

## REPETITION IN CONVERSATION: TOWARD A POETICS OF TALK

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All language is, to a varying extent, poetic. Investigating the relationship between conversational and literary discourse illuminates the workings of conversation. Past research suggests the pervasiveness of repetition, and its significance in questioning prior theoretical and methodological assumptions. Repetition functions in production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. The congruence of these levels provides a fourth, over-arching function in COHERENCE, which builds on and creates interpersonal involvement. Examples illustrate the pervasiveness, functions, and automatic nature of repetition in taped, transcribed conversation—supporting a view of discourse as relatively pre-patterned, rather than generated. Repetition is a resource by which speakers create a discourse, a relationship, and a world.\*

'Repeating is a wonderful thing in being, everything, every one is repeating then always the whole of them and so sometime there surely will be an ordered history of every one.' —Gertrude Stein, *The making of Americans* (284)

'Apparently there has been no other subject during my entire scholarly life that has captured me as persistently as have the questions of parallelism.' —Roman Jakobson (Jakobson & Pomorska 1983:100)

1.1. Mukařovský ([1932] 1964:17) notes that 'the theory of poetic language is primarily interested in the differences between the standard and poetic language, whereas the theory of the standard language is mainly interested in the similarities between them.' Thus I have been investigating correspondences between ordinary conversation and literary discourse, not to suggest that they are the same, but to understand better the workings of everyday conversation. Furthermore, I use the term 'poetic' not in opposition to standard or conversational discourse, but in 'the wider sense of the word' in which Jakobson (1960:259) observed 'the poetic function not only in poetry, where this function is superimposed upon the other functions of language, but also outside of poetry, when some other function is superimposed upon the poetic function.'

Friedrich 1986 makes a compelling argument for seeing all language as poetic in varying degrees. He finds (p. 3) that 'the most interesting and surely the

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most complex differences between natural languages are centered in the relatively poetic levels of sound and meaning, be this poetry strictly speaking, or a poetic stratum in other kinds of discourse'. Citing Sapir's observation (1921:223) of 'the effect of verse latent in all prose', Friedrich defines 'poetic language' as 'all parts of a language system that exemplify a figure', including 'metaphor-like relations in grammar', any spontaneous speech that 'may evince analogical freshness or ambiguity', and even 'words, idioms, constructions with relatively fixed and frozen meanings' that may suddenly come to life (24). He calls conversation 'rough drafts for poetry' (33).

1.2. CONVERSATIONAL AND LITERARY DISCOURSE. My interest in the relationship between conversational and literary discourse grew out of a study comparing spoken and written narratives (Tannen 1982), which concluded that a short story combined the 'involvement' that Chafe 1982 found typical of conversation with the 'integration' he found typical of expository writing.

Extending this comparison of spoken and written discourse types, I have argued (Tannen 1984) that ordinary conversation and literary discourse have more in common than has been commonly thought, as both depend for their effect on interpersonal involvement. Scattered findings from disparate fields, when brought together, yield evidence of linguistic patterns common to literary and conversational discourse. I see these as falling into two types: sound patterns and sense patterns. The former involve the audience with the speaker or writer and the discourse by sweeping them along; the latter create involvement through audience participation in sense-making. In each of the categories listed below, linguists, sociologists, or anthropologists have observed that conversation exhibits features which literary scholars have identified as quintessentially literary or poetic. (Parenthetical references are suggestive, not definitive.)

1.3. SOUND PATTERNS. Rhythmic patterns are created by repetition and variation of phonemes (alliteration, assonance, rhyme—Sacks 1971); by morphemes; by lexical items and syntactic constructions (numerous such studies are reviewed below); and by discourse structures associated with genres such as narrative, description, instructions etc. All these are overlaid with paralinguistic and prosodic patterns of pitch, amplitude, timing, and intonation. Included here are the features that Levin 1982 calls 'style' figures of speech which operate on linguistic form. (An example is anadiplosis: beginning a sentence with the word or phrase that ends the preceding one). Work on conversational synchrony (Erickson & Shultz 1982) and on microsynchrony (reviewed in Kempton 1980) provides evidence for quite literal participation in rhythmic patterns established by sound.

1.4. SENSE PATTERNS. Audience participation in sense-making is required by ellipsis and indirectness, sometimes called implicature in conversation (Lakoff 1979, Tyler 1978); by imagery and detail (Chafe 1982), by dialog (Labov 1972, Tannen 1986); and by figures of thought and tropes which operate on meaning (Levin 1982), such as metaphor and irony. All these are ways of communicating more than, or other than, what is denoted by the literal meanings of words. When supplying elided or implied meaning; when responding to detail, imagery,

or dialog; when interpreting a simile, proverb, or metaphor—in all these, the audience has to fill in, has to work to make meaning.

1.5. SOUND AND SENSE IN REPETITION. Repeating a word, phrase, or longer syntactic unit—exactly or with variation—results in a rhythmic pattern which sweeps the hearer or reader along. Simultaneously (as Derrida 1976 points out under the rubric of 'iteration'), each time a word or phrase is repeated, its meaning is altered. The audience reinterprets the meaning of the word or phrase in light of the accretion, juxtaposition, or expansion; thus it participates in making meaning of the utterances. An extreme representation of this phenomenon is in Jerzy Kosinski's novel *Being there*, in which a simple-minded gardener is thought brilliant by interlocutors whose words he repeats. The deep meaning which they glean from his utterances is their own work.

1.6. UNDERSTANDING THROUGH CARING. Part of the effect of participating in sense-making and of being swept up by the sound and rhythm of language is emotional. The similarity between conversational and literary discourse exists because both seek not merely to convince audiences (a logical process), but also to move them (an emotional one).<sup>1</sup> Emotion and cognition (following M. C. Bateson 1984, Friedrich 1986, and Tyler 1978) can be seen as inseparable. The cognitive effect of comprehension is facilitated by an emotional experience of interpersonal involvement.

Like all atomistic schemes, the separation of linguistic patterns into sound and sense, and into subcategories within these, is in itself a fictionalization: Language is unified, its sound and sense simultaneous and inextricable, as Friedrich 1986 argues for tropes. Nonetheless, the identification of lower-level patterns has heuristic value.

The present paper explores lexical, syntactic, and prosodic repetition in conversation. I argue that repetition functions in production, comprehension, cohesion, and interaction—and that the congruence of these levels of discourse creates coherence: of message and metmessage (Bateson 1972), of form and meaning, of the informational and relational levels of language. Building on Becker's 1979 notion of COHERENCE, I argue that repetition is one of a range of patterns that contribute to coherence in discourse, which in turn contributes to a sense of coherence in the world. Analysis of repetition in conversation supports a view of language as relatively pre-patterned rather than generated.

In the sections that follow, I review research on repetition (§2) and its theoretical implications (§3); discuss the functions of repetition (§4); illustrate some of these functions in taped, transcribed conversation (§5); demonstrate the automaticity (§6) and the aesthetic relevance of repetition (§7); and briefly consider how uses of repetition reflect individual and cultural differences (§8).

<sup>1</sup> It might be thought that the discourse type which is distinguished from both conversational and literary discourse is expository prose—comprising genres which seek to convince by means of logical persuasion, such as scholarly articles or lectures. In reality, however, all discourse operates on the coherence constraints which I describe. Thus McCloskey 1985 demonstrates that economic theories which come to predominate are no more accurate than others in predicting economic developments; rather, they exhibit rhetorical elegance.

#### RESEARCH ON REPETITION

2. Friedrich (154) remarks on the 'intensely poetic' nature of the child's language learning experience, 'involving sound play, complex figures of speech, and various experiments'. If repetition is an essentially poetic aspect of language, then it is not surprising that, as Keenan (1977:125) notes, 'One of the most commonplace observations in the psycholinguistic literature is that many young children often repeat utterances addressed to them', and that work on children's discourse is the richest source of research on repetition. A sampling will suffice to suggest the range of this and related literature.

Examining the child-child and child-adult conversations of twin boys, aged two years nine months at the start of the study, Keenan aims to go beyond the observation of widespread imitation to describe its functions. She concludes: 'there appears to be no end to the ways in which cross-utterance repetition is employed in conversational discourse' (132). Merritt 1982 finds that primary school children use repeats and reformulations to get their teachers' attention during individualized instruction periods.

Most of the chapters in Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan 1977 include some mention of repetition; thus Garvey 1977 observes repetition in play. For Brenneis & Lein 1977, repetition is the first of three patterns of argumentative sequence structures in role-played disputes among first, third, and fourth grade white children in Western Massachusetts. Watson-Gegeo & Boggs 1977 observe repetition in contradicting routines among Hawaiian children; Kernan 1977 considers repetition as a semantic narrative technique in personal experience narratives told by black American girls; and Cook-Gumperz 1977 includes repetition as a form of instruction-giving in classroom talk.

Another major collection of papers on child discourse (Ochs & Schieffelin 1979) evinces a similar pattern; e.g., Ervin-Tripp 1979 finds repetition used as a 'remedial tactic' in turn-taking trouble. Scollon's four types of 'vertical constructions' in an adult's conversations with a one-year-old (1979:222) are 'cross-classified on the dimensions of repetition and intervening discourse'. Ochs et al. 1979, using three sources of data of children between the ages of one and three—interacting with each other and with caretakers—find repetition used as an 'attention-getting strategy' (256–7) and a means to achieve 'definiteness' (259). Hatch et al. (1979:272–4) are interested in the role of repetition in children's acquisition of formulae and the 'subsequent impact on rule formation'.

Schieffelin 1979 examines a pervasive practice among the Kaluli (Papua New Guinea), by which caretakers instigate repeating routines with young children by preceding an utterance with *elema* 'say like that'. Schieffelin's study has sparked others in which ethnographers have observed repeating routines with young children; thus Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo 1986 demonstrate that the Kwara'ae (Austronesian, Solomon Islands) use repeating routines to distract and entertain small children, and to teach them language and interactional behavior. As with the Kaluli, children recognize that they are expected to repeat not only by the inviting word (*elema* in Kaluli; *lia*, *ngwae ki*, or *'uri* in Kwara'ae), but also by characteristic paralinguistic contours which shape the utterance.

Scholars concerned with adolescent or adult conversation have noted repetition as well, often in languages other than English or in non-standard varieties of English. In a study of conversational interviews with Jewish working-class speakers in Philadelphia, Schiffrin 1982 shows multiple functions of non-adjacent self-paraphrase. Johnstone 1984 argues that immediate self-paraphrase in American English adult conversation is a paratactic modificational strategy: the more often two items are juxtaposed, the more similar they become. Polanyi 1978 identifies a type of repetition in conversational story-telling which she calls a true start: borrowing the computer terms 'push' and 'pop', she notes that speakers begin a story at a point that seems compelling enough to merit the floor, then backtrack (push) to give necessary information, and finally return (pop) to the starting point by repeating the opening phrase.

Jefferson (1972:303) defines one type of repetition, 'a repeat', as 'an object that has as its product-item a prior occurrence of the same thing, which performs some operation upon that product-item'. In particular, she looks at conversational exchanges in which a speaker calls attention to another speaker's erroneous utterance, by repeating the erroneous part with questioning intonation. This invites the speaker in error to utter a correction, after which the on-going interaction proceeds.

In a study of conversations of urban black children, age four to fourteen, Goodwin 1983 observes a similar phenomenon which she calls an 'aggravated partial-repeat correction format'; this differs from Jefferson's repeats in that the repeat is uttered with challenging rather than questioning intonation. The result is an aggravated correction.

In a comprehensive study of language acquisition and use among black and white working-class communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, Heath 1983 notes repetition both in the language development and play of children and in the narratives and worship participation of adults—particularly children and adults of the black community. The cultural patterning that links conventions for participation in worship and in conversation is also suggested by the findings of Erickson (1984:141), showing how repetition of pitch and phrases is used in a group conversation among black adolescents 'to engage the audience in a dialogue of call and response'.

Koch (1983a:48) analyses 'the frequent, complex, and multi-level use of repetition' in modern written Arabic. Identifying both linguistic and rhetorical functions, she focuses on the rhetorical. Shepherd 1985 suggests that repetition is particularly extensive and complex in creole speech. Her analysis of Antigua Creole includes reduplication, formulaic repetition of clauses, and repetition of themes in discourse. Among the functions of repetition which she identifies are emphasis, intensification, and humor.

According to Grimes 1972, New Guinea Pidgin and other languages of New Guinea and Brazil are characterized by overlays: 'the near repetition of relatively long stretches in such a way that certain elements in one stretch are repeated in another, while other elements are novel each time' (513). He also notes a number of functions of repetition (not overlays): linkage, expansion, continuation, information focus, and emotional involvement.

Duranti & Ochs (1979:396) include repetition as one of 'two major ways in which referents are tied to the prior discourse' in Italian conversation. This exemplifies Halliday's & Hasan's identification (1976:282) of exact repetition or reiteration by 'synonym, superordinate, or general word' as a cohesive tie.

Abbi 1975 examines immediate word repetition, or reduplication, in Hindi. After a recent study of 28 Indian languages (Abbi 1985, 1986), she finds reduplication of all parts of speech to be widespread in South Asian languages, particularly in speech, informal writing, and child language. She notes its use for emphasis, intensity, and plurality.

Gumperz et al. 1982 find the use of reduplication and higher-level repetition strategies to be a source of miscommunication when Indians speak English to British interlocutors. Reduplication results in expressions that sound odd to British ears ('I just make sure to eat slowly and slowly', 49). More disastrously, Indian English speakers' repetition of key words, phrases, and ideas to establish 'thematic continuity' is perceived as redundant and pointless by British listeners, who consequently may interrupt Indian interlocutors before they make their point.

Parallelism in poetry has been the object of significant study. First, of course, is Jakobson's classic discussion of 'Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet' (1966). Subsequently, Levin (1973:30) proposes that poetry is characterized by 'coupling': putting 'into combination, on the syntagmatic axis, elements which, on the basis of their natural equivalences, constitute equivalence classes or paradigms'. Kiparsky 1973 examines both syntactic and phonological parallelism in poetry. For Hymes (1981:42), 'the form of repetition and variation, of constants and contrasts, in verbal organization' is no less than a definition of structure itself.

In Magnus 1979, work in literary criticism on parallelism in poetry is reviewed as a basis for investigating the refrain in modern English poetry, as well as the less formalized syntactic repetition of three major poets: the 'analogical' and 'ultimately ironic' parallelism of Walt Whitman; T. S. Eliot's repetition of smaller units—first incantatory 'litanic' and analogical parallelism, then 'analytic' repetitions used 'to make divisions and distinctions'—and finally 'the apotheosis of syntactic repetition' in Wallace Stevens' 'pairings', 'multiple appositions', 'appositional qualifications', and 'repeated similes'.

#### THEORETICAL REVERBERATIONS

3. A number of the above studies, and others, use analysis of repetition to question previously held theoretical or methodological assumptions. Thus Scollon 1979 reports that he could not make sense of his observations of highly repetitive 'vertical constructions' uttered by the one-year-old he was studying, and could neither account for nor appreciate her linguistic ability, until he gave up the disciplinary linguistic focus on the sentence as the limit, descriptor, and determiner of language. Goodwin & Goodwin 1987 observe repetition as 'format tying', and use this to critique a speech-act approach to discourse. They argue that reducing conversation to underlying actions, intentions, or moves is like studying what a musician does but ignoring the music that is played.

Citing H. Sacks' unpublished lecture notes for the concept of 'tying techniques' to account for conversational coherence, Goodwin & Goodwin argue that the coherence of a participant's move to a preceding one may lie in the 'particularities of its wording'.

Silverstein 1984, rather than rejecting propositional schemas, analyses repetition in dyadic conversation, taped in a laboratory setting and transcribed by Starkey Duncan, in order to illustrate that 'poetic pragmatics' mediates between a hierarchic organization of propositional representation and a real-time enactment of conversational moves. He finds a poetic organization in conversation which has, on the one hand, a non-directional and non-temporal structural aspect, and, on the other hand, a directional and temporal functional aspect.

Becker 1984b examines reduplication and repetition as variants of a repetitive strategy at different levels in an episode from a wayang (Javanese shadow play), in which a boy escaping from a demon breaks a taboo by upsetting a steamer of rice. Javanese grammatical constraints preclude the use of pronouns ('there is no "it" in Javanese', 432) or of ellipsis (in Becker's terms, 'zeroing') in subsequent reference to inanimate topics. Instead, various forms of *dang* 'to steam' are repeated, resulting in a dense discourse texture which is characteristically Javanese.

Becker sees such discourse strategies as constituting the grammar of a language: not abstract patterns but actual bits of text which are remembered, more or less, and then retrieved to be reshaped to new contexts. And so, by a process of repetition, 'The actual a-priori of any language event—the real deep structure—is an accumulation of remembered prior texts'; thus, 'our real language competence is access, via memory, to this accumulation of prior text' (435).<sup>2</sup>

Becker's account of linguistic competence is similar to that of Bolinger—who, questioning transformational theory (1961:381), observed:

'At present we have no way of telling the extent to which a sentence like *I went home* is a result of invention, and the extent to which it is a result of repetition, countless speakers before us having already said it and transmitted it to us in toto. Is grammar something where speakers "produce" (i.e. originate) constructions, or where they "reach for" them, from a pre-established inventory ...?'

This suggests an extension of repetition to apply not only to how a particular discourse is created, but to how language itself is created.

The broader significance of the study of repetition, then, lies in its reflection of something basic about language—its structure, in a concrete rather than abstract, reductionist sense; its coherence, the link between structure and meaning; and the human nature of grammar. Mukařovský (19) observes that poetic language de-automatizes standard language. In this paper, I explore the notion that repetition, which is artfully developed and intensified in literary

<sup>2</sup> Becker 1987 calls attention to Gertrude Stein's use of repetition. According to Walker (1984:43), 'The final version of *The making of Americans* was shaped by [Stein's] increasingly radical commitment to presenting repetition as the "reality" that informs human history.' This view of the significance of repetition reflects the thinking of a number of philosophers and poets, including Kierkegaard ([1843] 1946).

discourse, is spontaneous, pervasive, and often relatively automatic in conversation. Examining it is a way of linking the surface patterns of talk with interactional goals, and of understanding how people are linked to each other through talk in interaction.

#### FUNCTIONS OF REPETITION IN CONVERSATION

4. Why is there repetition in conversation? Why do we waste our breath saying the same thing over and over? (Why, for example, did I write the preceding sentence, which paraphrases the one before?) The varied purposes simultaneously served by repetition can be subsumed under the categories of production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. The congruence of these levels of discourse provides a fourth and over-arching function in the establishment of coherence and interpersonal involvement.

4.1. PRODUCTION. Repetition enables a speaker to produce language in a more efficient, less energy-draining way. It facilitates the production of more language, more fluently. For speakers whose styles favor cooperative overlap (Tannen 1984)—i.e. speakers who like a lot of talk going on in casual conversation, much of which occurs at the same time that others are speaking—repetition is a resource for producing ample and overlapping talk. Here I argue that the relative automaticity of repetition facilitates language production in conversation.

Neurolinguistic research demonstrates the automaticity of certain kinds of language production. Whitaker 1982 describes aphasic patients who suffered complete destruction of the language-producing areas of the brain, and consequently lost their spontaneous language capacity. Nevertheless, they retained the ability to repeat exactly; to shadow (i.e. repeat with a split-second delay); and to repeat with simple transformations, such as changes in tense, person, and sentence type. They were able to do this because this type of language production is performed in a different part of the brain: a part devoted to automatic functioning.

Whitaker further reports findings of neurolinguistic experiments which measured the flow of blood to the brain; these showed that automatic language production is both faster and less energy-draining than novel language production. His examples of automatic language production by brain-damaged aphasic patients are strikingly similar to the repetitions and variations found in samples of ordinary conversation. The research on aphasics provides evidence of the automaticity of these repeating strategies.

Repetition allows a speaker to set up a paradigm and slot in new information—where the frame for the new information stands ready, rather than being newly formulated. An example is seen in a narrative analysed at length in Tannen 1982, in which a woman talked about a man who worked in her office:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Transcripts are presented in lines, to facilitate reading by representing in print the chunking accomplished in speaking by intonation and prosody. The following transcription conventions are employed:

Comma: clause-final intonation ('more to come').

- (1) a. And hé knows Spanish  
 b. and hé knows French  
 c. and hé knows English  
 d. and hé knows German,  
 e. and HE is a GENTleman.

The establishment of the pattern allowed the speaker to utter whole new sentences while adding only small bits of new information.

Repetition, finally, enables a speaker to produce fluent speech while formulating what to say next. I have used the term 'linking repetition' (Tannen 1979:167) for a phenomenon found in narratives, told about a film (the much-analysed 'Pear Stories', Chafe 1980), by which some speakers repeated clauses at episode boundaries—in contrast to others who hesitated. Though neither added new information, the effect of the linking repetitions was more fluent narration.

To the extent, then, that repetitions and variations are automatic, they enable speakers to carry on conversation with relatively less effort, to find all or part of the utterance readymade—so they can get going with verbalization before deciding exactly what to say next.

4.2. COMPREHENSION. The comprehension benefit of repetition mirrors that of production. The automatic nature of repetition and variation facilitates comprehension by providing semantically less dense discourse. If some of the words are repetitious, comparatively less new information is communicated than if all words uttered carried new information. This redundancy in spoken discourse allows a hearer to receive information at roughly the rate the speaker is producing it. That is, just as the speaker benefits from some relatively dead space while thinking of the next thing to say, the hearer benefits from the same dead space and from the redundancy while absorbing what was just said. This contrasts with the situation that obtains when a written document is read aloud, and it may account for the difficulty of trying to comprehend such discourse—e.g. the frequent inability of listeners at scholarly conferences to follow fully (or at all) some papers read aloud. The hearer, deprived of redundancy in such

Question mark: rising intonation.

Period: sentence-final falling intonation.

Colon: elongation of vowel sound.

Two dots: perceptible pause of less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  second.

Three dots: half second of pause.

Extra dots: extra half-second of pause.

Dash: glottal stop (cutting-off of sound).

Accent: primary stress.

Capitalization: emphatic stress.

Brackets on successive lines, including those lacking top 'flap': two speakers talking at once.

Brackets with reversed 'flaps': latching (no inter-turn pause).

Slashes /?/ indicates indecipherable utterance; /words/ in slashes represent a best guess at uncertain transcription

Arrow at right speech continues without break on ensuing line.

Underline: repetitions.

cases, must pay attention to every word, taking in information at a rate much faster than that at which the author compiled it.

4.3. CONNECTION. Halliday & Hasan 1976 include repetition in their taxonomy of cohesive devices: it serves a referential and tying function. Repetition of sentences, phrases, and words shows how new utterances are linked to earlier discourse, and how ideas presented in the discourse are related to each other. But this is only the most apparent and straightforward way in which repetition mediates between the speaker and the material.

In a more pervasive and subtle way, repetition evidences a speaker's attitude, showing how it contributes to the meaning of the discourse. In terms of theme and rheme (Halliday 1967) or of topic and comment, repetition is a way of contributing to the rheme or comment. In the term which Labov 1972 applies to narrative, but which can be applied to all discourse, repetition is 'evaluative'—helping to answer in advance the question 'So what?' Here falls the function of repetition which is commonly, but perhaps imprecisely (cf. Koch 1983a), referred to as emphasis, as well as a range of other evaluations of a proposition, or relationships among propositions, which constitute cohesion.

Demonstration and discussion of these phenomena appear below; but perhaps an illustration is required here for clarification. Consider again Ex. 1. Repetition of *he* in 1e (*and HE is a GENTleman*) ties the last line to the first four, indicating that the person referred to is the same throughout. Repetition of *and he knows* also serves a tying function, indicating that all the languages named are known by the same referent. Beyond this simple function, however, the repetition of the phrases establishes a list-like rhythm—giving the impression that the languages which this person knows constitute a long list, longer even than the one given. Furthermore, and crucially, the evaluative effect of the list is to communicate that the speaker finds the length of the list impressive—and so should the listener. Moreover, the impact of the last line, *and HE is a GENTleman*, is greater by virtue of its suddenly varying the frame. It carries over the sense of admiration in the repetition of the rhythmic pattern which stresses *he*.

Almost paradoxically, repeating the frame first foregrounds and intensifies the part repeated, then foregrounds and intensifies the part that is different. To quote Jakobson (from Jakobson & Pomorska 1983:103), 'By focusing on parallelisms and similarities in pairs of lines, one is led to pay more attention to every similarity and every difference ...'

4.4. INTERACTION. The functions of repetition discussed under the headings of production, comprehension, and connection all refer to the creation of meaning in conversation—what might be called, following G. Bateson 1972, the 'message level' of talk. But repetition also functions on an interactional level—accomplishing social goals, or simply managing the business of conversation. Some functions observed in transcripts which I have studied (which are not mutually exclusive, and may overlap with previously discussed functions) include the following: getting or keeping the floor, showing listenership, providing back-channel responses, stalling, gearing up to answer or speak, humor and play, savoring and showing appreciation of a good line or a good joke, per-

effect (what Koch 1983a calls 'presentation as proof'), linking one speaker's ideas to another's, ratifying another's contribution (including another's clarification), and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a speaker's utterance. In other words, repetition not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but ties participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation.

**4.5. COHERENCE AS INTERPERSONAL INVOLVEMENT.** By serving these and other functions in production, comprehension, cohesion, and interaction, repetition serves an over-arching need for interpersonal involvement. Such involvement may be identified with what Goffman (1967:73), building on Durkheim's 1915 notion of positive and negative rites, called 'presentational deference', through which 'the recipient is told that he is not an island unto himself and that others are, or seek to be, involved with him and with his personal/private concerns.' In the schema of Lakoff 1979, it is a camaraderie strategy, arrived at by observance of the rules of rapport.

Repeating the words, phrases, or sentences of other speakers (a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) shows one's response to another's utterance, (c) shows acceptance of others' utterances and their participation, and (d) gives evidence of one's own participation. It provides a resource to keep talk going—where talk itself is a show of involvement, of willingness to interact, to serve positive face. All of this sends a metamessage of involvement (cf. G. Bateson). This may be the highest-level function of repetition—in the sense in which Bateson adapts B. Russell's notion of logical types to describe the metamessage level of interaction: the level at which messages about relationships are communicated.

In a closely related way, repetition also serves the purpose served by all conventionalized discourse strategies at every level of language: giving talk a character of familiarity, making the discourse sound right. This is a verbal analog to the pleasure associated with familiar physical surroundings: the comfort of home, of a favorite chair. It is the trust in a speaker who seems—by virtue of appearance, dress, kinesics, and ways of speaking—like one to be trusted. The pattern of repeated and varied sounds, words, phrases, sentences, and discourse structures gives the impression, indeed the reality, of a shared universe of discourse.

But how, in terms of language, is interpersonal involvement accomplished? An explanation may be found in Becker's 1982 notion of an aesthetic response—which he defines, following J. Dewey, as an emergent sense of COHERENCE: seeing how things fit together. I suggest that this experience also makes possible an emotional response. Perceiving meaning through the coherence of discourse constraints (Becker 1984a), as well as perceiving oneself as coherent in the interaction constituted by the discourse, creates an emotional experience of connectedness; this permits not only participation in the interaction, but also understanding of meaning.

Becker (1979:241) observes, 'For an aesthetic response to be possible, a text must appear to be more or less coherent'. The inability to perceive coherence 'drives people mad'. An aesthetic response, then, is not an extra or frivolous

aspect of language, but its core. Similarly, Friedrich (1986:160) calls the aesthetic the 'keystone' of his analysis of linguistic relativity—the foundation of a concept of truth that can reconcile disparate theoretical views.

Coherence is the goal—and, in frequent happy occurrences, the result—when discourse succeeds in creating meaning through familiar strategies. The familiarity of the strategies makes the discourse and its meaning seem coherent, and allows for the elaboration of meaning through play on familiar patterns: the eternal tension between fixity and novelty that constitutes creativity. Finally, it sends a metamessage of rapport between the communicators, who thereby experience that they share communicative conventions and inhabit the same world of discourse.

#### REPETITION AND VARIATION IN CONVERSATION

**5.1. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.** 'History repeats itself', a radio emcee announced; 'That's one of the things wrong with history.' This witticism reflects conventional wisdom which considers repetition undesirable in conversation. 'You're repeating yourself' can only be heard as a criticism. One cannot say, 'Wait a minute, I haven't repeated myself yet,' as one can say, 'Wait a minute, I haven't made my point yet.'

Evidence of negative associations with repetition abound. The stereotypical popular image of repetition in conversation is represented by Woody Allen (1982:363) in the screenplay of *Stardust memories*:

*And Jones and Smith, the two studio executives who are always seen together, Smith always yessing Jones, repeating what he says, appear on the screen next ...*

JONES And what about the cancer foundation ...

SMITH And what about the cancer foundation ...

JONES ... and the leukemia victims ...

SMITH ... and those leukemia victims ...

JONES ... and the political prisoners all over the world?

SMITH ... and the political prisoners ...

JONES What about the Jews?

SMITH The Jews!

The italicized description of the action, provided by the publisher, suggests a negative Tweedledee/Tweedledum interpretation of the repetition in the dialog; moreover, the repetition in the dialog seems intended to belie the verbalized concern for victims.

A reviewer (Prescott 1983:82) has criticized an author by saying, 'Her numbing repetition of perhaps a dozen significant sentences quickly becomes irritating ...' The poet W. H. Auden ([1956] 1986:3) observed that 'the notion of repetition is associated in most people's minds with all that is most boring and lifeless—punching time clocks, road drills etc.' He lamented that this makes 'an obstacle' of 'the rhythmical character of poetry' because 'rhythm involves repetition'.

The bad press which repetition in conversation has suffered (according to popular opinion, not descriptive linguists), is a consequence of the conduit metaphor (Reddy 1979), by which language is viewed as a neutral vehicle for conveying information. Any use of language that does not convey information

is seen as superfluous and therefore bad. Like many of the dynamics of conversation that I have been investigating—such as the use of details, the preoccupation with the events of others' lives (thought of as gossip), and the construction of dialog (a litany of *He says/She says*)—repetition is devalued in everyday conversation, even as it is highly valued in literary discourse by creative writers and scholars.

The remainder of this paper demonstrates, with reference to examples from conversational transcripts, that repetition is pervasive, functional, and often automatic in ordinary conversation. Most examples are from a dinner table conversation in which I participated, and which I have previously analysed in terms of conversational style (Tannen 1984). Supplementary examples are provided by other taped conversations in English and Greek.

5.2. FORMS OF REPETITION and variation in conversation can be identified according to several criteria. First, one may distinguish self-repetition and allo-repetition. Second, instances of repetition may be placed along a scale of fixity in form, ranging from exact (the same words uttered in a similar rhythmic pattern) to paraphrase (similar ideas in different words). Midway on the scale, and most common, is repetition with variation—including questions transformed into statements, or vice versa, and repetitions with changes of person or tense or other changes in wording. As repetition I also include patterned rhythm, in which wholly different words are uttered in the same syntactic and rhythmic paradigm as a preceding utterance. There is also a temporal scale ranging from immediate to delayed repetition. (The question of where the latter end of the scale is situated raises the question of how distant—in time, when speaking, or in space, when writing—a second utterance may be, and yet be seen as repetition.) Finally, repetitions may be classified according to their functions.

I shall not attempt here to illustrate every form and function of repetition, but rather will indicate the pervasiveness of repetition in conversation by exemplifying many of its forms and functions—showing evidence that repetition can be automatic, contributes to interpersonal involvement, and supports a revised view of linguistic competence.

5.3. EXAMPLES: THE PERVASIVENESS OF REPETITION. At the beginning of each semester, I ask students in my classes to record spontaneous conversations in which they participate; we then choose segments to transcribe and analyse throughout the semester. Each term, the assignment which everyone finds easiest is that which requires identification of repetitions in the transcripts. For example, the following segment came from a recorded conversation among four undergraduate housemates at home:

- (2) a. Marge: Can I have one of these Tabs?  
 b. Do you want to split it?  
 c. Do you want to split a Tab?  
 d. Kate: Do you want to split MY Tab? (laughter)  
 e. Vivian: No.

REPETITION IN CONVERSATION

- f. Marge: Kate, do you want to split my Tab!?  
 g. Kate: No, I don't want to split your Tab.

Of these seven lines, five are repetitions and variations of the paradigm established by a combination of Marge's question 2b with the last word of 2a. Included are the self-repetition of 2b-c, the allo-repetition of 2c-d, and repetition with slight variation. The functions of these repetitions include humor, seen in 2c-d, where *a Tab* is reinterpreted as *MY Tab* (note the accompanying laughter), and in reformulating a question when answering it, in 2f-g.

This example is not unusual. In another segment of the same conversation, Vivian tells about an amusing event involving her and Marge, who occupy different bedrooms in the house. Vivian had been lying in bed when she heard 'this—pounding upstairs, upon the ceiling in our room'. Vivian checked with Marge, who said she didn't hear it, and they returned to their respective rooms. Back in her room, however, Vivian continued to hear the pounding:

- (3) Vivian: So I stood on my bed →  
 Marge: She pounded on the ceiling, →  
 Vivian: and I pounded on the ceiling, →  
 Marge: she was pounding ...  
 Vivian: and I hear Marge  
 and I hear Marge dash out of her room,  
 come downstairs and open the door,  
 and I was like 'No Marge ...  
 She said 'Marge, it's me,'  
 Marge: I'm like, 'What is ...'  
 Vivian: I was pounding on my ceiling.  
 Marge: Bizarre!

This narrative, like the 'Tab' interchange, is structured around a kernel phrase *pounding on the ceiling*. As in the previous example, this kernel phrase is made up of parts of two preceding, contiguous phrases from which the paradigm is drawn: Vivian had begun the story by saying (a) *there was this pounding upstairs*, (b) *upon the ceiling in our room*.

Ex. 4 further illustrates what is pervasive in the transcripts prepared, year after year, by students in my classes. In this dyadic conversation, Frank complains that he has nothing to do because he is unemployed; his friend Terry encourages him to be more contemplative by suggesting he take advantage of the time to daydream. She suggests that he stand on a bridge and watch the water go under it.<sup>4</sup> He counters that he will finish the book he is reading:

<sup>4</sup> In the interest of brevity, I have paraphrased these lines from the transcript, telescoping the action and eliminating repetition of references to the bridge. This is how Terry expressed her suggestion:

- I know!  
 Go up to Key Bridge  
 and stand in the middle of Key Bridge  
 and watch the water go under the bridge.  
 THAT's a good way to daydream.

The fact that summarizing often means eliminating repetition indicates that repetition is characteristic of, and basic to, speaking.

- (4) Terry: THAT'S NOT DAYDREAMING! ... darn it!  
 Frank:            └[laughter]  
           Well daydreaming is something that comes natural!  
 Terry:    ┌You don't don't PLAN daydreaming.  
           └You don't even  
           you're not even hearing what I'm SAYING! What?  
 Frank:    You can't PLAN daydreaming ...  
           I'm gonna go daydream for a couple of hours guys  
           so  
 Terry:    └Yes you CAN plan it!  
           ┌You can plan daydreaming.

Thus speakers weave the words of others into the fabric of their own discourse—the thread of which is, in turn, picked up and rewoven. The repetitions and variations make individual utterances into a unified discourse, even as they are used for evaluation: to contribute to each speaker's point.

5.4. FUNCTIONS OF REPETITION IN AN EXTENDED MULTI-PARTY CONVERSATION. Not all transcripts show such pervasive multiple repetition, but many do, and all show some. For the consistency of examples taken from a single large body of talk, I will turn to examples from two and a half hours of a single dinner-table conversation which took place among six friends, four men and two women, all middle-class white—three from New York City, two from Los Angeles, and one British. Though this transcript is the basis of a number of other studies (the most extensive is Tannen 1984), most of the segments cited here have not been previously analysed, and those that have are being cited for new observations.

5.41. REPETITION AS PARTICIPATION. Exx. 2–4 show repetition of a kernel sentence in a story, or in the theme of an interchange. In these uses, each time the utterance is repeated, the theme is developed—slightly changed in meaning, as well as form. Another extremely common type of repetition, in a sense the most puzzling but also the most basic, is the repetition of a previous speaker's utterance. Person is varied if required by the change in speaker, but no information is added, and no perceptible contribution is made to the development of a story or theme. Thus, in the following segment, the participants are discussing the Whorfian Hypothesis. Having defined it, D, the linguist in the group, goes on:<sup>5</sup>

- (5) a. D: Y'know who else talks about that?  
 b.    Did jever read R. D. Laing?  
 c.    The divided self?  
 d. C: Yeah. But I don't /??/.  
 e. D: He talks about that too.  
 f. C: He talks about it too.

<sup>5</sup> The speaker referred to in this and other excerpts as D is the author. I generally represent speakers by pseudonyms, rather than initials, referring to myself by name in transcripts and by first person singular pronoun in text; however, in order to be consistent with other articles in *Lg.*, I have here adopted the practice of using initials for speakers, including myself, in examples and exposition

C's repetition, 5f, echoing D's 5e, seems to be simply a way of participating in the interchange—showing listenership and acceptance of D's utterance, and perhaps indicating that C too has read the book.

Such immediate repetitions of others' utterances are extremely frequent in the transcript. When S is serving wine, L (Libby) declines, and her refusal is immediately repeated by N and S, speaking almost in unison:

- (6) L: I don't drink wine.  
 N: She [doesn't drink wine.  
 S:       └Libby doesn't drink wine.

These immediate allo-repetitions are shows of participation and familiarity.

During the dinner conversation, each participant's work furnished a topic of talk. The preceding topic, the Whorfian Hypothesis, grew out of D's work as a linguist. The following segment of conversation occurred when participants were discussing violence in children's cartoons, relevant to C's work for an animation studio. D and L, the two women, claimed that, as children, they had been disturbed by violence in cartoons; three of the four men taking part in the conversation claimed they had not:

- (7) a. S: I never saw anything wrong with those things.  
 b.    I thought they were funny.  
 c. C:       └Yeah.  
 d. D: I hated 'em.  
 e. C: I agree. [i.e. with S]  
 f. P: What. The cartoons?  
 g. S: I never took them seriously.  
 h.    I never [thought anyone  
 i. D:       └I couldn't stand it.  
           [One page of transcript intervenes.]  
 j. S: I never ... took that seriously  
 k. P:       └I never could take it seriously.

In 7g and 7j, separated by a page of transcript, S repeats almost the same phrase. By restating his contribution, S continues to participate in the conversation, even though he has nothing new to say.

In 7k, P repeats what S said in 7g and 7j, with slight variation. Although 7k adds no new information to the conversation, it nonetheless contributes something crucial: P's participation. It is not only what P says that shows that he agrees with S, but also the way he says it. By repeating not only S's idea, but his words and syntactic pattern, P's contribution is a ratification of S's. At the same time, the three instances of a similar statement help constitute the discourse and give it its texture.

5.42. RATIFYING LISTENERSHIP. In ex. 8, C was telling about a promotional whistle-stop train tour in which he had been involved. When the train pulled into a station, pandemonium resulted as a crowd rushed the train:

- (8) a. C: they all wanna touch this ... silly little mouse  
 b. S: At five o'clock in the MORNING on the TRAIN station.  
 c. C: Yeah.

- d. N: In New Mexico.  
 e. C: In New Mexico.  
 f. With ice on the ... ICE hanging down from things ...

C ratifies S's contribution 8b by saying *Yeah*. But he ratifies N's contribution 8d by repeating it, incorporating it into his narrative in 8e-f.<sup>6</sup>

5.43. HUMOR is a common function of repetition with slight variation. Here is an example of wordplay following D's request for permission to tape:<sup>7</sup>

- (9) P: Just to see if we say anything interesting?  
 D: No. Just to see how you say nothing interesting.  
 P: Oh. Well I— I hardly ever say nothing interesting.

P also uses repetition as a resource for humor when D comments on how well-behaved P's dog Rover is. S simply agrees, but P converts D's statement into an agrammatical, wry one:

- (10) D: Rover's being so good.  
 S: I know.  
 P: He's being hungry.

Finally, the humor created by repeating can be appreciated by repeating. For example, the discussion of cartoons turned to why the two women, D and L, were disturbed by cartoon violence. S suggests it was because the women 'took them literally':

- (11) a. N: That's because you have a— /arcane/ view of reality.  
           [laughter]  
 b. D: Cause we're sensitive. [laughing]  
           [laughter]  
 c. L: Cause we're ladies.  
           [laughter]  
 d. S: Ladies ... Ladies. [laughing]

D and L build on the paradigm established by N, all three of them ironic and rewarded by laughter. Then S, in 11d, laughingly repeats *ladies* from L's 11c, in order to savor it, thereby showing his appreciation of her irony.

5.44. STALLING. Repeating a preceding utterance with slight variation is used in many other ways as well. One such way is to repeat a question, transforming 2nd to 1st person: this allows the responding speaker to fill the response

<sup>6</sup> The repetition of *ice* in C's utterance raises the question of the status of self-repetitions which seem to be false starts. Ochs 1979 considers them lexical repetitions. I believe, however, that a repetition which is part of a false start (e.g., hypothetically, *I—I—I don't know*) and is thus seemingly unintentional, differs fundamentally from one which seems intentional (again hypothetically, *It's very very small*). Yet, in its surface form, *ice* is repeated. Furthermore, false starts, hesitations, and other errors cannot be viewed only from the cognitive perspective. From the social perspective, they are often (if not always) purposeful in terms of presentation of self; thus, as Lakoff 1979 observes, a hesitant person may be more likable.

<sup>7</sup> A playwright, Glen Merzler, was inspired by my analysis of this conversation to write a play, *Taking comfort*, about a woman who tapes a Thanksgiving dinner in order to write a dissertation in linguistics. He found this repetition with variation amusing enough to insert it, verbatim, in his play.

slot without giving a substantive response. At one point in the conversation, N, an American Sign Language interpreter, was talking about ASL. P asked him a question, and N responded by restating it with rising intonation:

- (12) a. P: But how do you learn a new sign.  
       b. N: ... How do I learn a new sign?

During playback, I learned that N had been uncomfortable with the speed of P's speaking turns. This, combined with the pause preceding his answer 12b, led me to conclude that N repeated the question to slow down the conversation—an additional, related function of the repetition.

5.45. EXPANSION. Here D begins a dyadic interchange with P by asking a question:

- (13) a. D: Do you read?  
       b. P: Do I read?  
       c. D: Do you read things just for fun?  
       d. P: Yeah.  
       e. Right now I'm reading Norma Jean the Termite Queen.

P transforms D's 2nd person question 13a into the 1st person. D repeats her initial question with elaboration in 13c. P answers in 13e, grounding his expansion in the repetition with transformation of the question. Thus the reformulation of the question is the first step in a process of expansion; the question is used as a scaffold on which to construct on-going talk.

Ex. 14 occurred in the context of talk about the composer Schumann. (L and S are professional musicians). L had said that Schumann destroyed his fingers for piano-playing with a contraption which he designed to stretch them. This led to the following interchange:

- (14) a. D: I read something in the newspaper,  
       b. I won't tell you.  
       c. N: What contraption?  
       d. S: I don't want to hear about it.  
       e. D: You don't want to hear about it.  
       f. L: Tell it. Tell it.  
       g. N: We want to hear about it.  
       h. L: /?/  
       i. N: S can go in the other room.  
       j. S: I don't want to hear about it.

L's self-repetition in 14f signifies her eagerness to hear the (presumably gruesome) story. S repeats in 14j exactly what he said in 14d. In 14e, D ratifies what S says in 14d by transforming his 1st-person statement into the 2nd person. N uses the same syntactic frame in 14g to distinguish himself and the others from S. The result is a lot of talk resulting from a few words and ideas, linked together and distinguished by repetition.

The following example shows how repetition makes a fabric of conversation. Here S and his brother P recall the quonset huts in which they lived as children:

- (15) a. S: Cause they were built near the swamp.

- b. We used to go ... hunting frogs [in the swamps,  
 c. D: [Where was it.  
 d. Where were yours?  
 e. S: In the Bronx.  
 f. P: In the Bronx.  
 g. In the East Bronx?  
 h. D: How long did you live in it?  
 i. S: [Near the swamps?  
 j. ... Now there's a big coöperative building.  
 k. P: Three years.  
 l. D: THREE YEARS?

S is preoccupied with his recollection that the quonset huts were near the swamps, and he repeats this three times: in 15a, 15b, and 15i. In 15f-g, P utters *In the Bronx*, shadowing S's 15e—and also offering information that was as much his as S's, since they are brothers. P's second utterance in 15g is both a repetition of S's words and an immediate self-repetition with expansion, adding *east* and introducing rising intonation. (The intonation seems to orient the answer to D, the questioner, as if to say, 'Do you know where the East Bronx is?') S then echoes P's intonation (though not his words) when he utters 15i, with rising intonation, *Near the swamps?* Finally, P answers D's question 15h by uttering 15k. In 15l, D responds by repeating P's answer with emphasis. (Here breathy and loud voice quality signifies rhetorical disbelief, or appreciation.)

#### THE AUTOMATICITY OF REPETITION

6. As noted above, Whitaker 1982 reports neurolinguistic research which shows that repeating, varying, and shadowing prior utterances are automatic, rather than generative, language capacities. I have presented examples of these phenomena in conversation; it remains to show evidence of their automaticity. Is it coincidental that these types of language production can be automatic and are pervasive in conversation, or are they pervasive because they can be automatic? Bolinger (381) observes: 'How much actual invention, on this [generative grammar] model, really occurs in speech we shall know only when we have the means to discover how much originality there is in utterance.' If it can be shown that repetition in conversation is evidence of automaticity, rather than of 'originality' in utterance, then this study may contribute to answering Bolinger's question.

6.1. SHADOWING. The type of repetition in conversation that is most demonstrably automatic is shadowing: repeating what is being heard with a split-second delay. A number of examples previously cited include this phenomenon; e.g.,

- (7) j. S: I never ... took that seriously  
 k. P: [I never could take it seriously.

P begins to utter 7k a split second after S began 7j, and speaks along with him. In other words, P shadows S. He also does so here:

- (15) e. S: In the Bronx.  
 f. P: [In the Bronx.

Shadowing occurs frequently in the transcripts studied. For example, C shadows S, the host, when the latter offers the guests a choice of port or brandy after dinner (talk about the dinner, its food and rituals, interspersed the conversation):

- (16) a. N: I don't know what ... uh ... port tastes like.  
 b. S: Port is very sweet. Port is very rich. →  
 c. C: [Port is very sweet. Very rich. →  
 d. S: Syrupy red wine.  
 e. C: And brandy's very alcoholic.

C's 16c repeats, with slight variation, S's self-repetition (with variation) 16b. C begins 16c before S begins the second part of 16c, in which he says that port is *very rich*; yet C repeats this part of S's utterance as well. This indicates that C is shadowing S: repeating what he hears, as he hears it, with a split-second delay.

Ex. 17 is a segment of talk which I have previously analysed in detail (1983a, 1984) to demonstrate that overlapping talk can be constructive and rapport-building, rather than interruptive. I cite the segment here to demonstrate that the overlap and consequent metamessage of rapport are accomplished, in large part, by repetition:

- (17) a. S: Remember where W I N S used to be?  
 b. D: No.]  
 c. S: [Then they built a big huge skyscraper there?  
 d. D: No. Where was that.  
 e. S: Right where Central Park West met Broadway.  
 f. That [building shaped like that. [shows with hands]  
 g. P: [Did [I give you too much? [serving turkey]  
 h. D: [By Columbus  
 Circuit? ... That Columbus Circle?  
 i. S: [Right on Columbus Circle.  
 j. Here's Columbus Circle,  
 k. [here's Central Park West,  
 l. D: [Now it's [the Huntington Hartford Museum.  
 m. P: [That's the Huntington Hartford, right?  
 n. S: Nuhnuhno.  
 o. Here's Central Park West,  
 p. D: [Yeah.  
 q. S: here's Broadway.  
 r. We're going North, this way?  
 s. D: [uhuh  
 t. S: And here's this building here.  
 u. The Huntington Hartford is [on the South side.  
 v. D: [On the other- across.  
 w. Yeah, rightrightrightright.  
 x. [And now that's a new building with a:]  
 y. S: [And there was ...] [and] [there was a-  
 z. stores here,



what Pawley 1986 calls lexicalization: a phenomenon by which groups of words behave like single words.

6.2. PATTERNED RHYTHM. The syntactic and intonational patterns of S's utterances in 15 and 17 are reminiscent of each other:

- (15) j. NÓw there's a big coóperative building.  
 (17) c. Thén they built a big huge skýscraper there?  
 h' but . . . THIS is a húge skýscraper right there.

There are many ways in which these utterances are pre-patterned. The idea they express is itself a kind of standardized routine about how things have changed. The bigness of the new buildings is an expected part of this scenario: small quaint buildings are destroyed, being replaced by large impersonal ones. The routinized nature of these observations is paralleled by that of their form. This is the kind of thing one can say, and the way one can say it, at a time and a point in conversation like this.

S's repetition of a similar statement with a similar intonation pattern gives an inkling of patterned rhythm: a syntactic pattern is repeated with partially or completely different words, but similar rhythm and intonation. Another example comes from 17, when S begins to describe the neighborhood he has in mind. When D and P erroneously suggest that the place he has in mind is the Huntington Hartford Museum, S backs up and utters what sounds like a repetition, but actually is composed of different words:

- (17) j-k Hére's Columbus Circle, héré's Central Park West,  
 o-q Hére's Central Park West, héré's Broadway.

One of the links in these chains, *Here's Central Park West*, is the same; but in one case it is the first clause, and in the other it is the second. The remaining links are different: in one case *Columbus Circle*, and in the other *Broadway*. But the contours of the two lists are the same. I refer to these as lists, even though they are pairs of phrases: the intonation creates the impression of a list, implying that more phrases could be added (even though only two are actually given). This is similar to the effect of listing intonation in naming the languages spoken by the man in ex. 1.<sup>9</sup>

Another example of patterned rhythm occurs in a segment immediately preceding the lines cited in 8. Describing the pandemonium in the railroad station, C said:

- (20) a. C: Because everyone ... was ... they were so INSANE.  
 b. They'd come in and run in ...  
 c. and 'I wanna touch him.'  
 d. Well, when you have six thousand, five thousand,  
 e. six thousand ten thousand people come in,  
 f. they all wanna touch this ... silly little mouse

<sup>9</sup> I first identified the phenomenon of listing intonation in a study of interaction in a medical setting. In that study (Tannen & Wallat 1983), the pediatrician minimized the danger of a child's condition when talking to the child's mother, but when reporting to the staff of the medical facility, she emphasized the danger by use of listing intonation—creating the impression of a whole list of dangers, when in fact there was one: 'sudden death, intracranial hemorrhage'. In this list, the first link is simply the result of the danger expressed in the second.

Why does C say that the people *come in and run in*? The second verb phrases, with slight intensification, the idea of the first. (Johnstone 1984 examines such instant self-paraphrases as lexical couplets.) But it is not the case that the repetition with variation adds nothing: on the contrary, it creates the vivid impression of many people in great movement, through its intensifying, list-like intonation.

Another instance of list-like intonation is seen when C utters 20d-e: *you have six thousand, five thousand, six thousand ten thousand people come in*. In addition to the repetition of *come in* from 20b, there are four items in the list which describe how many people were involved. Such a list might be expected to follow an order of increasing numbers. Instead, the order of six, five, six, ten seems to be random; what is crucial is the rhythm established by the list. Furthermore, the violation of expected sequence contributes to the impression of confusion and disorder.

C again achieves a listing effect with a relatively contentless list in the following comment, spoken in the discussion about cartoons. He defends violence in cartoons by explaining that the maker wanted the cartoons to include a variety of scenes:

- (21) C: you have to run the gamut of everything.  
 /You get/ scary parts, good parts, this things,  
 and everything else.

Rather than giving a list of the various parts which a cartoon should have, C provides a relatively contentless list. Of the four kinds of parts he named, only one is specific: *scary parts*. *Good parts* is not specific; all parts of a work have to be good. *This things* is a kind of filler (also a speech error); and *everything else* is a filler which sums up. Yet the effect of C's comment is clear: cartoons should run the gamut of types of scenes. The meaning of the statement lies not in the meanings of the words, but in the patterned rhythm: the listing intonation.

The intonational pattern of a speaker's utterance also provides a resource for the participation and play of others. Throughout the dinner table conversation, S (the host) engages in self-mockery by simultaneously displaying and parodying hosting behavior. The model for his parody is his grandmother. Picking up on S's pattern, D invites P to stop carving the turkey and start eating; she says, *Sit, sit*. N immediately plays on this pattern by saying, *No, carve, carve*.

The reduplication in *Sit, sit* signifies intensity ('Sit immediately', or 'I insist that you sit')—much as, in 17, the triple repetition *Nuhnuhno* and the quintuple repetition *righttrighttrightright* serve to intensify the responses. By contrast, the reduplication in *Carve, carve* seems to signify repeated aspect: 'Keep carving', or 'Carve away'. Repetition also shows repetitive aspect in an explanation by C of a certain method of learning. In a discussion of learning theories, he described the behavior of a learner by saying, *and you miss and you miss*.

A final example of listing intonation, and also of exact repetition for repeated aspect, comes from a study of involvement in Modern Greek conversational narratives (Tannen 1983b). The speaker is telling a group of women about an

experience in which a man threw her down and tried to rape her. She dramatizes what she said to him:

- (22) a. *Tón évriza, 'Dén ntrépese, paliánthrope?'*  
 b. *Toupa, toupa, toupa ekeí ...*  
 c. *'Sátire, yéro, aidéstate, salíari,'*  
 d. *Toupa, toupa, toupa.*  
 a. 'I cursed him, "Aren't you ashamed, scoundrel?"  
 b. I-told-him, I-told-him, I-told-him there ...  
 c. "Satyr, (dirty) old-man, repulsive (creature), slobberer,"  
 d. I-told-him, I-told-him, I-told-him.'

In 22c, the four epithets with which the speaker addresses her attacker seem to represent a longer list of names which she called him. Furthermore, the two sets of triple *toupa* 'I-told-him' give the impression that she kept on yelling at him, emitting a stream of abuse.

#### REPETITION IN AN AESTHETIC RESPONSE

7. The dovetailing of these multiple dimensions of repetition in an aesthetic response is seen below, in which D and P (who is recently divorced) use repetition to jointly terminate a discussion of how, upon first getting divorced, one wants to date many people; but then—

- (23) a. D: Then you get bored.  
 ...  
 b. P: We'll, I think I got bored.  
 [D laughs]  
 c. Well I— I mean basically what I feel is  
 d. what I really like ... is people.  
 e. And getting to know them really well.  
 f. And you just CAN'T get to know  
 g. .... TEN people REALLY WELL.  
 h. You can't do it.  
 i. D: Yeah right.  
 j. Y' have to there's no—  
 k. Yeah there's no time.  
 l. P: There's not time.  
 m. D: Yeah ... 'strue.

P's turn (23c–g) is tied to D's by repetition with variation and expansion in 23b of D's statement 23a. P's argument is then structured by a series of self-repetitions, as each utterance picks up a word or phrase from a previous one. This is best illustrated by reproducing the transcript with repeated words circled and linked:

Well I— I mean basically (what) I feel is  
 (what) I (really) like . is (people)  
 And (getting to know) them (really well).  
 And (you just can't) (get to know)  
 . TEN (people) (REALLY WELL).  
 (You can't) do it.

Finally, in 23i–m, P and D weave each other's words together into a coda comparable to that of a musical composition, through the picking up and repeating of *Yeah, there's no(t), and time*.<sup>10</sup>

The metamessage of involvement communicated by repetition can gainsay a message of disagreement communicated by the words spoken. In 23, P's discourse agrees with D's, and builds on it. In 24, P's meaning disagrees, but his strategy of repeating agrees. In the discussion of eating habits of which ex. 19 was a part, after P's explanation that spending time preparing food results in his eating less, D offers congratulations, which P declines to accept:

- (24) a. D: Hmm.  
 b. Well then it works,  
 c. then it's a good idea.  
 d. P: It's a good idea in terms of eating,  
 e. it's not a good idea in terms of time.

In expressing his disagreement, P does not just say *No it's not*. He weaves D's words of 24c into his rejoinder, using this agreement as the basis for his disagreement and casting both in the mold of her statement. His disagreement violates positive face, the need for rapport; but the form of his disagreement, repetition, honors positive face by ratifying D's utterance and giving a joint coherence to their discourse. (Note too that his repeated phrases in 24d–e, *a good idea in terms of*, are spoken quickly and with monotonic low intonation, whereas D's initial use of the phrase was uttered at normal pacing with stress on *idea*. In other words, this is another example of the automaticity of repetition in subsequent reference).

#### INDIVIDUAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

8. My research documents the pervasiveness of repetition for conversation in Modern Greek and in several varieties of American English. Conversations recorded by my students indicate that the conversation of adolescents is particularly rich in repetition. I expect, however, that degree and type of repetition differ with cultural and individual style.

Since repetition of sentences and ideas is a means of keeping talk going in interaction, the relative frequency of this type of repetition should be correlated with the cultural value placed on the presence of talk in interaction. This is supported by the infrequency of repetition and other prepatterned stretches of discourse, as observed by Scollon (p.c.) among Athabaskan Indians, who place relative positive value on silence in interaction (cf. Scollon 1985). In striking contrast are the talk-valuing cultures of East European Jewish-Americans (Tannen 1984) and of Black Americans (Erickson 1984), among those who have been observed to favor syntactic repetition.

Becker 1984b suggests that the repeating strategies which he describes in a

<sup>10</sup> Hymes 1981 argues that American Indian oral narrative is poetic because it has line and verse structure. For him, in contrast to Tedlock 1972, it is the verse rather than the line structure that is central. Prodded by Hymes, I have observed verse structure in conversation as well. This segment too exhibits verse structure: lines 23a–b constitute an introductory verse structured around *you get bored*, lines 23c–h form the core about *getting to know people* and 23i–m are the coda structured around *Yeah and no time*.

wayang drama are characteristic of a Javanese aesthetic of density. Moreover, he observes repeating strategies in other cultural patterns, including characteristic pathologies: a common way of expressing madness in Java is echolalia (p.c.) Another practice which Becker describes (1984c:109) fits this pattern as well. When East Javanese audiences enjoy a lecture, they repeat phrases which they appreciate. An American guest lecturer was unnerved by the buzz of voices in the audience, mistaking the show of appreciation as lack of attention. This misunderstanding results from divergent, culturally patterned, strategies of repetition.

Research such as that cited above indicates that Black English makes use of self- and allo-repetition in characteristic ways. Thus Erickson 1984 finds in Black English conversation the allo-repetition of call/response that typifies audience participation in Black worship (Heath 1983). Black preaching also contains a great deal of self-repetition, as seen in the speeches of Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson. Consider, for example, King's account of an epiphanic experience, in which he heard a voice he identified as Christ's telling him to keep fighting: *He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone* (Raines 1986:33).<sup>11</sup>

Self-repetition is also found in Black English conversation. For example, Hansell & Ajitotutu (1982:92) note that, in talk among a white researcher, a black assistant, and two black teenagers (recorded by John Gumperz), one of the teenagers adopts a "public address" style similar to that used by black preachers and politicians'. Although the authors are concerned with other aspects of this discourse, the transcript shows that it includes both exact repetition (*Now you know I'm right about it / you know I'm right about it*) and parallelism built on the construction *X is a dog*, including repetition of the word *dog*:

Now they make it look like Wallace is a dog  
and Nixon is the next dog  
and Humphrey is/well .. you know  
a little bit higher than the other two dogs ...  
but he's still a dog (91)

Johnstone 1987 argues that the grammatical structure of Arabic makes repetition strategies especially available to speakers. Thus cultural patterns provide a range from which individuals choose strategies which they habitually use, making up their individual styles. In the examples from the dinner-table conversation, preliminary impressions suggest that P frequently repeats others' utterances (17, *That's the Huntington Hartford, right?*; and 15, *In the Bronx*). S often repeated his own (7, *I never took that seriously*; 14, *I don't want to hear about it*). C frequently uses relatively contentless listing intonation (20,

<sup>11</sup> A letter published in the New York Times Book Review, December 28, 1986, commenting on the review in which these lines were quoted, points out that Raines, the reviewer, as well as the author of the book about King which he was reviewing, missed the fact that the phrases here repeated by King are taken from the old hymn, 'Never alone', which would have been familiar to King's audience

*come in and run in; 21, scary parts, good parts, this things, and everything else*). And D frequently utters; immediate self-paraphrases (24, *Then it works, then it's a good idea.*) Documenting individual and cultural repeating strategies, like other aspects of individual and cultural styles, remains a relatively unexplored and particularly promising area of research.

#### CONCLUSION

9. The view of repetition which I propose echoes Jakobson's view of parallelism in poetry (1966:428-9):

'... any word or clause when entering into a poem built on pervasive parallelism is, under the constraint of this system, immediately incorporated into the tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values. The metaphoric image of "orphan lines" is a contrivance of a detached onlooker to whom the verbal art of continuous correspondences remains aesthetically alien. Orphan lines in poetry of pervasive parallels are a contradiction in terms, since whatever the status of a line, all its structure and functions are indissolubly interlaced with the near and distant verbal environment, and the task of linguistic analysis is to disclose the levels of this coaction. When seen from the inside of the parallelistic system, the supposed orphanhood, like any other componential status, turns into a network of multifarious compelling affinities.'

If one accepts that at least some (and probably all) of conversation is also a system of pervasive parallelism—though not necessarily rigid in the same way as poetry—then Jakobson's observations apply as well to conversation. For 'orphan lines', one might substitute the notion of single sentences considered in isolation. Sentences and parts of sentences do not occur in isolation: rather, they echo each other in a 'tenacious array of cohesive grammatical forms and semantic values', and intertwine in a 'network of multifarious compelling affinities'. One cannot therefore understand the full meaning of any sentence without considering its relation to other sentences—both synchronically, in its discourse environment, and diachronically, in prior text.

I have presented examples of repetition in ordinary conversation to illustrate its pervasiveness, and some of its forms and functions. I have suggested that repetition in conversation can be relatively automatic—and that its automaticity contributes to its functions in production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. These dimensions operate simultaneously to create coherence in discourse as it builds on interpersonal involvement. Simply put, repetition is a resource by which conversationalists together create a discourse, a relationship, and a world. Understanding the pervasiveness and significance of repetition supports a re-evaluation of linguistic competence along the lines suggested by Becker and Bolinger: less newly generated, more modeled on prior utterances, and hence more interactive.

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