--nd then the child, . . . realizes in the beg while (he) should have ordinarily-- when (they) helped him to give to-- (they) helped him to give them-- the pears (he) goes to put them in their place, (he) should have ordinarily . . . given offered o--ne-- . . . to al to as many children as there were to offer-- a few pears, and (he) didn't offer. . . . But when (he) saw them giving him back they called him in order to-- give him the hat, . . . then as if (he) realized tha--t (he) should have offered in the beginning, . . . and (he) offered after this gesture of calling him back in order to-- . . . to give him his hat.

This passage is riddled with false starts, hesitations, lengthening of sounds, rewordings, and repetitions, indicating that the content is of emotional significance to the speaker and is perhaps disturbing to her. Such evidence of emotional involvement with the events of the film and of the narrative is not seen in American narratives in our sample.

The tendency of Greek speakers in our study to "interpret" more than Americans can be seen very clearly in the following complete narrative told by G12. Although this is an extreme case, it exhibits a tendency which appears to some extent in most of the Greek narratives about the film.

G12 eh *Ap oti katalava--... ita--n... ena episodhio... eyine-- sto Mexiko... Ipotheto... mu fanikane Mexikani-- i anthropi... ke-- mm edhichne ti--n... pos mazeve enas anthroposta achladhia... ke-- mm tsk epemene oti-- afto pu ekane to zuse... To n-- dhiladhi--m--... to oti-- kalierghuse ti ghi--... oti mazev'asta--... ti sighomidhi... itane yi'afon kati to idhietero... Axize kati--... tsk to zuse afto pu ekane, tu arese. eh-- mm Ke edhichne mia skini--... /m/ prepi na itane malon i-- mm... i aghrotiki zoi--... tis periochis ekinis... enas pu perase me mia katsi--ka--... ena-- pedhaki--... ena pedhaki me podhilato... pu idhe to kalathi, me ta achladhia, ke to pi--re, [slight laugh]... ke meta-- kathos perneghe... sinandise mesa ston aghro-- pa--li... ali mia kopela me podhilato... ke opos tin kitaghe dhen prosexe ligho... ke tu epese to-- tu epese to kalathi me ta achladhia... ke eki pali itane-- mm ali tris fili tu... pu-- amesos to voi--thisa--n... ke afto itane pandos kati pu edhichne poso ta pedhia-- metaxi tus aghapionde... echun alilegii... to voithisan na ta mazepsi... ke-- m--... ke opos xechase ke to kapelo tu, itane mia oreza skini pu tus edhose ta achladhia... ke yirise pali piso... Dhiladhi--... yenika nomizo oti itane mia skini--... tsk... tis aghrotikis zois tis periochis ekinis pu edhichne... Afta.*

eh From what (I) undertoo--d, ... (it) was ... an episode, ... (it) happened-- in Mexico. ... (I) suppose, ... the people seemed (like) Mexicans to me, ... a--nd mm (it) showed the--... tsk how a person gathered the pears, ... a--nd mm tsk (it) insisted tha--t that which he did (he) lived. ... The n-- in other words-- m--... the (fact) that (he) was cultivating the ea--rth, that (he) was gathering the--se... the harvest, ... was for him something special. ... (It) was worth somethi--ng... tsk (he) lived that which (he) did, he liked (it). ... Eh--... and (it) showed a sce--ne... /m/ (it) must have been probably the-- mm tsk the agricultural li--fe, of that region, ... one who passed with a goa--t, ... a-- littlechi--ld... a littlechild with a bicycle, ... who saw the basket, with the pears, and too--k it, [slight laugh]... and then-- as (he) was passing, ... (he) met in the fie--ld a--lso, ... another girl with (a) bicycle, ... and as (he) looked at her (he) didn't pay attention a little, ... and fell the-- fell the basket with the pears, ... and there too were-- mm three other friends of his, ... who--... immediately he--lped him... and this was moreover something which showed how much children-- love each other, ... (they) have solidarity, ... (they) helped him to gather them, ... a--nd m--... and as (he) forgot his hat too, (there) was a lovely scene where (he) gave them the pears ... and returned back again. ... In other words--... generally (I) think that (it) was a

sce--ne, ... tsk ... of the agricultural life of that region which (it) showed. ... These. [i.e., "That's it."]

A vast array of interpretive devices operate here to support G12's coherence principle: an idealized view of agricultural life which she takes to be the film's message. First of all, her intonation creates this effect; she draws out many of her vowels, creating a "soothing" effect, and she strings her clauses together with a combination of lengthened vowels and steady clause-final pitch, giving the entire narrative the sound of a list: a recital of matter-of-fact circumstances rather than novel events. The effect of this intonation is particularly apparent when she tells that the boy took the pears. Nothing in her intonation communicates that anything special is happening, so the taking of the pears, in her narrative, is not interpreted as a theft at all; it is just one more everyday rural event.

G12 discusses the pearpicker's attitude toward his work as if it were known to her, and she concerns herself continually with the "message": for example, when she notes that the helping scene serves the purpose of showing that "children love each other." Similarly, her use of the adjective "lovely" to describe the scene in which the boy gives the others pears constitutes an interpretation of its meaning. She "plays down" elements that do not contribute to her interpretation and "plays up" those that do.

## INTERPRETIVE NAMING

Narratives exhibit interpretation not only in their explicit statements about the actions and characters but in more subtle ways as well. The intonation has an interpretive effect, as has been seen. So does lexical choice. For example, G12 called the pears "the harvest" (*ti sighomidhi*), after rejecting the less marked categorization, "these..." (*afta*), presumably the beginning of "these fruits" or "these pears."

G12 *oti mazev' afta--... ti sighomidhi.*  
that (he) gathered the--se... the harvest.

The choice word of the *harvest* grows out of the interpretation of the man as an independent farmer and contributes to a romantic notion of his relationship to the fruit he is picking. Another speaker calls the pears "his yield" or "his production" (*tin paraghoghi tu*), to similar effect, setting the tone for her similarly romantic description of his disposition:

G2 ... *Eh--... ola itane-- oreza yi'afon--... efcharista pernuse--*,  
... Eh--... everything wa--s lovely for hi--m, (he) was passing (his time) pleasantly,

Similarly, G12 called the threesome the boy's "friends;"

G12 ...*ke eki pali itane-- mm ali tris fili tu*,  
...and there too were-- mm three others friends of his,

There is no indication in the film that the boys knew each other. Harry C. Triandis points out (personal communication) that in Greece helping behavior is expected only in the ingroup; hence the fact that the boys helped the bicycle boy makes them friends. G10, whose narrative was quoted at the outset, also used this categorization. In keeping with Triandis's analysis, G10 calls the threesome the boy's "contemporaries" (*sinomiliki tu*) when they first appear, but the next time she mentions them, they have become "his friends" (*i fili tu*). In all, three Greeks and no-Americans called the threesome the boy's "friends."

Interpretive naming is a very effective narrative device, because lexical choice has an air of inevitability about it; it takes much more sophistication to deduce that an interpretation is being made by the choice of a word than it does to recognize an overtly stated interpretation.<sup>8</sup> As a narrative device, categorization (i.e., choice of a word) can function to create an interpretation by triggering a series of associations (a familiar frame, script, or schema).

For example, G10, in the narrative quoted at the beginning, started by saying,

G10 (There) was a-- . . uh worker, . . a villager,

This categorization represents a complex interpretation of the action of the man picking pears; it implies a great deal of information about the man, his way of life, and the motivations of his actions—certainly far more than is actually shown in the film. In our study, far more Greeks than Americans commit themselves to an interpretation of the pearpicker's occupation through the noun they choose to refer to him by. This can be seen in Table 4, which shows the names used for the man and how many speakers used them.

The noninterpretive nouns used are *man* and *guy* in English, "person" (*anthropos*) and "gentleman" (*kirios*, rather like "mister" or "sir") in Greek. At least one of these unmarked categorizations is used by all speakers at some point in their narratives. There is also a set of nouns used for the man in English which are particular but still not interpretive. Two Americans call him the *pearpicker* and the *protagonist*. These nouns give more information about the man than do the unmarked nouns *man* and *guy*, but not more information than is presented in the film.

<sup>8</sup>The ability to recognize lexical choice as an interpretive device is one of the basic skills of critical reading and writing which are taught in Freshman English and Academic Skills classes.

TABLE 4  
Words Used for Pearpicker

English	Number of Speakers	Greek	Number of Speakers
<i>Noninterpretive</i>			
man	16	<i>anthropos</i> ("person")	12
guy	4	<i>kirios</i> ("gentleman")	8
total	20	total	20
<i>Particular</i>			
pearpicker	1		
protagonist	1		
total	2		
<i>Interpretive</i>			
Chicano man	1	<i>mesilix</i> ("middleaged one")	1
farm laborer	1	<i>erghatis</i> ("worker")	3
farm worker	1	<i>yeorghos</i> ("farmer")	3
farmer	1	<i>aghtrois</i> ("farmer")	3
total	4	<i>farmer</i> ("farmer")	1
		<i>idhiokritis tu kimatos</i>	
		("proprietor of the land")	1
		<i>choriatas</i> ("villager")	1
		total	13

The name *Chicano man* used by one American is interpretive of the man's identity, just as the Greek word for "middleaged one" (*mesilix*) represents a judgment based on the man's appearance. Therefore these words are considered "interpretive." Yet they are not so in the same sense as the others in that category. Judgments about the man's ethnic identity and age do not represent broad assumptions about his way of life as do the words *farmer* and *worker*.

It is not surprising that no Greeks chose a categorization for the man which reflects an interpretation of his ethnic identity, given the practical irrelevance of Chicano identity in Greece. Although only one American used "Chicano man" as the noun phrase with which to refer to the pearpicker, fully half of the American speakers gave some verbal indication of similar interpretations. They commented that the man was, for example, "sort of Spanish looking" or "of Spanish or Mexican descent." The high frequency of this interpretation likely comes from the ethnic heterogeneity of American society and the consequent salience of ethnic identity for members of that culture.

In contrast, only one Greek commented on the man's ethnic identity; this was G12, whose narrative has already been presented.

G12 (it) happened in Mexico. . . (I) suppose, . . . the people seemed (like) Mexicans to me,

G12 did not differentiate the pearpicker from the other characters when she assigned ethnic identity. Rather, she identified all the characters as Mexican and therefore decided that the film took place in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the ethnic identity of the pearpicker in particular did not have significance for her.<sup>10</sup>

More Greek than American speakers attributed to the man an occupation motivating his activities. Three Americans decided that he was a farmer, or a farm laborer or worker. In contrast, eleven Greeks—more than half—made an interpretation of the man's occupation. Three called him a worker; eight decided he was a farmer.<sup>11</sup> A twelfth called him a "villager," which is not a

<sup>9</sup>This is another instance of the phenomenon I have dubbed *generalization* (Tannen 1979b); that is, an element which was seen is recalled as having occurred more often or in greater number.

<sup>10</sup>An even more striking contrast was found by John Dubois, in narratives told by Guatemalan villagers who had seen the pear film. The Guatemalans often described the ethnicity of the boys ("gringos") but never that of the man.

<sup>11</sup>The categorization "farmer" took three different lexical forms in Greek, as a result of the diglossic Greek language situation (see Ferguson 1972). *Yeorghos* is the term in *katharevusa* ("puristic" or "learned"; Ferguson's "high register"). *Aghrotis* is the term in demotic, the commonly spoken idiom (Ferguson's "low register"). *Farmer* is the loan word from English. All three forms are common in Greek conversation. Furthermore, the designation "proprietor of the land" seems to presuppose that the man is a farmer.

profession but does indicate assumptions about his way of life. That the Greeks were more likely to characterize the man as a farmer is easy to attribute to the preponderance in Greece of small owner-operated farms. What is interesting for our purposes is that the Greeks were more inclined to make that interpretation overt.

## INTERPRETIVE OMISSION

It has been seen that G12 "played down" parts of the film which did not contribute to her interpretation. She also omitted parts of the film which would have detracted from her rosy picture of the film's world. For example, she omitted to mention that the boy fell off his bicycle. She also omitted the entire last scene in which the three boys pass by the tree where the man has discovered that his pears are missing.

G12's narrative is extreme in this sense but indicative of a pattern which is widespread in the data. As shown by their being shorter on the average, the Greek narratives are less likely to include information which does not contribute to their themes. This can be seen clearly in the ways in which the Greeks and Americans told about the scene where the boy falls off the bicycle. The events depicted in the film are as follows:

1. The boy is riding his bicycle.
2. A girl is riding her bicycle.
3. The boy and girl pass each other on their bikes.
4. The boy's hat flies off his head.
5. The boy turns his head backwards.
6. A bicycle wheel hits a rock.
7. The boy is on the ground under his fallen bike.

Although causality is not clearly discernible in the film, most speakers in both groups speculate about or impute causality in their stories. However, Americans tended to mention all the elements in this sequence of events, whether or not they included them in an interpretation of causality, whereas the Greeks tended to mention only those elements which they used in their explanations of why the boy fell. Table 5 shows who and what got mentioned in the narratives.

Regardless of how they explained the reason for the fall, most Americans (thirteen) mentioned all three possible causes in their stories (the girl, the rock, and the hat). Only four Greeks did this. The rest of the Americans (seven) mentioned two elements of that scene (the girl and the rock). No American mentioned only one. Nearly half the Greeks, however, did just that: mentioned only one element (only the girl or only the rock). In most cases, the

TABLE 5  
Objects Mentioned in Fall Scene

Speakers Mentioning	English	Greek
Girl only	0	7
Rock only	0	2
Girl and hat	0	1
Girl, rock, hat	13	4
Girl and rock	7	6

one element mentioned was that to which they attributed causality. The overall pattern, in other words, is, once again, for the Americans to include details simply because they were there, whereas the Greeks tend to include details only if they contribute to the story line being developed.

### ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY

The line between interpretation and incorrect statement is often thin. For example, the narrative by G10 quoted at the beginning of this chapter includes the statement that the boy lost his hat "as he crashed with the girl." The film shows no collision between the two bikes; the collision is a reconstruction based on the speaker's expectations about what might happen when two bikes are shown heading for each other in a film. But G10 is not alone in this error. She is one of four Greek speakers who make such a statement. Although no Americans in our study actually state that the two bikes collide, yet they clearly have the same expectations, as shown in the comments of the following two:

- E2 and you think "UH." You know "Are they going to collide,"  
E7 and you wonder if there's going to be a collision. ... But .. instead they just .. kind of .. brush .. by each other

Again we see a pattern in which Greeks and Americans have similar expectations, but for the Greeks the expectations form the basis for development of an interesting story line, whereas the Americans take account of the expectation in their recall of detail and their report of their experience as movieviewers.

Although none of them attributes the fall to a collision, the Americans nonetheless explain the fall in some way. Any explanation of causality is in effect an interpretation; a film cannot "show" *why* something happened. Therefore, there are variations in speakers' accounts of why the boy fell off his bike. For the Americans, however, the range of explanations given is strikingly narrow. As seen in Table 6, three-fourths of the Americans (fifteen of them) explain that the boy fell because he turned and his bicycle hit a rock;

TABLE 6  
Explanations of Cause of Fall

Cause	Number of Speakers Giving Cause	
	American	Greek
Turning and hitting rock	15	8
Tripping on rock	4	4
Looking at girl	0	2
Meeting with girl	0	1
Collision with girl	0	4
Rushing (and maybe also girl)	0	1
Tipping hat	1	0

four more give the compatible but more succinct explanation that he hit a rock. The largest number of Greek speakers (eight) also say that the boy turned and hit a rock, another four say only that he hit the rock. But eight other Greeks give one of four other explanations: the boy collided with, met, or looked at the girl, or he was rushing.

Besides the four Greeks who said that the bicycles collided, another said that the boy fell during his "meeting" (*sinandisi*) with the girl, thus implying, though not stating, that the bicycles made contact. In general, the Greeks made more of the role played by the girl in this series of events. No American attributed the boy's fall to the girl's presence, but nine (nearly half) of the Greeks considered the girl to be involved in the causality. (It is impossible not to speculate that this may reflect a greater tendency among the Greeks to interpret along lines of cultural clichés such as boy-meets-girl.) All but one of the Americans limited themselves to talking about the events which were depicted in the film: the bicycle wheel hit the rock, and the boy turned his head. Again, the Greeks showed greater variety in their accounts. One noticeable exception is the American who erroneously recalled that the boy had tipped his hat: a gesture associated with a boy-meets-girls script.

### PHILOSOPHIZING AND PERSONALIZING

A number of Greek speakers interpreted events to the point of philosophizing. For example, G16 continued to comment on the film after she had finished telling what happened in it. She showed herself to be a very perceptive film analyst in a literary criticism tradition by focusing on the existence of conflicts in the film. Following is her commentary. (The passage is rendered in English without pauses and false starts to facilitate reading.)

G16 *Pandos echi-- stichia etsi-- fisika ke to-- ke o nearos pu pire to kofini... eghò to krino as pume oti-- kanonika dhen eprepe na to pari... to pire... stin archi... ala meta me tis me tin praxi ton nearon*

*pu to xanafonaxan eno dhe zitisan... tus-- e--dhose meta achladhia. Ke--... ke stin archi etsi o-- kirios pu ta mazeve t'achladhia [???/ poli ta proseche ta--... afto... dhichni etsi anthropo pu--... dhiladhi iche poles andithesis mesa to erghe. ... Eno stin archi-- prodhiath prodhiatithes oti--... tha dhosi-- achladhia as pume to pedhi xero 'gho... sikonete ke fevghe. ... Ala meta-- tin ora pu tu dhinun to kapelo metanioni ke xanadhini. Ke o kirios pu mazeve stin archi ke nomizes oti--... ta mazeve yia ton eafto tu ke dhichni enan anthropo alo ti stighmi pu-- vlepi ta pedhia pu xanafevghe... ke-- /ena/ kathenas kratai to achladhi ke vlepi ot'ine dhika tu dhe-- ke dhen tus fonazi... erchese se sigrusi ke les kitaxe dhen itan etsi /pu icha sto nu. /... Echi poles sigrusis mesa ke--*

It has such elements as, of course, and the young man who took the basket, I believe that he shouldn't have taken it, he took it at first, but then with the young men's deed who called to him and didn't ask, he gave them pears. And in the beginning the gentleman who was gathering pears took great care of them, this shows the man to be, that is, there are many contrasts in the film. Although in the beginning you believe that the child will give them pears, he goes away. But then after they give him the hat he changed his mind and gives them also. And the gentleman who was harvesting in the beginning and you thought that he was collecting them for himself and it shows a different man when he sees the children going away each holding a pear and sees that they are his and doesn't call them you see a conflict and you think it wasn't as I thought. It has many conflicts in it and--

Whereas G16 focused on the theme of repeated conflicts in the film, G11 saw coherence in the many "falls" in it and related this to her own philosophy and emotions:

G11 *Mono pu-- eghe tha'leghe oti... oles ekines i ptosis pu mas edhichne to dhendro apo ti ghi-- uh opos epefte... to dhendro... sti ghi uh to to fruto tu dhendru sti ghi... ithele na dhixi oti ola ta praghmata archizun ap ti ghi ke katalighun pali sti ghi yiat' iche poles ptosis. Dhe xero dhen-- ala... eghe tha'ihela kati para pano y'afto. Afto ipa oti kati mu lipi. Ne. Ine poli oreo... eh ala-- su ipa... tha ithela na edhichne ke kati alo. Emena mu fanike lighaki lipso. Isos yiat' to /pira/ ap tin archi... mm afti ti skepsi epidhi... prosexa poli tin ptosi tu achladhiu apo to dhendro. Isos mu 'mine afto ke ime lighaki pesimistria... pistevo oti ola proerchond'ap to skotadhi ke xanapighenun sto skotadhi. Kitaxe na to paris ke--*

*mm... tsk... ke epistimonika pes... choris fandasia... oli... silamvanometha sti mitra mias ghinekos mesa s'ena skotadhi... ke xanapighenune ston tafo... pali se skotadhi. Ime pesimistria dhen echo dhi pote kalo sti zoi mu ute-- xero an tha dho... dhen me endhiaferi an tha dho... y'afto to idha kapos milo mirolatri/s/ [???/... ke isos epidhi echo ke prosopika provlimata afti tin epochi... im' epireazmeni dhen skeptomun pote-- dhiaforetika dhiladhi dhen ipirxa pote esiodhoxi... dhe nomizo oti ipirxa... Tipot'alo. Efchom'omos na iparxi mia stighmi pu tha'ne kali yia mena. Ke yia sena. Dhen xero. Ine pola praghmata pu [???/... xeris... otan pistevis poli se kati... ke xafnika su--... vlepis oti ine-- chalkino ot'ine-- tipotenio... [????/ ine fovero-- xeris... ke eghe'cho klonisti afto to xero... yiat' me parakoluthuse [????????/ afto leme xeris efchome na mi perasi para na apodhichti oti-- tsk... oti... eh-- dhen ine chalkino ot'ine chriso ke oti tha lampsi. Afto thelo.*

G11 Only I would say that all those falls that it showed us... the tree from the earth-- uh as it was falling the tree to the earth uh the the fruit of the tree to the earth (it) wanted to show that all things begin from the earth and end up in the earth because (it) had a lot of falls. I don't know I don't-- but I would have wanted something more for this (reason). That's what I said that something was missing for me. Yes it's very nice eh-- but-- I told you I would have wanted it to have shown something else too. To me it seemed a little lacking. Maybe because I took it from the beginning this thought because I paid a lot of attention to the fall of the pear from the tree. Maybe this stayed with me. And I am a bit of a pessimist I believe that everything originates from darkness and goes again into darkness. Look! Take it even-- mm tsk even scientifically say without imagination everything is conceived in the womb of a woman inside a darkness and we go again to the grave again to the darkness. I am a pessimist I have never seen good in my life neither do I know if I ever will I don't care if I do that's why I saw it somehow fatalistically... and perhaps because I also have problems at this time... I am influenced I never thought differently because I was never optimistic. I don't think I was. Anything else. I hope however that there will be a time that it will be good for me. And for you. I don't know. There are many things that [????/ you know when you believe very much in something and suddenly you... you see that it is-- copper that it is-- nothing. It is terrible. You know and I have been shaken this I know because [????/ followed me that's what we say. I hope that it's not passing but that it is gold and that it will shine. That's what I want.

This is an extreme example. The Greek interviewer found G11's monologue somewhat amusing. But it seems likely that if an American speaker had gone on in this way, the American interviewer would not have simply been amused but would have begun eying the door, fearing she might be closed in with an unbalanced person. These results support my impression, based on several years' residence in Greece, that philosophizing is more common in casual Greek conversation than it is among middle-class Americans. These results correlate, as well, with findings in another study (Tannen, 1979a) in which speakers from these two groups were asked to interpret and comment on a sample conversation. In that study, Greeks turned out to be more likely to personalize their answers.

### STYLISTIC VARIATION

The Greek pear narratives give the impression of greater stylistic variation than the American. This results from greater variation on many levels. The tendency to interpret, which has been demonstrated in detail, contributes to this effect. In addition, the choice of lexical items and intonation show greater stylistic range in the Greek pear stories.

The terms used for characters and objects show greater regularity in the American pear narratives than in the Greek. For example, there are twice as many different terms used for the three boys in the Greek than in the American narratives (see Table 7). In all, seven different terms are used to refer to the threesome in the American narratives, and fourteen different terms in the Greek. The American speakers show a marked preference for one term, *boys*, used by sixteen speakers in all and by ten speakers as first mentions. Two other terms, *little boys* and *kids*, are used by six and seven speakers respectively; the word *guys* is used by three. Thus four terms are used by more than one speaker; three other terms (*little kids*, *buddies*, *people*) are used by only one speaker each. In other words, only three speakers use distinctive terms, that is, terms they alone employ. The Greek narratives also exhibit marked preference for one term: *pedhia* ("children"), used by fifteen speakers in all and by ten speakers as first mentions. However, there is greater variety in the other terms used. Five other terms are used by more than one speaker; eight terms are so distinctive that each is used by only one speaker.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Each of the Greek terms has its own connotations and associations, as is the case with all stylistic variables. English equivalents are necessarily rough approximations. Figure 7 shows four different but related forms, for example, based on the same root, each of which has a slightly different meaning. *Pitsirikádhēs* is the plural of *pitsirikás* (necessarily male, and somewhat stylized); *pitsiriki* is the plural of *pitsirikos* (necessarily male, and less stylized); *pitsirikia* is the plural of *pitsiriki* (used for male or female children); *pitsiriká* is an aberrant form (neither I nor any of my native informants could report having heard it before. *Pitsirika*, with penultimate stress, is used for a female child, but the speaker uttered the word with final stress.)

TABLE 7  
Terms Used for the Threesome

Term	American		Number of Speakers Using for First Mention
	Number of Mentions	Number of Speakers Mentioning	
boys	44	16	10
little boys	21	6	6
kids	14	7	3
guys	6	3	0
little kids	1	1	1
buddies	1	1	0
people	1	1	0
<i>Greek</i>			
<i>pedhia</i> ("children")	37	15	10
<i>neari</i> ("young men")	5	3	1
<i>pedhakia</i> ("little children")	4	3	2
<i>aghoria</i> ("boys")	3	3	1
<i>aghorakia</i> ("little boys")	3	1	1
<i>fili tu</i> ("his friends")	2	2	1
<i>pitsirikádhēs</i> ("kids")	2	2	0
<i>pitsiriki</i> ("kids")	4	1	0
<i>bobires</i> ("runts")	2	1	1
<i>pitsirikia</i> ("kids")	1	1	0
<i>pitsirika</i> ("kids")	1	1	1
<i>mikri</i> ("little ones")	1	1	0
<i>mikra pedhia</i> ("little children")	1	1	1
<i>sinomiliki tu</i> ("ones of the same age")	1	1	1



Stylistic variation is seen (or, rather, is heard) in the intonation characteristic of the Greek narratives. Most of the Greek stories give the impression of sharply rising and dropping intonation patterns, with striking contrasts between the peaks and falls. The acoustic displays which resulted from processing the narratives in a pitch extractor clearly show the difference between the Greek and American styles (see Figure 1). Each section shown is typical of the displays resulting from the respective set of narratives. The entire set of displays for the American speakers looked more or less like the section shown in Figure 1(a); the entire set of displays for the Greek speakers looked more or less like the section shown in Figure 1(b). Comparison of the top lines, which are the amplitude displays, shows that the Greek speaker used more dramatic shifts in loudness. The lower lines, the pitch displays, dramatize the sharp rises and falls in pitch which yielded the striking intonational variation of the Greek stories, in contrast with the relatively flat intonation of the American speakers.

Stylistic variation on all these levels contributes to the overriding effect of the Greek narratives as "good stories," in keeping with the emerging goal of the Greek speakers. This phenomenon yields concrete evidence which may explain, in part, why American speakers often sound "monotonous" and "dull" to Greek listeners, whereas Greek speakers often strike American listeners as "colorful" and "dynamic."

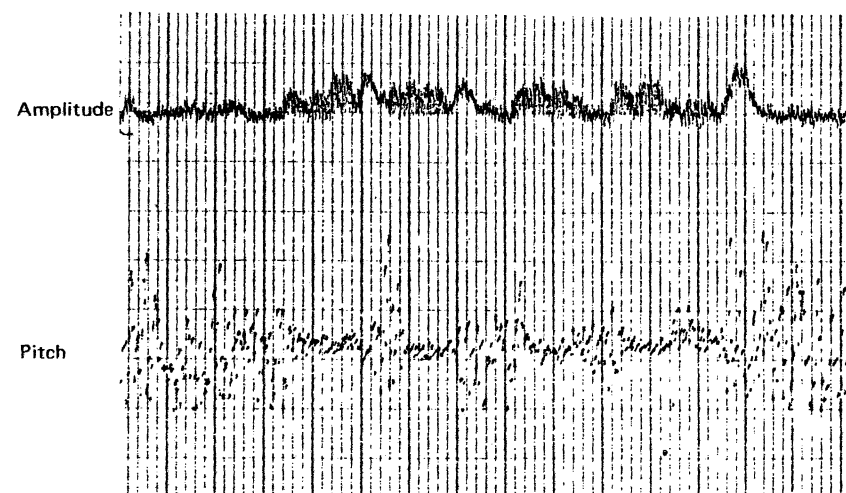
### CONVENTIONS OF MOVIE COMMENTARY

In asking why the Greek and American narratives based on the pearpicking film differed in the ways discussed, we must consider a range of possible influencing factors. To begin with, the question—"What happened in the movie?"—though translated from English to Greek, cannot be considered identical in the two languages; the pragmatic effect of these "comparable" words might be very different when used in the different cultures. Moreover, the situation in which the stories were elicited must have had different social significance for members of the two cultures. Being the subject of an experiment is an identifiable and expectable activity for undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley; it is not so for students at the Hellenic American Union in Athens. Psychology, as conceived in American social science, does not exist as a discipline even at the Greek university. Differing definitions of the task at hand must necessarily trigger different verbal strategies, especially in an interview situation in which the speaker is trying to satisfy what she perceives as the requirements of the questioner.

Telling about a movie, however, is a practice that many modern city dwellers engage in under a variety of social circumstances. Expectations about how this speech activity is done must have influenced the narratives in

#### Pitch Extractor Displays

(a) Section of display of an American speaker's narrative



(b) Section of display of a Greek speaker's narrative

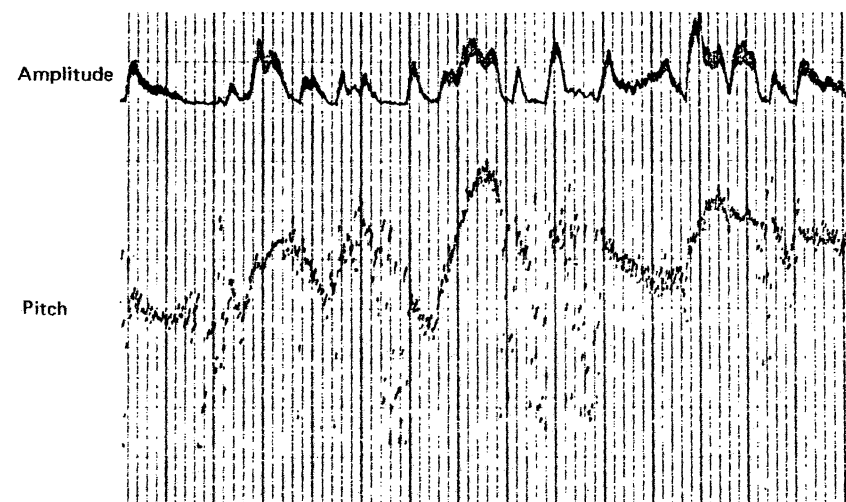


FIG. 1.

the present study. As the popular culture critic Michael Arlen (1974) points out, Americans are media-wise and pride themselves on "an assertively cynical savviness" about behind-the-scenes machinations of movies and TV. This was seen in the American speakers' preoccupation with the film's soundtrack, camera angles, costumes, and so on. There is no evidence that such media-sophistication is valued in Greek society.

To gain some insight into conventional modes of talking about movies, I turned to movie reviews in Greek and American newspapers. It is clear, of course, that movie reviews are part of a written rhetoric, whereas the pear narratives were spoken. But striking similarities between the approaches found in the published reviews and the spoken narratives suggest that the strategies used in the two forms are conventionalized and related to each other.

Following are excerpts taken from reviews published in newspapers of comparable standing in San Francisco and Athens. The reviews are both of Russian director Eisenstein's *Ten Days That Shook the World*. The two accounts begin similarly, but they develop rather differently. The American reviewer comments on Eisenstein's contribution to cinema:

From his first film "The Strike," he developed new principles for building up dramatic action, enhanced the cinema language, and pioneered expressive potentials in sharp cutting and foreshortening. Nowhere is the force of his images felt as remarkably as in his "Ten Days That Shook the World."

—Norman K. Dorn, *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, Mar. 2, 1969, p. 4.

Now the Greek review, which also harks back to Eisenstein's first film and addresses his contributions to cinema:

*Stin proti kiolas tenia tu o Sergei Michailovits Aizenstain edhixe tin pliri orimotita tis technis tu, pu ine sinchronos politiki praxi ke piima. . . . Omos simera . . . vlepu me thavmasmo tis ikones tu Aizenstain dhiavghis, sklires san dhiamandi n'anditithende ke na organononde rithmika s'ena ekriktiko optiko piima, to piima tu prodhomeno lau, pu telika tha nikisi.*

Even in his first film, Sergei Michelovitch Eisenstein shows the full maturity of his art, which is at the same time political act and poetry. . . . Today . . . we see again with admiration Eisenstein's images, clear and hard as diamonds, juxtaposed and organized rhythmically in a bursting optical poem, the poem of the betrayed people who will triumph in the end.

—G. Bakoyiannopoulos, *Kathimerini*, April 8, 1975, p. 2.

Both reviewers draw attention to Eisenstein's visual images, but the American reviewer uses cinematic jargon ("sharp cutting and foreshortening") and

discusses the director's technical accomplishments ("developed new principles . . ."). In contrast, the Greek reviewer uses nonspecific poetic language ("bursting optical poem," "hard as diamonds"), makes broad statements of praise ("full maturity of his art"), and focuses, finally, on the film's message ("the betrayed people who will triumph") rather than its technique.

Another pair of reviews concerns Swedish director Sjöman's *I Am Curious Yellow*. An American reviewer, Vincent Canby, begins by saying the film is "a good, serious movie about a society in transition, told in terms of recording devices—pads and pencils, posters, cinema verité interviews, tape recordings and the fiction film." Near the end of the review he writes:

Sjöman is a former assistant to Ingmar Bergman and has great fun playing with the movie medium. At one point he cuts to the Stockholm Board of Film Censors as the gentlemen register their surprise at Lena's behavior. There is an extended sequence depicting the imaginary implementation of a national policy of nonviolence. In a moment of complete frustration, Lena fantasizes on her general war with males and her specific victory over Borje as she cstrates him. All of this makes for a distant, cold and tricky movie.

—*New York Times*, Mar. 11, 1969, p. 42.

The following is the final section of an Athenian review of the same film.

*I tenia, lipon, telika ine ochi mono mia oxia kritiki tu suidhiku prototipu, ala ke tis seksualikis eleftherias. Kato apo ton epithetiko anarchismo tu o Sgheman afini na provalun ta ichni tu sindiritismu ke tu puritanismu tu. Sighchronos dhen fenete na sinidhitopii oti me ton tropo pu dhichni ton eafsto tu ke to sinerghio ghenai ena neo epipedho fandasias. Pios pezi "rolo" pios zi toi tu? Pu ine i alithia ke pu i technii?*

The film, then, ultimately is not only an acute critique of the Swedish prototype but also of sexual freedom. Beneath his offensive anarchism, Sjöman allows the traces of his conservatism and puritanism to emerge. At the same time he doesn't seem to be aware that with the way in which he reveals himself and his studio, a new level of fantasy is born. Who is playing a "role"? Who is living his life? Where is truth and where is art?

—G. Bakoyiannopoulos, *Kathimerini*, April 8, 1975, p. 2.

Again, the American review uses cinematic jargon ("cuts," "extended sequences"), whereas the Greek review uses language of broader artistic application ("critique," "truth," "art"). Both reviewers comment upon the intrusion of the director into his film. Canby is interested in the cinematic impact of the technique ("playing with the movie medium," "a distant, cold and tricky movie"). In contrast, Bakoyiannopoulos is concerned with the

emerging artistic vision and its message ("Who is playing a 'role'?" "Where is truth and where art?").

At the same time that published commentators, such as movie reviewers, much reflect the values of their culture, expressing ideas in a way that is expected, they also create expectations: repeated exposure to such standardized forms of rhetoric must influence members of a culture over time.

### CONCLUSION: CONTRASTING RHETORICS

In an attempt to understand the bases of the contrasting rhetorical conventions which surfaced in the Greek and American narratives, I turned to recent research on the contrasting rhetorical strategies associated with oral and literate tradition (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1980). Basil Bernstein (1972) suggested that working-class speakers of British English employ a "restricted code" which does not make contextualization overt; middle- and upper-class British speakers employ an "elaborated code" in which they explicitly contextualize, that is, fill in pronoun referents, background information, underlying assumptions, and so on. Bernstein's hypothesis has been misinterpreted to imply linguistic deficit in lower-class speakers and egregiously misapplied, but he was among the first to observe that groups of speakers differ in their choices of linguistic content.

Bernstein's dichotomy is similar to that which underlies the excellent work of Goody and Watt (1962), Goody (1977), and Olson (1977) on the contrast between oral and literate strategies. According to these scholars, the verbal strategies associated with oral tradition differ from those associated with literate tradition. Literate culture does not replace oral culture in any society but rather is superimposed on it. As Goody (1977) points out, literate culture becomes associated with formal education, "for schools inevitably place an emphasis on the 'unnatural,' 'unoral,' 'decontextualized' processes of repetition, copying, verbatim memory" (p. 22). There exists then a "gap between the public literate tradition of the school, and the very different and indeed often directly contradictory private oral tradition of the family and peer group" (Goody and Watt, p. 342). I would postulate that the Greeks in this study, as a result of their cultural and historical development, were employing conventionalized forms and strategies associated with the oral tradition of the family and peer group, and the Americans were employing strategies associated with the literate tradition of schools. Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1980) point out that American and perhaps other Western European societies have conventionalized literate rhetorical strategies for oral use in many public situations.

Thus, as was seen, Greeks did not use direct mention of, or allusion to, the film as a film. They knew that the hearer knew that they were talking about a

film; they did not need to make that shared background knowledge and context overt. Furthermore, by building a story which includes characters' thoughts and emotions as well as judgments of their actions and which omits irrelevant details and focuses on events significant for the theme, the Greeks were telling stories designed to interest their listeners—also strategies associated not with school but with social or peer interaction. Hence, for example, to say that the two bicycles collided makes a better story than to say that they might have collided but did not. In contrast, to the extent that Americans were preoccupied with accuracy of detail and correct recall, they were adhering to strategies associated with the literate culture of schools.

In these senses, the code used by Greek speakers may be considered *restricted*—that is, less detail is made overt. The American narratives then may be considered examples of an *elaborated code*, insofar as they were longer and more full of detail. These differences, however, only reflect strategies associated with the specific task at hand: telling about a movie in answer to an interview question. In the study of conversational style associated with in-group talk (Tannen, 1979a), I found that in commenting on the expression of preferences in a conversation between a married couple, Greek respondents expected far more elaboration than Americans. In that setting, the code preferred by Greeks turned out to be elaborated, whereas the Americans showed preference for a restricted code.

I would postulate, then, not differences in underlying cognitive processes but in conventionalization of appropriate rhetorical forms. This hypothesis is in keeping with Bruner's (1978) analysis, explained in a review of a recently released study conducted in 1932 by Russian psychologist Alexander Luria. Examining differences in cognitive style between illiterate and educated peasants, Luria indicated that his illiterate subjects employed functional and concrete reasoning rather than abstract reasoning. Bruner notes, however, after examining Luria's data, that the peasants' reasoning, though different, is "abstract" in its own way. He observes:

Most of what has emerged from studies of Africans, Eskimos, Aborigines, and other groups shows that the *same* basic mental functions are present in adults of any culture. What differs is the deployment of these functions: what is considered an appropriate strategy suited to the situation and the task (p. 88).

This is substantially the conclusion of Cole and Scribner (1974), who assert, "We are unlikely to find cultural differences in basic component cognitive processes" (p. 193) but rather in "*functional cognitive systems*, which may vary with cultural variations" (p. 194). In yet another realm, Ekman (1973) concludes that people from different cultures exhibit the same facial expressions in association with specific emotions; they differ with respect to "display rules"—that is, when they deem it fitting to allow others to witness those facial expressions of emotion.

The cultural differences which have emerged in the present study constitute real differences in habitual ways of talking which operate in actual interaction and create impressions on listeners—the intended impression, very likely, on listeners from the same culture, but possibly confused or misguided impressions on listeners from other cultures. It is easy to see how stereotypes may be created and reinforced. Considering the differences in oral narrative strategies found in the pear narratives, it is not surprising that Americans might develop the impression that Greeks are romantic and irrational, and Greeks might conclude that Americans are cold and lacking in human feelings. In fact, Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou, and McGuire (1972) documented the existence of just such mutual stereotypes.

As John Gumperz (1977) points out in his work on other ethnic groups, conversation with a particular member of a different cultural group, forms the basis for conclusions about the other's personality, abilities, and intentions. In a culturally heterogeneous society like the United States, such conclusions in turn form the basis of decisions not only of a personal nature, such as whether to pursue a friendship, but also in professional matters, such as public service, educational, and employment situations—where the results of misinterpretations can be tragic. By locating the sources of such judgments in ways of talking, that is, in conventionalized rhetorical strategies, we may hope to contribute to improved understanding of communication between members of different cultural or subcultural groups.

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