IMPLICATIONS OF THE ORAL/LITERATE CONTINUUM FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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In pursuit of understanding linguistic phenomena in discourse, I am always in search of factors motivating linguistic choices. A research area that goes far to explain findings of my own and others' scholarly investigations discusses oral vs. literate tradition. Begun in the sixties as an attempt to explore the impact of writing on cognitive and rhetorical processes, work in this area has been advanced by researchers in anthropology, literature, and cognitive psychology. I suggest their findings are enlightening as well for linguists. Elsewhere I have discussed implications for an understanding of the relationship between spoken and written language in various modes (Tannen 1980a and in preparation a) and of communicative style (Tannen 1980b and in preparation b).[1] Here I explore implications for cross-cultural communication.

I briefly outline research in oral/literate tradition and suggest that the key distinction is not between orality vs. literacy as such, but between strategies that have been associated with oral and literate tradition which can be employed in any mode. What has been called 'oral tradition' is language use which emphasizes shared knowledge or the relationship between communicator and audience; what has been called 'literate' emphasizes decontextualized content or downplays communicator/audience interaction.[2] As communication can contain more or fewer of the strategies associated with these traditions, to greater or lesser degrees, I further suggest that the distinction be conceived of not as a dichotomy but rather as a continuum.

In discussing implications of the oral/literate continuum for cross-cultural communication, I draw upon findings of my research on narrative and conversational strategies. I refer to cross-cultural communication on three levels: (1) between

natives of different countries (Greeks and Americans); (2) between compatriots of different cultural, ethnic, or geographic backgrounds (Americans of Greek, Jewish, and nonimmigrant parents and grandparents from New York and California); (3) between women and men.

I suggest that nearly all communication is to some degree cross-cultural, in the sense that no two people have exactly the same background and, consequently, precisely the same expectations about interaction. Expectations, however, are more strikingly different when backgrounds diverge more drastically; hence, cross-cultural differences are greater in (1) than (2), and in (2) than (3).[3]

Oral vs. literate tradition. A number of scholars in varying fields pioneered research in the sixties examining the effects of writing on cognitive and social processes (Goody and Watt 1963, Havelock 1963, Ong 1967). The seventies brought continued work by the same scholars (Goody 1977, Havelock 1971, Ong 1977) as well as others (Cole and Scribner 1974, Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1980, Kay 1977, Olson 1977, Scribner and Cole 1980).

Lord (1960), following Parry, had demonstrated that oral epics were not memorized but reconstructed at each telling through the imposition of formulaic phrases on the skeleton of a familiar plot. Inspired by this insight, Havelock (1963) surmised that the difference between oral reconstruction and rote memory associated with oral vs. literate tradition, respectively, is not just a habit of expression but represents a difference in approach to knowledge and thought. In literate society, knowledge is seen as facts and insights preserved in written records. As Ong (1967) also points out, in oral culture, formulaic expressions (sayings, cliches, proverbs, and so on) are the repository of received wisdom.

Formulaic expressions function as wholes, as a convenient way to signal knowledge that is already shared. In oral tradition, it is not assumed that the expressions contain meaning in themselves, in a way that can be analyzed out. Rather, words are a convenient tool to signal already shared social meaning. Thus, in an oral tradition, as has been pointed out elsewhere (Tannen and Oztek 1977), it does not matter whether one says 'I could care less' or 'I couldn't care less'. The expression is, in either case, a handy way to make reference to a familiar idea. As Olson (1977) puts it, 'the meaning is in the context'. In contrast, in literate tradition, 'the meaning is in the text'.

Ong observes that in oral tradition, thought is 'exquisitely elaborated' through a stitching together of formulaic language which he calls 'rhapsodic'. In literate tradition, thought is analytic, sequential, linear. Olson notes that truth, in oral tradition, resides in common-sense reference to experience, whereas in literate tradition it resides in logical or coherent

argument. It is the oral sense of truth that comes naturally. Hence, says Olson, most people cannot distinguish between a conclusion that is logical and one with which they agree.

Ong explains furthermore that 'knowing' in oral tradition is achieved through analysis. This follows Havelock's assertion that understanding in oral tradition is objective. It explains the fact--puzzling and disturbing to modern scholars--that Plato would have banned poets from participation in education in the Republic. Because of their ability to move audiences emotionally, poets were a dangerous threat to the transition to literacy, by which people were to learn to suspend their emotions and approach knowledge through analytic, logical processes.

Olson points out that children learn language through use of formulas; Wong Fillmore (1979) has demonstrated this for second language acquisition. That is, children do not learn the meanings of individual words and rules for putting them together, like Tinker toys and sticks. Rather, they learn strings of words associated with fixed intonation and other paralinguistic features, to be uttered in certain social settings. By trying the expressions out in various settings, they arrive at correct associations--or at least they approximate correct associations more and more closely.[4]

I hypothesize that when children do learn that words have literal meanings, they go through a stage of overapplication of this principle. This accounts for their inclination, at a certain age, to interrupt their parents during adult conversation with complaints like 'That's not what he said', and offer corrections that do not change the sense at all, to the parents' great annoyance. This stage of language development furnishes Hank Ketcham with numerous Dennis the Menace jokes which derive humor from the boy's literal interpretation of words that were meant formulaically.

In a broad sense, then, strategies associated with oral tradition place emphasis on shared knowledge and the interpersonal relationship between communicator and audience. In this, they 'elaborate' what Bateson (1972) calls the metacommunicative function of language: the use of words to convey something about the relationship between communicator and audience. Literate tradition emphasizes what Bateson calls the communicative function of language: the use of words to convey information or content. This gives rise to the idealization that language can be 'autonomous' (Kay 1977)--that is, that words can carry meaning all by themselves, and that it is their prime function to do so.

Scollon and Scollon (to appear) caution against generalizing the 'bard and formula' notion of orality propounded by scholars whose work I have discussed here. The Scollons note that oral traditions can differ strikingly, and they demonstrate this with Athabaskan examples. They suggest instead a distinction between focused and nonfocused situations. The former is one

in which 'there are strong limitations on negotiation between participants'; the latter is one in which 'the highest value is on mutual sense making among the participants'.

Their argument reinforces the awareness that it is not 'orality' per se that is at issue but rather the relative prominence of communicator/audience interaction on the one hand, as opposed to the relative prominence of decontextualized content on the other. For the present discussion, I am going to continue to refer to strategies associated with oral vs. literate tradition, because this is the framework in which the work discussed has been done. However, I do not intend to imply that all oral traditions make use of these strategies nor that they are inherently oral in nature.

All these scholars point out that literate tradition does not replace oral. Rather, the two are superimposed upon and intertwined with each other. Similarly, no individual is either 'oral' or 'literate', but rather uses strategies associated with one or the other tradition in various settings. Goody and Watt (1963) suggest that oral tradition is associated with the family and in-group, while literate tradition is learned and passed on in the decontextualized setting of the school. Certainly this is true, in a prototypical sense. But strategies associated with one or the other tradition can be realized in any setting and in any mode. Literary fiction, for example (Tannen 1980a), uses many strategies that have been considered oral in a written mode.

Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1980) point out that strategies associated with literate tradition have been conventionalized in Western countries for oral use in public settings. In fact, it is clear that many middle class families employ strategies associated with literate tradition in the home. This can be seen in their prodding children to 'get to the point' and 'stick to the point'. An outgrowth of such attitudes, too, can be seen when parents and teachers tell children that their talk ought to be 'logical', that, for example, 'two negatives makes a positive', as if sentences can and ought to be analyzable to constituent parts, like mathematical equations. In fact, in interaction, it does not matter how many negative particles a sentence contains, except insofar as more may be better, as in vernacular Black English, which requires negative concord (Labov 1969).

It seems, then, that 'mainstream' middle class Americans have conventionalized verbal strategies and linguistic attitudes associated with literate tradition for use in a wide variety of contexts, whereas Americans of some ethnic and geographic backgrounds, as well as members of other cultural groups (including Greeks), have conventionalized more discourse strategies drawing upon oral tradition for use in a broad range of settings.

It has been suggested that many black children approach school tasks as real-world problems, rather than as decontextualized tasks. Thus, in choosing a word to answer a question on a reading test, they do not limit themselves to the information given in the paragraph presented but choose an answer

that takes into account their broader experience (Aronowitz to appear, Nix and Schwarz 1979). The following discussion considers some of the strategies associated with oral vs. literate tradition and shows the effects of their use in cross-cultural communication.

Formulaic language. Ong observes that Americans overvalue strategies associated with literate tradition. 'Most Americans', he says,

> even those who write miserably, are so stubbornly literate in principle as to believe that what makes a word a real word is not its meaningful use in vocal exchange but rather its presence on the pages of a dictionary (1979:2).

In the same spirit, most Americans feel that they ought not to use formulaic language. They feel that fixedness implies insincerity; hence the word 'cliche', with its negative connotation. This attitude persists despite the fact that no one can talk without extensive use of formulaic speech. Fillmore (1979) suggests that 'a large portion of a person's ability to get along in a language consists in the mastery of formulaic utterances'. Nonetheless, many Americans, when uttering formulas, make excuses ('I know this is a cliche, but ...' 'Everyone must say this, but ...') or otherwise mark their expressions with verbal or nonverbal equivalents of quotation marks.

Speakers in many other cultures highly value formulaic use of language. For example, speakers of Greek and Turkish (Tannen and Oztek 1977, Zimmer 1958), Yiddish (Matisoff 1979), Arabic (Ferguson 1976), and other languages seem to be happiest if they can find a fixed way of saying what they mean. For one thing, this lends to their utterance the weight and legitimacy of received wisdom: if everyone says it, it must be true. Second, it assures them that they are making a socially appropriate conversational contribution.

Situational formulas of the type found in Turkish and Greek (Tannen and Oztek 1977, following Zimmer 1958) are rigid collocations that are always said in particular social settings. Their omission carries meaning; it is perceived as a social gaffe or an intended slight, just as in American culture hanging up the telephone without saying 'goodbye' constitutes a positive act that might be reported: 'S/he hung up on me.' Rigid situational formulas are a prototype of formulaic language, or one end of a continuum of fixedness in language use, the other end of which might be a totally new thought expressed in a totally original syntactic pattern. There is a range of relative fixedness and relative novelty along the continuum, including use of familiar combinations of words, familiar syntactic patterns, and so on. As Jarrett (1978) demonstrates for blues lyrics, all utterances are 'inevitably traditional'. although the degree of fixedness may range from use of

clearly recognizable formulas to totally new lines which are formulaic in their adherence to recognizable patterns of rhythm, metaphor, register, syntax, and so on. Similarly, in everyday interaction, individuals differ with respect to the relative frequency of their use of more or less formulaic language, and cultures differ with regard to value placed on relative fixedness vs. relative novelty in expression. These value differences may be seen as expressions of attitudes toward language associated with literate vs. oral tradition.

What are the consequences in cross-cultural interaction of differing attitudes toward formulaic use of language? A person accustomed to using utterly fixed expressions, such as Greek situational formulas, feels linguistically hamstrung if s/he cannot find equivalents in the language s/he is speaking. To understand this effect, one need merely imagine trying to end a phone conversation without uttering a conversational closing. What then can a speaker do when feeling called upon to utter a formulaic expression in conversation in a different language?

One possibility is to borrow the formula from the other language, or to translate it into the language spoken. Zimmer (1958) notes that Germans residing in Turkey had the habit of uttering Turkish situational formulas in otherwise monolingual and monocultural German conversation. Similarly, Jewish Americans, God bless them, often utter Yiddish formulaic expressions in English conversation--either in Yiddish or in English translation. This strategy, however, is successful only in interaction with others who are familiar with the formulas--in other words, in communication that is not strictly cross-cultural.

In interaction with others who are not familiar with the situational formulas--or who do not recognize the formulaic nature of an utterance because they are not familiar with the paradigm --the speaker may choose to omit them (if possible), thus operating with a reduced linguistic repertoire, with attendant frustrations. However, a speaker often does not realize, or does not realize in time, that an utterance is 'formulaic', since so much of speech is habitual and seems self-evidently appropriate.[5] In that case, the formulaic utterance is used, and the interlocutor may not recognize its formulaic nature. Then, at the very least, a level of resonance is lost, much as a literary allusion is lost on someone who is not familiar with the source. Thus a lack of richness is experienced in cross-cultural communication. Even worse, however, the utterance may be taken literally and therefore seem odd. At the very worst, its intention can be missed entirely. In the event that an interlocutor perceives correctly the formulaic nature of an utterance, s/he may find its use charming or quaint, or lazy or insincere, depending upon his or her attitude toward use of formulaic language. A final strategy, as pointed out to me by Penelope Alatis, is to translate the formula and explain its meaning and use. This, however, enlarges the formula to a topic of talk rather than simply a vehicle for expression.

I have found that Greeks are more likely to explain motiva-
tions, events, and so on with reference to familiar sayings,
and that this accounts in part for the fact that they sometimes
strike Americans as romantic, trivial-minded, or unsophisti-
cated. But a reverse phenomenon occurs as well. I can re-
call a time before I knew Modern Greek, when I heard Greeks
use expressions in English that I now know are formulaic in
Modern Greek. At the time they struck me as highly imagina-
tive, poetic, and charming. I have a suspicion that this phe-
nomenon contributes to the fact that young American women
travelling in Greece often find young Greek men inexpressibly
charming and poetic. It is an instance of the broader phe-
nomenon pointed out by Sapir (1958) that in communicating
with speakers from a different culture, one cannot distinguish
between individual and culturally shared style.

Women and men. The phenomenon of using language in a
fixed and formulaic way is significant in another kind of cross-
cultural communication: talk between women and men. There
is a stereotype among Americans that women use language care-
lessly, that they are not precise, that they talk too much
(Lakoff 1975). It has been shown, too, that women pay more
attention than men to interpersonal dynamics in conversation--
that they are more sensitive than men to nonverbal and para-
linguistic cues: the channels that are emphasized in oral tra-
dition. Fillmore (1979) counts as one of four kinds of verbal
fluency 'the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide
range of contexts', and he notes that such fluency is often
associated with skillful manipulation of fixed expressions. This
is the only kind of fluency which he exemplifies with reference
to a female (Barbara Walters).

I suggest that in their attention to the interpersonal dynamic
of conversation, women are more likely to make use of verbal
devices that build upon shared cultural background and con-
text, among them formulaic language. However, since Americans
tend to devalue strategies associated with oral tradition, they
place more value on the 'precise' and 'analytic' use of language
which is prototypically associated with literacy and with men.
Thus, the discontinuity in expectations of a 'good person' and
a 'good woman' which has been found in other domains (Brover-
man et al. 1970), may hold as well for the use of formulaic lan-
guage. As Lakoff (personal communication) has suggested, this
may account for the puzzling phenomenon that American women,
who clearly have more 'rights' than their counterparts in other
cultures, seem to be more disturbed by male/female differences.
It may be that in those other cultures a high degree of atten-
tion to interpersonal dynamics--as seen, for example, in use of
formulaic language--is valued for both women and men.

What to say: Commonplaces, personalizing, philosophizing.
The use of formulaic or well-worn language is closely associ-
ated with what is said; form and content are intertwined. Just
as Greeks find it appropriate to use familiar expressions, so
they are more disposed to utter sentiments that are familiar
and often reiterated. Just as Americans find it insincere to
utter cliches, so they think it better to say something novel
than something that has been said often before.

These differing expectations showed up in oral narratives
told by Greeks and Americans. Under the direction of Wallace
Chafe at the University of California, Berkeley, a film was
made which had sound but no dialogue, showing a series of
simple events: a man was picking pears; a boy took a basket
of pears; he fell off his bike and was helped up by three other
boys; he gave the three boys pears; and they ate them as they
passed by the pear-picker. The movie was shown to 20 Ameri-
can women and they were asked to tell what they had seen. I
took the film to Greece and elicited narratives from 20 Athenian
young women.[6] For one thing, in telling about the film, the
Greeks in the study were far more likely to try to find a theme
or general meaning for the film, and in so doing, they often
chose culturally familiar themes, such as the beauty of agricul-
tural life. A readiness to make use of culturally familiar expla-
nations showed up in many ways. For example, in explaining
why the boy fell off his bicycle, almost half (nine) of the
Greeks made reference to the appearance of a girl, cuing a
familiar boy-meets-girl 'script' (see Tannen 1979a for discussion
of scripts, frames, schemata). The Americans did not do this.
They only mentioned the girl if they were making reference to
her in their explanation of causality of the fall.

Another related dimension is the tendency to talk in terms
of personal experience and to instantiate rather than talk in
abstract or general terms. For example, several of the Greeks
followed up their summaries of what happened in the film with
their own ideas of what it all meant, in a way that sounds to
Americans like 'philosophizing'. One Greek speaker made much
of the 'conflicts' in the film, and another focused on the many
'falls', relating this to her pessimistic outlook in general and
the difficulty she was experiencing in her own life at the time.

In a comparative study of indirectness in conversation
(Tannen 1976), I asked Greeks and Americans, on a question-
naire, for their interpretations of a hypothetical conversation
between a husband and wife about whether or not to go to a
party. In answering the question, many of the Greeks made
reference to their own experience: 'That's the way my hus-
band would do it', or 'That's how it happens in my house'.
Others answered by instantiating the conversation: 'The wife
is probably home all day while her husband works, so she'd
probably want to go to the party.' In contrast, the Americans
tended to answer in terms of the dialogue itself: 'The hus-
band said OK, and OK means yes.' Thus, the Greeks were

more inclined to instantiate, to personalize, and to answer in terms of broader context. A later study (Tannen 1979c), administering the same questionnaire to Greek-Americans, found that native-born Americans of Greek parents and grandparents exhibited strategies slightly closer to those of the Greeks than those of the Americans. In other words, communication between Americans of different backgrounds is also cross-cultural communication, and those who speak what is ostensibly 'the same language' may nonetheless be using and expecting strategies influenced by those of parents, grandparents, other relatives, or peers of different cultural backgrounds.

Interpretation vs. reporting. Other patterns emerged in the stories about the film which are related to the tendency to personalize. Americans seemed to approach the narrative production as a memory task. They seemed to include as many details as possible, as accurately as possible, and were very concerned with the temporal order of events. In contrast, the Greeks seemed to approach the task as they would storytelling in conversation. Their narratives were shorter, since they included only those details which contributed to the theme they chose to develop. They made more interpretive leaps, such as omitting details or even events which did not contribute to the theme; reporting characters' feelings; calling the man a 'farmer' and the fruit 'harvest'; and adding events that did not occur.

For example, there is a scene in which a boy and girl are seen approaching each other on their bicycles, followed by one in which the boy falls off his bike. Four Greeks say directly and two imply (a total of more than 25 percent) that the boy fell off his bike because he collided with the girl. No Americans say this, although two note that they thought the bikes would collide but did not. I would hypothesize that the expectation that the bikes would collide was present for both groups of viewers, but the Greeks were more likely to commit themselves to the interpretation that (1) followed a familiar script and (2) made a better story. The Americans were more concerned with reporting precisely what the film showed. The commitment to 'stick to facts' is a strategy associated with literate tradition; the tendency to interpret, to make a story fit a familiar form, is associated with oral tradition. Another major difference between the two groups was that Americans tended to tell about the film as a film. They often repeated phrases that reminded the hearer that what was being talked about was a film ('the scene switched', 'the camera panned', and so on). The exercise of their critical faculties was most often aimed at criticizing the film-maker's technique. Thus they said the costumes were unconvincing, the soundtrack unnatural, the action too slow ('He'd never make it as a pear-picker'). In contrast, the Greeks focused their critical

acumen on the characters in the film and their actions. They made judgments: the boy should not have taken the pears, he should have thanked his helpers sooner. They often made interpretations of meaning (the scene showed that children love each other). Insofar as all communication is a matter of presentation of self (Goffman 1959), the Americans' concern is to present themselves as able recallers and film critics. The Greeks are concerned with showing that they are good judges of character and film interpreters. Again, the Greeks are employing strategies recognizing personal involvement--hence oral tradition.

Male/female differences surface as well. My comparison of Greek and American women's narratives discovered that the Greek women tended to interpret more, whereas the Americans reported. However, the American women sometimes reported their personal reactions to the film as a film. For example, some reported their ongoing experience as film viewers, as in 'I thought the boy would fall'. The use of adjectives often revealed interpretive processes ('He was really brazen'). In comparing the narratives told by American men and women, Dodge (1980) and Patrick (1980) found that the American women made more interpretive comments than the men. The men tended to tell 'streamlined' narratives in which they stuck to reporting action. Thus, there seems to be a continuum of interpretive personalizing on which American men are at one end and Greek women at the other, with American women in between. Unfortunately, no narratives were collected from Greek men.

Storytelling in conversation. Another dimension of oral and literate strategy differences occurs in storytelling. As Gumperz (1977) and Fillmore (1979) note, to participate in conversation, people need a notion of how conversation is done--they must have a 'schema' for the construction of conversation and its parts. One such element is the telling of stories.

I have analyzed the natural conversation spontaneously generated at a Thanksgiving dinner among Americans of different geographical and ethnic backgrounds (Tannen 1979c, 1980d). Three participants were Jewish and from New York; two were of English/Irish and English/Italian background, both raised as Catholics. The sixth person was British. In the course of two and a half hours of conversation, all participants told stories. Analysis of the structures and the content of the stories told showed that those who were ostensibly from 'the same culture'--middle class Americans--had very different expectations of how stories should be told.

A framework for the analysis of narratives in conversation is provided by Labov (1972), based on stories told by black teenagers. Labov notes that in telling a story, a speaker's main job is to make clear to the audience what the point of the story is--to answer in advance the 'withering question', 'So what?'

Speakers communicate the point of a story--i.e. their attitude toward what is being said--by means of 'evaluation', either external or internal. External evaluation is the obvious kind: the teller steps outside the story to poke the reader verbally and say, 'Hey, here's the point'. This can be done by such comments as 'And this was the incredible thing', or by explaining, for example, 'When he said that, I felt awful'. Internal evaluation is not so obvious. It resides in all levels of verbalization such as expressive phonology, speeding up or slowing down, repetition, lexical choice, and so on. Direct quotation is a common form of internal evaluation. By putting words in the mouth of the characters, the teller communicates what happened from inside the story. Nonetheless, by deciding what words to put in the character's mouth, the teller is building the story toward the desired point.

Labov demonstrates that middle class white speakers tend to use more external evaluation, while inner city blacks use more internal evaluation. He notes as well that internal evaluation makes a better story. I believe this explains the often perceived phenomenon of 'good storytellers' among working-class people, rural people, or members of certain cultures, including Jews and Greeks. I suggest that the phenomenon results from use of strategies associated with oral tradition. Oral tradition depends for its impact on the creation of a sense of identification with characters and tellers of stories, whereas literate tradition depends upon an intellectual understanding of the principles or points to be made. Internal evaluation contributes to the sense of identification, while external evaluation makes explicit what the point is--a feature of literate-based strategies. As Kay (1977) points out, use of language prototypically associated with literacy in an industrial society is 'autonomous'. Whatever is needed for comprehension is included in the words of the text (external evaluation). In contrast, nonautonomous language depends on 'simultaneous transmission over other channels, such as the paralinguistic, postural and gestural'--the basic tools of internal evaluation. Of course, this split is an idealization; what we are dealing with is a continuum: more or less reliance on features of spoken-like vs. written-like language. Lexical choice, by writers as much as by speakers, constitutes internal evaluation. However, a word may be spoken with a certain intonation, tone, gesture, and facial expression that would add to the evaluation, whereas the written word must stand alone.

In the analysis of stories told over dinner, it became clear that the New Yorkers of Jewish background employed more internal evaluation and avoided explicitly stating the points of their stories. Their strategy[8] seemed to be--and this was supported by participants' comments upon hearing the tape, i.e. 'playback' (Labov and Fanshel 1977)--to capitalize upon shared background by not telling the point straight out, simultaneously building upon and reinforcing a sense of 'being

on the same wave length'. The fact that the lack of external evaluation seemed inappropriate to the native Californians can be seen in their on-the-spot reactions as well as their comments during playback. For example, one New Yorker told the following story:[9]

(1) K: I have a little sèven-year-old student ... a little
girl who wears those. ....She .. is *too*
p
(2) F: └She wears those? [chuckle]┘
much. Can yóu imagine? She's séven years old,
acc
and she sits in her chair and she goes .... [squeals
acc————]
and squirms in his seat.]

(3) F: Oh:: Go::d. ... She's only SEVen?

(4) K: And I say well .. hów about let's do sò-and-so. And
acc
she says ... ⌜Okay. ... ⌜Jùst like thát.
————] [squealing]

(5) F: ⌜Oh:::::
p

(6) D: └What does it méan.
p, acc

(7) K: It's just so ... ⌜she's acting like such a little gìrl
p
already.

There are two listener/respondents taking an active part in this story. Their reactions are opposite. Frances (F) responds by showing agreement and understanding, not by saying so, but by responding in like style. In (3) she says, 'Oh: Go::d', using exaggerated tone and lengthened vowels, and repeats a part of Kurt's (K's) story in a 'disbelieving' tone: 'She's only SEVen?' Her tone says 'That really is amazing'. In (4) Kurt continues his story, and in (5) Frances again shows understanding by use of a paralinguistically exaggerated response, 'Oh.:::::'. In contrast, David asks (6), 'What does it mean?'

Here is clear evidence, in the text itself, that Frances, who, like the speaker, is of New York Jewish background.

'got the point' of the story. Part of this evidence lies in her responding in kind. Kurt's telling of this 'story' is marked by exaggerated paralinguistic and prosodic features. He uses marked shifts from high to low pitch; speeding up and slowing down; postural and gestural cues. In (1) and (4), he mimics the movements as well as the voice of the girl he is talking about; he places his hands on his knees and squirms in a stereotypically female manner. Frances' response is similar in a number of ways. She picks up on Kurt's words and repeats them back to him, (3) 'She's only SEVen?' with paralinguistically exaggerated phonology. The result is a rhythmically and paralinguistically synchronous and matched speaker/listener interchange.

In contrast, David's question (6) 'What does it mean?' is uttered in flat intonation. Not only does the content of his question make it clear that he does not get the point of the story. In addition, the rhythm and tone of his question are in contrast to Kurt's and Frances' utterances. In playback, David commented that perhaps he did not so much miss Kurt's point as feel annoyed that Kurt had not made it. That is, he felt that the point of the story should be *told*--in external evaluation. He complained that even in answer to his question (6), Kurt did not tell the point of the story. Kurt's 'explanation' (7) is 'She's acting like such a little girl already'. David commented that 'such a little girl' means to him 'just like a person' or 'grown up', as in 'such a little young lady' as opposed to 'like an infant'. What Kurt meant and should have said was that she was acting like a 'coquette'. David continued that it made him uncomfortable when Kurt squealed and squirmed to imitate the girl's manner. This acting-out of the story seemed to him a breach of good taste.

It is particularly interesting that Kurt, in answering David's direct question, still did not 'explain' the point of the story. I submit that it seemed to him self-evident, as it seemed to Frances.

Thus, Kurt communicated the point of his story through internal evaluation, by presenting the character in a way that seemed to him self-evidently demonstrative of the point. He made much use of paralinguistic and kinesic features--the essence of oral tradition, building upon shared sociocultural knowledge and redundancy of channels. David expected something more like Kay's 'autonomous' use of language, in which the message is carried by and made explicit in words.

Another aspect of cross-cultural differences in storytelling has to do not only with how the point is communicated but what the point can be. Thus it becomes clear that for the New Yorkers of Jewish background, stories were most commonly told to illustrate the speaker's feelings about something. In some sense, Kurt's story is about his feelings about little girls using girly mannerisms. The non-New Yorkers, in contrast, told stories about events in which their feelings were

not only not dramatized but often not expressed. This led to another set of mismatches: the New Yorkers had trouble getting the point of the non-New Yorkers' stories, since they were looking for meaning in the speaker's attitude toward the events.

At one point the conversation turned to a discussion of heredity vs. environment, as exemplified by adopted children. Kurt told the following story, again about a student:

(1) K: In fact one of my students told me for the first time, I taught her for over a year. .... That she was adopted. And then I thought .. ?uh? ... *that* acc————————] acc explains .. *so* many things.

(2) F: What. ⌐That she was →

(3) K: ⌐Cause she's só:: different ⌐from her mother ⌐Smarter than she should have been? or stupider →

⌐than she should've been. [chuckle]

(5) K: ⌐It wasn't smart or stupid, actually, it was just she was *so* different. .... Just '*dif*ferent.
F: hm

The point of the story emerges in the first sentence in which Kurt illustrates his emotional reaction to hearing that his student was adopted in the grunt, 'uh', uttered between two glottal stops, accompanied by a facial expression of surprise. This sense of surprise in effect carries the message that the student was different from her parents, and this had been puzzling to Kurt before he learned that she was adopted. I have suggested (Tannen 1980b) that the questions asked by Frances in this interchange do not show lack of understanding or lack of approval of the way the story is being told. Rather, they function as 'cooperative prompts', eliciting information which Kurt would have told anyway. They serve to encourage him to tell what he was planning to tell--a show of enthusiasm on the listener's part. Evidence for this lies in the fact that the story continues over the overlap of the question; the question does not stop the storyteller or interfere with the rhythm of his story; rather the questions and story continue

in an interwoven fabric of continuous and rhythmically smooth speech.

In contrast, when David tells a story about a child who is adopted, Kurt reacts with a question that interrupts the flow of David's speech and shows Kurt's impatience.

(1) D: My u::m ... my aûnt's two kids are adopted, and

they were both adopted from different .... famili?

different môthers.

(2) K: Yeah. And?

(3) D: └ And they're just 'different from each

other and different from anyone in my fâmily. ....

K hm

They're not like each ôther at àll.

All listeners to the tape of this conversation agree that Kurt's 'Yeah. And?' sounds impatient. David himself, during play-back, said that it sounded like Kurt was impatient, and David hypothesized that it was his slower pace that was causing the impatience. Indeed, David speaks more slowly than Kurt, and his hesitation over 'families' vs. 'mothers' creates a stalling in the telling. I hypothesize, however, that another part of Kurt's impatience results from the fact that David has not given any hint of how he feels about what he is telling. The flat intonation is in striking contrast to Kurt's storytelling style, although in terms of actual information communicated in the content, David gives no less information than Kurt did, and both are saying that the adopted children are 'just differ-ent' from their adopted families. But in David's story there is no element of his own emotional involvement, as there is in Kurt's. This pattern is not limited to these stories but ap-pears in numerous stories told by members of the two groups.

By focusing on personal emotions, and by using internal evaluation through exaggerated paralinguistic and nonverbal cues, the New Yorkers in this study were using strategies associated with oral tradition. By sticking to events and re-lying on lexicalization, the natives of Los Angeles were using strategies associated with literate tradition. The effect in communication between members of the two groups was slight mutual impatience and annoyance, and incomplete comprehen-sion. Of course, these phenomena were not gross but com-paratively subtle and became clear only after microanalysis. All participants left the gathering feeling they had had a good time, and friendships among them endured. However, the nature of their rapport is certainly influenced by such habitual differences, and consequences of such stylistic

differences are potentially significant in interaction not favor-ably biased by ties of friendship and congenial setting.

Conclusion. Kay (1977) suggests that the notion of autono-mous vs. nonautonomous speech accounts for Bernstein's (1964) controversial hypothesis of elaborated vs. restricted codes. Kay writes (1977:22) that

autonomous speech packs all the information into the strictly linguistic channel and places minimal reliance on the ability of the hearer to supply items of content neces-sary either to flesh out the body of the message or to place it in the correct interpretive context.

I suggest that the addition of background information is a kind of elaboration. Therefore, autonomous or literate-based lan-guage is not necessarily always elaborated, nor is oral-based or nonautonomous speech always restricted. Rather, there is a difference in which levels of signalling or which aspects of the communicative channel are elaborated. The use of exag-gerated paralinguistic features such as pace, pitch shifts, amplitude shifts, expressive phonology, .expressive tone quality, and so on constitutes elaboration of the paralinguistic channel. Similarly, the study of conversational strategies shows that Greeks expected more 'enthusiasm' in expression of preferences and that Jewish American participants in the Thanksgiving dinner expected more active listener participation in the form of expressive reactions, prompting questions, and mutual revelation of personal experience (Tannen 1979c). This is elaboration of another sort. In the autonomous or literate-based mode, the content and verbal channel are elaborated, while the oral-based strategy elaborates paralinguistic chan-nels and emotional or interpersonal dynamics.

Two major conclusions may be drawn from these findings. (1) 'Middle class white' speakers are not a monolithic speech community. Just as we have come to realize that visible ethnic minorities have disparate cultural backgrounds and linguistic norms, so members of middle class white communities come from a variety of ethnic, geographic, and cultural back-grounds. If our goal is to understand the speech behavior of individuals in a multi-ethnic society, we must broaden our notion of ethnicity. (2) The notion of strategies that have been associated with oral and literate tradition explains many of the differences in language use by members of varying ethnic, geographic, class, and cultural backgrounds. Strate-gies associated with oral tradition place more emphasis on per-sonal topics, personalization, and instantiation. There is some indication, furthermore, that this accounts for some male/female differences as well. In contrast, those who are accus-tomed, even in casual conversation, to using conventionalized strategies influenced by literate tradition are

focus on decontextualized content, to expect language to proceed in a linear and logical way, to avoid overlap, and so on.

The consequences of these differences in cross-cultural communication are complex and depend upon the culture in which communication takes place. In communication between members of different cultures, such as nationals of different countries, the mutual stereotyping is likely to be negative both ways. Thus it has been shown (Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou, and McGuire 1972) that Greeks tend to stereotype Americans as cold but organized. This can easily be seen as a consequence of Americans' focus on content, to the exclusion of interpersonal dynamics. In contrast, Americans tend to stereotype Greeks as enthusiastic, spontaneous, but disorganized: a function of their emphasis on the personal and interpersonal. In such settings, each group is convinced that its own norms are based on self-evident assumptions of the qualities of a good person.

The matter is more complicated, however, when communication takes place among people of different cultural backgrounds residing in the same country. Then one set of norms tends to dominate. Those who grow up in a setting in which the norms learned at home are reinforced in the public domain, have attitudes toward their own language that are quite different from those growing up in a culture in which the norms operative at home differ from those endorsed by the society at large. Thus, I found that New Yorkers of Jewish background often were ambivalent about their own speech styles. Those who used strategies associated with literate tradition had a certainty about their convictions. If they proclaimed that it was rude to interrupt or that one ought to state the point of a story, they had no ambivalence about the validity of those values. However, the speakers who tended to overlap in a cooperative way in conversation, on hearing their own conversation on tape, were likely to be critical of themselves. They, too, believe that it is rude to interrupt, to talk loudly, to talk too much. Of course, these negative feelings may be mixed with positive ones: that it is a pleasure to talk to others who talk like them. But at the same time--especially for those who have moved outside homogeneous ethnic communities--they have been influenced by prevalent norms just as much as those who adhere to them. A similar situation obtains for women, in contrast with men.

These are a few of the ways in which an understanding of cross-cultural communication is enhanced by awareness of the oral/literate continuum.

NOTES

1. The summary of research on oral/literate tradition which appears in this paper closely resembles the summary which appears in Tannen (1980a). Here, as there, I thank John and

Jenny Cook-Gumperz for focusing my attention on the importance of this research. I am grateful as well to Ron Scollon for invaluable critical comments and continuing dialogue. Recalcitrant blind spots are mine alone.

2. Such a distinction resembles numerous other theoretical schemata which I do not discuss here, including Hall's (1977) high/low context continuum, field dependency vs. field independency (Cazden and Leggett 1978), and R. Lakoff's (1979) communicative styles camaraderie vs. distance. This last is discussed at length in Tannen (1979c, 1980d).

3. Gumperz and Tannen (1979) present a schema for and discussion of the levels of linguistic signalling at which cross-cultural (social) vs. individual differences occur in interaction.

4. My niece, at age nine, was included in the ceremony at her mother's second marriage. At the critical moment in the solemn ceremony, when bride and groom both sipped wine from a ceremonial goblet, the rabbi offered a sip to the little girl as well. She declined politely, saying, 'No, thank you; I don't drink.' The laughter of the wedding guests and the subsequent legendizing of her rejoinder in family lore served as her lesson that she had used the formula in an inappropriate setting.

5. It was not until very recently that I learned that the habit of saying 'Wear it in good health' to someone who has purchased or received a new item of clothing is not in general use among Americans. It is clear that some of my compatriots share this ignorance and it can be a problem for TV producers. A recent episode of a situation comedy presented a scene, taking place in a Midwestern town, in which a character received a gift in a restaurant. Some nice ladies at a nearby table observed the event and gave their blessing as they left the restaurant: 'Wear it in good health.' Jim Drake, a director for CBS, comments (personal communication) that such linguistic egotism is a problem he and his actors must continually correct.

6. No attempt was made to match socioeconomic status or other variables except age and sex. However, it turned out that socioeconomic status, as judged by father's occupation, did not differ markedly. For a detailed comparative analysis of the Greek and American narratives, see Tannen (1980c).

7. An intriguing question is raised whenever I speak about these phenomena: to what extent are culturally determined or associated styles nonetheless personality features? Surely, I do not believe that ways of talking are 'just style'--hence not evidence of personality features. I hypothesize that members of a group have an array of features from which to choose. Personality and communicative style are intertwined, as Sapir (1958) observed.

8. Here, as always, I must note that 'strategy' does not imply a conscious choice, but merely a way of achieving a conversational goal.

9. Transcription conventions are a combination of my own and many gleaned from the following sources: the Chafe narrative project, University of California at Berkeley; Schenkein (1978); and the Gumperz project, University of California at Berkeley, based on conventions developed by John Trim.

.. noticeable pause or break in rhythm (less than .5 second)
... half-second pause, as measured by stop watch
an extra dot is added for each additional half-second pause, hence .... full second pause, and so on
ˇ secondary stress
ˊ primary stress
italics mark emphatic stress
CAPS mark very emphatic stress
⌐ high pitch, continuing until punctuation
⌐⌐very high pitch, continuing until punctuation
' high pitch on word
, phrase final intonation: 'more to come'
. sentence final falling intonation
→ arrow indicates talk continues without break in rhythm; see next line
? yes/no question rising intonation
: indicates lengthened vowel sound
p under line indicates spoken softly
acc under line indicates spoken quickly, continuing until punctuation unless otherwise indicated
ʔ is the traditional linguistic symbol for glottal stop, as in the expression of warning, ʔuh ʔoh
[brackets] indicate comments on nonverbal characteristics
⌐penned brackets on two lines indicate overlapping speech.
└Two people talking at once.
penned brackets with reversed flaps indicate latch⌐
      └Second speaker begins without pause following first speaker's utterance.

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