LARA

LEARNING AND RESIDENCE ABROAD

UNIT FOURTEEN

Language and Social Identity

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

> Questions of language are basically questions of power.
> (Chomsky *Language and Responsibility.*
> Harrestin Press 1979, p 191)

> Yolland: Poteen - poteen - poteen. Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be ... hermetic, won't it?
>
> Owen: You can learn to decode us.
> (Brian Friel, *Translations.* Faber and Faber p.40)

This unit is the unit that has the closest links to sociolinguistics and particularly to that branch of sociolinguistics which is influenced by anthropology, interactional sociolinguistics, and to that branch of anthropology concerned with language and communication, linguistic anthropology. The focus is on the ways in which language is used to communicate social identity. Our regional, class and ethnic identities are communicated through the language(s) and varieties of language we speak and these languages and styles of speaking symbolise our membership of particular group(s). Although we have some freedom and agency in our choice of language, we are also determined and positioned by our language within the social hierarchy. So issues of language and social identity are political issues concerned with power and ideology.

Students can use the ideas in this unit in three main ways. If they are studying a particular group which has been formed by ethnic or regional or occupational ties over some period of time, then an important part of this study is the collection of linguistic and interactional data of the kind outlined here. Secondly, students may choose to study an event (for example, Sophie studied the Carnival in Nice) and this unit introduces students to the idea of a speech event and how it can be looked at systematically. Thirdly, students may decide to focus on a more sociolinguistic project, such as compliment-giving, and they can link this type of speech behaviour to a more ethnographic understanding of identity.

2. Links with other units

The notion of 'identity', introduced in Unit 13, is taken further, looking at how language conveys and helps to construct social identity. Aspects of other units are taken up again, here, to illustrate different aspects of language and communication. For example, aspects of non-verbal communication (see Unit 3) are part of an individual's 'communicative style' introduced in this unit; the idea of shared cultural knowledge (Unit 4) links with the ethnography of communication introduced in Unit 4 and discussed here; and the relationship between language and gender identity introduced in Unit 6. Also, the idea of language as a way of categorising the world was introduced in Unit 10 (ethnosemantics) and is important in Unit 15 on local-level

politics and in Units 16 and 17 on Belief and Action where language as a political and symbolic force are revisited. Unit 17 on discourse and power is closely related to this unit and several of the items in this unit could be carried over to Unit 17 or certainly revisited there. This unit is closest in content to aspects of a sociolinguistic course which students may have followed. Sociolinguistic examples from French, Spanish, German and other languages can usefully be included here.

3. Background notes

The relationship between language and social identity is difficult to understand without a theory of social constructivism. Students should by now be familiar with the idea that the facts and 'reality' around them are socially constructed, that our understanding of what is real is the product of our particular society and its social and cultural practices. So our notion of what 'family' is comes from our own experiences and the discourses about 'family' that we read about and hear. Our social reality is largely constructed by language which we use to 'fix' notions and perceptions and make them public to others (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Berger and Berger 1972). For example, the language of pollution and cleanliness used in the Forsythe article (see Unit 13) uses language to categorise and classify 'them' and 'us'. The most powerful means that we have to categorise or use classificatory systems is language. It is not surprising, therefore, that social identity who we perceive ourselves to be and who society perceives us to be is established and maintained through language (Gumperz 1982). Our class, ethnicity, age and roles are, in Gumperz's terms, communicatively produced. The way we speak ties us into being members of particular social groups because of the particular dialects and varieties of language which we speak. To this extent, we seem to be determined by our language. For example, if we grow up in the Breton-speaking community described by McDonald (1986), then our identity as Bretons, in some way in contrast to and in opposition to the French, is determined by this experience. But a Breton speaker can also choose how much Breton to speak and to that extent is not totally determined by their language history but is a free agent. This tension between determinacy and agency is always there when we study language and social identity.

However, since it is so difficult for us to step outside our ways of experiencing the world, we tend to think of ourselves as relatively free agents who talk how we like and think what we like. We rarely think about the fact that there may be quite different ways of experiencing the world from the way we normally do. For this reason, this unit and the later units focus on the extent to which our social reality is constructed by ideology. In other words, who we are and what we experience is the product of a particular subject position from which stem certain interests. To take an obvious example, the language of the law courts or of the medical world construct for their speakers an authority which excludes those who do not 'speak' that language and serves the interests of those who do. Ideology enters into talk at all points, whether it is in the 'shitwork' of women's conversations discussed in Unit 6 on gender or the language of institutions and bureaucracy which excludes those found not fit or competent to receive the scarce resources on offer. So language and social identity are not merely about matching up varieties of language with a particular identity, it is also about power and the everyday politics of interaction (see Unit 17 for further discussion).

Ralph Grillo (1989) in discussing the politics of language suggests three main approaches: language as political object, language as political resource, and language as control. The first of these is concerned with macro issues and links up most directly with the previous unit on nationalism and ethnic identity. Here issues are raised such as the use of language as a symbolic weapon to form or challenge national identity. For example, the use of both French and German have figured much more conspicuously to articulate French and German identity and nationality than English has to articulate British identity (but see comments on the national curriculum in the previous unit).

This approach is well represented in the work of the sociologists of language and, notably, in the studies by Joshua Fishman on language and ethnicity and the related issues of language maintenance and loss among minorities. In a recent book reviewing the maintenance and possible growth of minority 'languages-in-culture' (1991), he discusses the significance of boundary maintenance among groups forced to 'spend almost all of one's cultural resources on damage control, that is, on merely staying alive within a cultural reality that is not of one's own making' (p. 411). Ethnic consciousness and the so-called ethnic revival have privileged language both as indexical of the cultural practices of an ethnic group and, more generally, as symbolic of an ethnic group and its survival within a majority culture. So a language is seen to stand for an ethnic group and to be an ethnic weapon in the struggle for recognition and rights.

Although students may find themselves exposed to these macro issues, mediated through the perceptions of the group they are studying, the unit focuses on the second of Grillo's approaches: language as a political resource which is looking at language and social identity from a micro perspective. It is at this point that the concept of "social identity" needs some explanation. It is contrasted with the more general notion of 'identity' which is usually associated with the psychological literature on personality and interpersonal relations. 'Social identity' implies one's identity as member of a group within a social hierarchy. As such, it draws in and on issues of politics and power as well as ethno-cultural issues. So class, ethnicity, gender and regional factors will all contribute to one's social identity.

Within this approach, language is seen as a resource both to control the political process and as a means of communicating one's social identity and sense of belonging. The approach has been developed by American anthropologists and sociolinguists, such as John Gumperz, Frederick Erickson, Deborah Tannen, Susan Phillips and Roger Shuy and by British anthropologists such as Maurice Bloch, David Parkin, Ralph Grillo, Brian Street, Roger Hewitt and sociolinguists such as Marilyn Martin-Jones, Ben Rampton and Celia Roberts.

The American tradition has focused on face-to-face interaction, linking the detailed analysis of how conversations are interactionally managed with the symbolic messages given off by such interactions. These messages convey and may also help to construct a particular social identity both within that interaction and across interactions. British social anthropologists have been more concerned with more general notions of rhetoric and metaphor and how they relate to conceptual systems. But more recently anthropologists such as Brian Street and Roger Hewitt have been

exploring varieties of language and literacies as social practice challenging the dominant notions of 'literacy' and 'ethnicity'.

John Gumperz's work has illuminated the relationship between language, social identity and power by focusing on the bureaucratic processes which control so much of our lives in modern urban societies (Gumperz 1982 and Gumperz (ed) 1982). The language required to succeed in these bureaucratically defined encounters is contrasted with the language resources of those groups who do not form the dominant, largely white and male, group who are society's decision makers. So, for example, the job interview, the school classroom, the courtroom and so on all require a particular 'communicative style' which is largely the property of the dominant social class. This is the formal language which Basil Bernstein called 'elaborated code'. As Ralph Grillo explains (1989b), this 'code' is perceived as rational and logical with a high level of explicitness and standardisation. It is concerned with propositions rather than performance, with apparent transparency rather than metaphor.

The central point that Gumperz and his associates have made is that when people using this code or style interact with others using a different one, then the less powerful group will be judged according to the norms and strategies of the more powerful one. So differences in style are used to judge and stereotype others as of lesser competence or with behavioural or personality problems. Thomas Kochman in *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (1981, University of Chicago Press) argues that 'style pervades every aspect of life.' His study of black and white Americans as students and in community meetings suggests that there are differences in both style and interpretation of style which create and feed into conflictual relations. The white group Kochman worked with tended to see emotional behaviour as threatening whereas the black group saw it as reflecting intensity of feeling. Whereas the white group appealed to outside authority to make their case, the black group saw an authoritative idea as one that had been tested in personal argument and struggle. At its most extreme, subdued reasoning is pitted against passionate persuasion.

The video segment on the housing interview suggested for this unit is an example of a black applicant stereotyped as difficult by a white housing officer and less likely to get fair treatment as a result. This is a clear example of the dominant white, rational and subdued style in contact with the passionate, persuasive rhetoric of the black applicant. The evaluative judgements that are made by speakers when they experience such differences are based on both communicative and symbolic factors. People anticipate that they will share the same ways of doing a conversation or managing a meeting so that information and attitudes can be conveyed. But they are also tuned into the symbolic function of communication. As Michael Moerman suggests (Moerman 1988), if one or several speakers overlaps the others' talk, then this has a social impact: another speaker gets the floor. But it may also have cultural or symbolic significance. Depending on the communicative traditions of a particular group, these may be interpreted as conveying 'solidarity' and involvement (as with Italian American groups or New York Jewish speakers) or as impolite or excluding.

It is because of the dual function of language, the communicative and the symbolic, in constructing and evaluating identity that Gumperz argues for the need for 'communicative flexibility:'

The real problem is that whatever the situation, whether a formal interview or an informal meeting, the need for all communication for all people who are relative strangers to each other is to achieve a communicative flexibility, an ability to adapt strategies to the audience and to the signs, both direct and indirect, so that the participants are able to monitor and understand at least some of each other's meaning. Meaning in any face-to-face encounter is always negotiable; it is discovering the grounds for negotiations that requires the participants' skills. Many of the meanings and understandings, at the level of on-going processes of interpretation of speaker's intent, depend upon culturally specific conventions, so that much of the meaning in any encounter is indirect and implicit. The ability to expose enough of the implicit meaning to make for a satisfactory encounter between strangers or culturally different speakers requires communicative flexibility. (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982:14)

The American anthropologists and sociolinguists working on face to face interaction have identified a number of features which, working together, can be said to characterise a group's most frequently used communicative style. Deborah Tannen (1984) has suggested the following list:

- When to talk
- What to say
- Pacing and pausing
- Listenership
- Intonation
- Formulaic aspects
- Indirectness
- Cohesion and coherence
- Non-verbal features

In her analysis of dinner table talk among six Americans using different 'conversational styles' (1984), she examined some of these features in trying to account for how well the group communicated together and how comfortable they felt. She identified five specific devices which were misread by some of the group:

- 'Machine-gun questions'
- Mutual revelation/personal statements
- Use of ethnically marked or in-group associated expressions
- Story rounds
- Ironic or humorous routines (p. 145)

The work of Gumperz, Tannen, Phillips, Erickson and the Scollons has been drawn on to produce a student handout on Communicative style. Students should find it interesting to think about their own communicative style(s) and how these differ from

speakers with whom they interact. They may find it easy to identify accent and vocabulary differences but relatively harder to notice grammatical and discourse differences and constructive use of socio-cultural knowledge.

As well as monitoring their own and others' communicative behaviour and thinking about the stereotypes and misjudgements that can arise when people lack 'communicative flexibility', they may also find it useful to be aware of the social psychological literature on language attitudes. This is usefully summed up in John Edwards' *Language, Society, Identity* (1985).

The studies of people's attitudes to the standard and prestigious varieties of language are extraordinarily consistent. Almost without exception, standard dialects and accents are associated with high status and competence whereas regional, ethnic and non-standard varieties are associated with lower status and competence, but with more integrity and attractiveness. These studies have been carried out without any ethnographic insights into the speakers' world and, therefore, the results need to be treated with considerable caution as many anthropologists working with language would attest. However, students may well collect data in which informants discuss their use of language and relate or contrast it to the standard or other varieties. So it is useful for them to be aware of the social and cultural pressures which contribute to attitude formation and, particularly, resistance to certain varieties of language.

The third of Grillo's approaches to the politics of language he describes as language as control. Here both the Marxist influence on ideology, where discourse is perceived as a means of controlling people's lives (see, for example, the work of critical theorists such as Althusser and Gramsci) and what is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are important. The work of the former has influenced the studies in critical linguistics that are discussed in Unit 17 and is not discussed further here, but the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is significant because of its links with a semantic approach to ethnography and the central notion of relativity.

In what is called its strong form, the hypothesis developed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf states that language determines the way we think and see things – our world view: 'Human beings ... are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.... The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (Sapir, E *Culture, language and personality* 1966 p. 69). Despite the trenchant attacks on their work, the notion that we live in a culturally and linguistically relative world has gained a new recognition in a post-modern society fleeing the essentialist and totalising myths of earlier cultural theory. It is also part of the theory of social constructivism mentioned earlier in this introduction.

A student ethnographer, working with new language and cultural practices, should find illuminating the idea that language orientates speakers so that certain aspects of material and conceptual reality are significant and others are less marked. Attention to the linguistic system, to discover the way events, ideas and things are classified has already been introduced in ethnosemantics. Students can now draw on the more general notion of linguistic relativity to understand how aspects of the linguistic code construct for a particular group a specific perspective of the world.

A radical re-interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been offered by feminist linguists. Borrowing from Saussure and the French psycho-analytic tradition, notably from Lacan, the radical feminist position is that the most powerful reality with which we live is the one imposed by language and that language is inevitably androcentric, or to use Dale Spender's well known term 'Man made'. Women, therefore, became muted, since men control all meaning, and it is only by finding a new language, a women's language, that women will find a voice again.

Among others, Deborah Cameron (1992) while sympathetic to the view as a feminist, asserts that language itself cannot be totally androcentric but that men control its use since they have social, political and economic dominance. In other words, it is the dominant group that make certain discourses powerful rather than the discourses itself. Like Cameron, it seems possible to take a position in the middle in which language does not define reality in any absolute sense but it works, ideologically, with other social and political realities to position people within the social hierarchy. Students could take further the issues of language and gender identity introduced in Unit 6 to explore issues of communicative style in female/male interaction. And certainly, as they work with a group, both the ways in which women are represented in language and the different styles in which women and men communicate can pose some critical questions in understanding identities.

Student ethnographers have three key problems to handle in attempting to make sense of a cultural group. Firstly, they have to learn to be sensitive to variety, difference and the salient patterns and lexical items in the foreign language. Secondly, they have to appreciate the significance of these differences and patterns as, symbolically, voicing identity. Thirdly, they have to come to appreciate that there is no simple and necessary relationship between a certain style of language and ethnic or other social identity. This is no easy task and grinding to a halt at any intermediate stage along the way may only help to construct and reinforce stereotypes.

Roger Hewitt's work on young black and white people in London (Hewitt 1986) is an excellent ethnographic challenge to simple correlations between language use and ethnic identity. He has shown that both use and competence in and attitudes about Creole vary enormously within the black British communities who formed part of his study in South London. In particular, he noted the extent to which young black people code-switched between Creole and London English. For example, the switch to Creole within a white dominated group would frequently be a symbol of resistance. He also studied the extent to which young whites learnt to use Creole and the extent to which this gave them, however temporarily, membership in a black group. Hewitt concludes that it would be quite wrong to see the use of Creole by black speakers as a fixed, salient marker of black identity. Most of the time, a non-ethnically marked London English was spoken, with Creole used strategically when issues of race and racism were explicit.

Roger Hewitt's work articulates a very complex interpretation of what, in the sociolinguistic literature, is defined as a speech community. There are many definitions of this concept (see Hudson 1980 p. 25-30) but all of them include the

notion of sharedness and most of them, the idea of frequency. Gumperz's definition is:

> any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use. (Gumperz 1968)

People feel that they are part of a speech community not merely because they speak the same language (English speakers from Britain and the USA may not think of themselves as part of the same speech community) but because they share the same communicative style and identify themselves as part of the community for other reasons which may be political, historic, ethnic and so on.

If membership in a speech community involves a shared communicative style, then most people will be members of several speech communities, especially in complex urban societies. And although language or style function within a speech community to create boundaries between groups, these boundaries are fluid and permeable in urban societies, as Roger Hewitt's work has shown. So, people may belong to several and/or overlapping speech communities and as such have several identities. Any one of these identities is pressed into service by the demands of a particular social encounter: there are ways of being a student, being part of your family or neighbourhood, being a member of a women's group and so on. A good example of a speech community or what might be called a 'community of practice' is the Petanque club in Aubervilliers studied by one student. The rules of the game and how the different groups of players related to each other were discovered through participant observation and close attention to the ways of speaking of the different members.

Code-switching, as Hewitt shows, is one way of marking both that you have several identities and that you are part of a particular community for whom code-switching is a marker of identity. As Gumperz has also shown (1982), it is the symbolic act of switching which is as important as the communicative use of a particular variety to convey a message. By code-switching strategically, at given moments within a conversation, speakers give off messages to each other about their social identity. There have been many studies of code-switching in the last ten years and students interested in projects on language and social identity may find the more anthropologically orientated studies particularly interesting. For example, Monica Heller's studies of service encounters in Montreal and Toronto are good examples of how people code-switched between French and English to mark and maintain ethnic identity (1982).

For beginner ethnographers, the concept of 'speech community' may help them to focus on the relationships and communicative styles of the groups they wish to study. They can tune in to the way people speak, as a social rather than an individual phenomenon, and to the perceptions and attitudes towards language which the groups use as markers of their own identities. In this way they can attend to both language and ethnographic concerns, linking them together in the tradition of the 'ethnography of communication.'

From an early paper on 'the ethnography of speaking' (1962), Dell Hymes together with Joel Sherzer and John Gumperz developed what is in effect a new sub-discipline: the ethnography of communication (see Saville-Troike 1986 for an excellent overview and Unit 4 for an introduction). They were concerned with the question 'what does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community and how does he or she learn?' In other words, how do they come to be communicatively competent within their own speech community? This entails not only knowing the linguistic rules and principles of communication needed for social interaction but also the cultural knowledge that gives it meaning and resonance.

Within the ethnography of communication, the basic unit is not the linguistic code but the 'speech event'. Speech events function as micro social systems (Gumperz 1984), giving insights into the way the community functions and makes sense to itself. Speech events were, typically, rather formal and ritual encounters such as religious ceremonies and other public events. A classic text is Charles Frake's *How to ask for a drink in Subanun* in which he describes the elaborate rituals involved in social drinking. There are three stages: talking, competitive drinking and game drinking. In the latter two stages, the performance of both talk and drinking can buy an individual status. Game drinking can involve highly elaborate poems and songs among the few remaining 'beer' drinkers. Frake sums up the event:

> the Subanun drinking encounter thus provides a structural setting within which one's social relationships beyond his everyday associate can be extended, defined and manipulated through the use of speech. The cultural patterning of drinking talk lays out an ordered scheme of role play through the use of terms of address, through discussion and argument, and through display of verbal art. The most skilled in 'talking from the straw' are the de facto leaders of the society. In instructing our stranger to Subanun society how to ask for a drink, we have at the same time instructed him how to get ahead socially.
>
> (Frake 1964:172).

More recently, the ethnography of communication has been used to study groups and events within complex urban societies, for example, native American Indian groups, classroom ethnography and heroin addicts.

Hymes designed a useful mnemonic: SPEAKING (see Handout 5) which is helpful in providing a formal description of an event. However, as Gumperz and others have shown, other methodologies such as discourse analysis need to be included to account for the situated interpretation of events as they are accomplished moment by moment.

The significance of ethnography of communication for student ethnographers lies in its focus on communication as the central means of holding people and institutions together. The events of a speech community can be studied in order to understand the way in which social meaning is expressed within that group. The detailed ways

in which language is used, for example, to celebrate mass, run a meeting or manage a neighbourhood event gives access to the cultural systems of the group.

This unit is about the way language practices can be studied in order to illuminate the social identities of particular groups. Students can use these ideas to sustain a continuous monitoring process of language use and connect it to the other ethnographic data they are collecting in a holistic way. Or they may decide to study a particular set of speech events, focusing on the events rather than group in the tradition of the ethnography of communication. Either way, as language students, a study of the intricate relationship of language, social identity and cultural practice provides a natural entry point to their own linguistic and cultural development.

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SECTION TWO

1. Outline of a session

1. Introduction: 'You are what you speak'
2. Assignment Feedback (Styles of talking)
3. Communicative Styles: Discussion of handout with video illustrations
4. White Talk – Black Talk
5. Ethnography of Communication and stereotyping
6. Implications and conclusions

2. Description of a session

2.1 Introduction

The Pygmalion quote (Handout 1) is used to illustrate the notion 'You are what you talk'. In other words, social identity, belonging and a sense of difference between your group and other groups are, crucially, communicated through language. Although ethnographers have to observe and record language use, and often have to learn, to at least some level of competence, the language of their informants, they rarely focus on language as the most important means of understanding a group's sense of identity. (Exceptions are those working in linguistic anthropology, the ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguists, Hymes, Gumperz, etc. as discussed in the background notes). As language students, those on the Introduction to Ethnography course may be particularly interested in focusing on the detailed way in which language contributes to the formation and maintenance of identity and group. Remind students also that this is another facet of the theme that reality is socially constructed, since aspects of our identity are accomplished through talk and interaction.

2.2 Feedback from the Assignment: Styles of Talking

The feedback is organised around three questions:

1. What are the differences between different speakers?
2. What are the differences within one speaker's speech?
3. What are the moral, ethical and access issues involved?

Ask each pair to give a brief profile of their informants (gender, age, social/ethnic background). Ask them to comment on one informant's use of language that was particularly interesting. Then ask about differences between informants. Students usually discuss (1) topic and amount of language elicited and (2) accent. The 'topic' discussion can be linked to issues of 'context' in order to extend the feedback to include points on 'audience' and 'register', i.e. to what extent the speakers were taking account of context (being asked questions by a stranger who was tape recording them) in shaping their responses. Specific issues may arise out of the social identity of informants, e.g. when this task was done by students in Ealing, two

informants, one from New Zealand and one from Scotland said that Ealing was a dangerous place to live. But one said that it had good child care facilities (a woman) and one said that it had good sports facilities (a man)!

In answering the question on ethical and access issues, the fact that it is not an ethnographic exercise needs to be emphasised. This exercise is closer to the survey techniques used in traditional sociolinguists where the focus is on the study of how language varies across different social groups. Students may be able to identify for themselves why this assignment was not ethnographic, i.e.:

- no attempt to take account of context;
- no relationship established between them and the people they recorded;
- the data was collected in an experimental way, i.e. informants were asked questions rather than a general problem being gradually illuminated through observation and conversations over time;
- the informants had no control over how the data was elicited;
- the focus was on how people spoke rather than on understanding the relationship between their use of language and their identity and the complexity of their lives.

The reason for including a sociolinguistic exercise is to highlight the significance of language use as part of the ethnographic undertaking and because of the relative difficulties of audio-taping an example of naturally occurring interaction, with anyone but close family and friends, when there is such a strict time limit, This does not mean that students will not be able to audio-tape as part of their ethnographic study abroad. Quite the contrary: since they will have several months to develop contacts with informants, examples of such data may be relatively easy to obtain. Some students have been able to get such tape recordings for their home ethnography by recording in their workplace. For example, one student was able to get permission to record interactions between check-in staff and passengers at Heathrow Airport where she worked.

2.3 Communicative Styles

Introduce the notion that, just as bi-linguals can code-switch between different languages, so individuals have a number of styles that they can switch and shift between. Although there are aspects of a particular style of speaking that are attributable to the individual's idiosyncratic habits (e.g. V.S. Naipaul has the habit of repeating his final utterance several times and Richard Branson speaks with longish pauses and sentence fillers such as 'um'), communicative styles develop out of socialising with particular groups, e.g. the family, groups within the neighbourhood, the workplace, etc. The varieties recorded in the assignment reflect these communicative styles. Talk through Handout 2 on communicative styles. Make the point that we are usually not aware of the communicative styles that are used until we talk to someone with a different style. And even then we interpret the differences in terms of personality, attitude or competence rather than communicative style. Also, make the point that since we are talking about group and social identity, we cannot divorce issues of style differences from issues of power differences (see

background notes). Then use the video to illustrate some of these differences in intercultural communication in Britain: The London Transport Job Interview (Handout 3, Part 1) and the Housing Interview segment (Handout 3 Part 2). The LT interview shows applicants of South Asian origin applying for jobs as drivers. One has grown up in Britain and has a communicative style typical of many Londoners and similar to the interviewer's. The other came from Uganda when he was already in his twenties and has a different communicative style. Points that students may identify are:

- Different schema about what counts as a 'good' job interview
- Discourse features of low involvement from the applicant, e.g. using impersonal grammatical constructions 'It's better to change the jobs ...' whereas the interviewer uses relatively high involvement strategies
- Different interpretations of intonation and pausing, e.g. the interviewer uses a low fall on 'uh huh' which could well be interpreted as a negative evaluation but the candidate shows no signs of picking up on this.

The housing interview segment shows the following:

- Different schema about how to conduct a bureaucratic interview
- Clear differences between the low involvement style of the housing officer and the high involvement style of the client, including how direct to be and turn-taking
- Different ways of showing intensity and concern through intonation (and see Kochman discussed in the background notes).

These examples show that ways of speaking are culturally relative, that to some extent you see the world, present yourself and tune in to others (or not) on the basis of how you have been socialised. It is important to make the point that although there may be some broad differences between different speech communities, for example, in relation to high or low involvement styles, labelling a particular style as high or low is a relative matter. You may seem to have a low involvement style with some people but just the same style may appear to be a high involvement style to other groups. The point is here that rather than stereotyping a national group as passionate or passive, excitable or full of 'ennui', ethnographers study styles of communicating in detail and how people come to be socialised into these different styles.

2.4 White Talk – Black Talk

This item is another example of how styles of language are used to establish and maintain identity (see Handout 4). Again, the message for students is that they will come across a number of different groups from various regional, class, ethnic and occupational backgrounds and that a study of their use of language is an important way to understand the group.

Introduce here the notion of a 'speech community' (see Background Notes). For examples of studies of speech communities in Europe, see McDonald 1989 and Chapter 10 of Delamont 1995). Explain that a speech community can be defined as

those who share the same communicative styles and who, as result, feel themselves to be a community. Ask the students to think of speech communities that they belong to and the reasons why they feel they belong to them.

Use the excerpts from Roger Hewitt's *White Talk/Black Talk*. Explain that he was interested in the way that young people, black and white, talked together and made friendships and that a number of white boys and girls learnt to speak a variety of black English (London Jamaican) in order to identify with black friends.

In discussion, the following points need to be drawn out:

- that people have a number of identities and will use their linguistic resources to show they are a member of a particular group or community.
- that it is the shift/switch from one style to another which is loaded with strategic/symbolic significance, e.g. you may change because of who you are talking to or what you are talking about to emphasise a point.
- that a group, particularly a dominated one, will use a particular language or dialect or style as a means of resistance and may resent others trying to use it.

It is important to sound a warning that ethnic identity cannot be simply read off from particular language use. Roger Hewitt asserts that for much of the time young blacks and whites choose to use a racially mixed local language which is a kind of London English rather than a black or white English. So, depending on your use of language, you can either make your blackness significant or not. Discovering just how people use their linguistic resources, and why, is one of the jobs of an ethnographer. Students may also be interested in thinking about shifts in style and language within power relations. It is not a simple matter of choosing to be white or black through your choice of language. Andrea Stuart makes the point in an article 'Lost in the Mix' (*New Statesman*, February 1992) that whites can choose 'black' culture and even say they are black: in other words, blackness is style. But very few blacks can choose to be white because that equals power, resources, etc.

2.5 The Ethnography of Communication

Establish the link between this and the notion of 'speech community', through the idea of shared communicative style. You feel part of a community because you share the same ways of doing things through talk. This means you know how, for example, a wedding will be performed in your community, or the rituals of a family gathering or a political meeting, either party political or neighbourhood politics. Events like these are studied by ethnographers of communication who draw both on studies of language and on ethnography to understand how these 'speech events' are realised and what you need to know – in other words your communicative competence – to take part in these events adequately and appropriately (see the notes on schema in the handout on communicative style). Students may be able to make links between Frake's *Asking for a Drink in Subanun* and their own participant observation in a pub. They could use Hymes's SPEAKING frame (Handout 5) to quickly analyse a speech event. For example:

- a religious ceremony, e.g. dos and don'ts at a funeral, wedding, a christening
- a (relatively) formal social event
- a student meeting

Make the point that the ethnographers of communication have tended to look at more formal and ritual events and to account for them in terms of rules. They do not explain how people make sense to each other moment by moment. It would be more helpful for students to draw on the general frameworks of the ethnography of communication, but look at more informal events/conversation as well. For example, students could combine some of the aspects of Hymes's SPEAKING model with the analysis of interactions using the notions of frame, discourse and code in the handout on Communicative Style. An example of this approach is in Handout 6: Australian and French stereotypes. It is important to remind students that this data was collected in workplaces in Australia and that it is not possible to generalise to all English speakers and French speakers on the subject of conversations about the weekend.

2.6 Implications and Conclusions

- You can learn a lot about how people form a social group, and feel they belong, from the way they talk.
- People are likely to have a number of communicative styles which form their repertoire of speaking, but one of these may be dominant.
- Just as there are differences in economic or capital resources, so there are differences in communicative resources or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991). The more powerful groups in society have access to the most powerful ways of talking. Regional, class, ethnic and gender varieties may mark you out as less powerful.
- Language has symbolic and ritual significance in constructing social identity. It helps people feel part of a group and is used as a means of ordering and structuring society through both formal and everyday speech events. Goffman (1971) makes the point that ritual, particularly language ritual, is used to manage the difficult business of crossing boundaries, e.g. when people meet for the first time or after a break.

Give out Handout 8 as a summary of the main points of this unit.

3. Advice and comments

Students find this session quite demanding and for those with no background in sociolinguistics, it is quite difficult to convince them of the value of recording interactions and examining them in detail. For those with some background in this area, the aim is to help them to think more ethnographically about speech varieties. For example, they need to link, say, a study on code-switching to notions of group identity and the symbolic function of language. If the student group has the same FL background, then examples from the FL should be used here.

Some students have chosen to do more sociolinguistic themes. For example, one student wrote on compliment-giving in Las Palmas. Another looked at code-switching between Catalan and Castillano in Barcelona. Both studies tried to give a more ethnographic turn to their projects, drawing on notions of group and identity in discussing the speech data they collected.

SECTION THREE

1. Assignment

STYLES OF TALKING

OBJECTIVE

To collect some oral interview data and analyse them according to

1. the range of different ways of talking from the different individuals, i.e. differences between people;
2. the different ways of talking within each interview, i.e. differences within each individual person's speech.

METHODS

In pairs, tape-record brief interviews with five or six people. (N. B. Make sure you try out and check the tape-recorder before you start).

Try to chose people who are not students (as far as you can tell!) If possible chose people from different age, gender and ethnic backgrounds.

ANALYSIS

When you have finished your tape recordings, listen carefully to all of them and analyse them from the following points of view:

Differences *between* people:

1. Topic: Did everyone cover the same sort of topic? Did some people give more detailed examples than others?
2. Length: Did everyone talk for about the same length of time?
3. Speed: Did some people talk faster, hesitate more, use false starts, etc?
4. Context: Did some people show more concern than others about why they were being interviewed, what you wanted them to say, etc?
5. Accent: Did people have different accents? Did they have different intonation and different ways of stressing words?

Differences *within* people's speech:

Did you notice any differences in the way people talked in answering Questions 1, 2 and 3, i.e. differences between how they answered Questions 1, 2 and 3?

Use points 1-5 above, e.g. did their accent change at all during the course of the interview?

INTERVIEW

You need to elicit enough speech from people to do the analysis but not so much that you spend hours afterwards listening to the tape.

There are three basic questions to ask:

- How long have you lived here?
- Where do you come from?
- What do you think of this as a neighbourhood to live in?

The first two questions may lead to only one-word answers. In this case you will need to ask follow-up questions.

For Question 1: Can you tell me whereabouts that is? (i.e. description of the area they live in).

For Question 2: I don't know X. Is it different from here? What makes it different?

If you feel more comfortable asking the questions in a different way, that's fine. It is important that respondents should not feel interrogated and that you elicit enough data to do some analysis.

INTRODUCING THE INTERVIEW

Obviously you will need to introduce the purpose of your 'project' when you accost somebody in the street, shops etc. Don't give up, even if a lot of people brush past you or turn away as soon as they see the tape recorder. Try again. You might be introducing yourselves like this:

"We are language students and we have to do a project on the language of people who live in Southampton (or whatever area you do your task in). We just have to ask two or three questions which we are tape recording so that we can listen to the different ways people talk."

Try another approach if you prefer!

You may find that once the tape recorder is switched on, people are more careful about how they speak. Don't worry about this but make a mental note of it.

Good Luck!

P.S. Avoid unfriendly types with large Dobermans.

HANDOUT 1 – "you are what you talk"

Higgins: I tell you I ... Let her speak for herself. You will jolly soon see whether she has an idea that I haven't put into her head or a word that I haven't put into her mouth. Hell, you have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden; and now she pretends to play the fine lady with me. (Shaw p126)

.....

Liza: .... You told me, you know, that when a child is brought into a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language and can speak nothing but yours. (Shaw p128)

.....

Liza: Oh if I only could go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I'm a slave now, for all my fine clothes. (p135)

Pygmalion, Act V, George Bernard Shaw
(first produced in 1914)

HANDOUT 2 – communicative styles

1. Beliefs, assumptions and value systems (Schema)

- Cultural themes e.g. relatively collectivist or individualistic – social relationships relatively hierarchical or egalitarian, notions and uses of time – e.g. establishing relationships may be more important than effective use of time (In Bahasa Indonesia this is described as 'jam karet' – rubber time)
- Cultural knowledge which constructs beliefs, assumptions, attitudes (e.g. what does it mean to: be 'healthy', have a 'good schooling', 'be successful'?), and the different values and associations attached to words (see Unit 10 on ethnosemantics, e.g. Agar on 'schmäh)
- Social knowledge about how to accomplish routine and institutional activities, e.g. how to behave in a restaurant, what to say and not to say in a job interview, how to conduct a business meeting (In Japan, a relatively junior person chairs the meeting so that the specialists can dominate it cf. *How to ask for a drink in Subanun*)

2. Interpretive Frame

The capacity to signal and make sense not only of the content but also the context of talk, i.e. to convey and interpret both a message and a metamessage, e.g. knowing when someone is serious or joking, knowing when someone is making a point about their own identity (see Unit 3).

3. Discourse

(N.B. These features are tendencies only and not absolutes.)

- Politeness and the notion of face, both face-saving and face-threatening. The two sides of face – positive and negative or solidarity and deference – are universal features but are used in culturally specific ways, i.e. in some communities, solidarity strategies will be used where other communities will use deference strategies. And deference or solidarity strategies will be realised more indirectly in one language or variety than another. Politeness strategies determine how direct or indirect to be, e.g. when making a request or introducing yourself. In Samoa, Ochs and Shieffelin showed parents tended not to give clarifications to their children because this would imply accommodation and would signal inferiority.
- high/low involvement, e.g. fact-orientated versus personal: do speakers tend to explain/justify what happened in terms of a set of facts or in terms of what they did and their evaluation of what happened? e.g. speakers and listener showing involvement: does the speaker try to engage the listener's attention/involvement through gaze, offering them a turn to speak, etc? does the listener's speech often overlap the previous speakers?

- taboo and conventional subjects, e.g. what can you talk about? Among Athabaskans in North America, it is considered unwise to end a conversation with an utterance like 'see you tomorrow' since you cannot be sure that you will. So what is conventional in one language or style may be taboo in another.

- how talk is structured, e.g. whether the main point comes first, when you are arguing a case, or whether you describe the context first – that is, all the conditions under which the point you are going to make will appear persuasive – and then give your main point. Linda Young showed how Hong Kong Chinese business people when arguing their case gave 'Because' statements first in order to build up the context and so the case, for their main point. Business meetings between Americans and Brazilians tended to be ordered differently: Brazilians started with tangential information first to illuminate speaker perspective while the American team plunged straight in with talk about expanding the business.

- how conversation is organised and timed, e.g. when to talk (turn-taking), how much to say, whether to ask a lot of questions when you first meet someone (remember Pamela Fishman's paper about women doing all the 'shitwork' in female/male conversations). Kochman's study of black and white American students in seminars showed that, among black students, the power and intensity of your remarks gave you the right to speak whereas white students operated a turn taking system.

4. Linguistic Code

- choice of words: 'rich' words, metaphors, jargon, etc (see Unit 10)

- grammar: do people present themselves as the actors, or protagonists, with active verbs or as acted upon, with passive verbs? e.g. a client at an advice centre introduced his problem as 'considerable trouble is befalling me' (translated from Bengali). The grammar of a language will also highlight certain ways of talking about processes and events and downplay others (linguistic relativity), e.g. in describing people's actions Spanish and English are contrasted in the way in which they emphasise location or trajectory.

- rhythm and repetition: used for dramatic effect as part of rhetoric, e.g. Martin Luther King's speeches: 'I have a dream..'

- intonation: is intonation used in similar ways to convey 'normal' information flow, contrasts between ideas, politeness, uncertainty, etc? In certain languages, e.g Japanese, Korean, Chinese, low pitch and soft voice can indicate something serious. Emphasis in North Indian Languages and some West African Coastal languages is through emphatic particles rather than intonation.

- accent: often particular words or sounds will be pronounced in a certain way as a maker of group identity.

5. Non Verbal Communication (see Unit 3)

- gaze

- gesture and other body movements
- use of social space

HANDOUT 3, PART 1 – transcripts from video examples

London Transport Interviews: No.1

Int.: So what leads you to want to go to much larger vehicles then? What idea was ...

Mr A.: Well I've been on smaller cars for about ten years now teaching people and it's driving I love to do and it was buses I wanted to get on in the first place but never had the heart to apply for it until recently

Int.: Well obviously you've got to enjoy driving to be a driving instructor ...

London Transport Interviews: No.2

Int.: Why do you actually want to leave? It's a nice steady job

Mr B.: Well the thing is – you know – it's better to change the jobs and get other jobs

Int.: <very slight nodding of head>

Mr B.: I was very interested in working for London Transport you know – right from the beginning

Int.: <low> uh huh

Mr B.: So because I couldn't get the job – so I had to go to R's laboratories.

(Gumperz and Roberts 1991)

HANDOUT 3, PART 2 – transcripts from video examples cont.

Housing Interviews No.1

Housing Officer: Morning. How can I help you?

Ms T.: Er, well I'd like to apply for a council house in a hard-to-let housing area.

H.O.: Right you're filling in – you've filled in an application form

Ms T.: Yeah, I've filled in a form for an ordinary council house, and rather than take it to the ordinary office, they said bring it here with me

H.O.: Right

Housing Interviews No.2

H.O.: Right what's the situation?

Mr O.: Situation … is that … er … What sort of situation is that?

H.O.: Sorry – Can you speak up a bit?

Mr O.: About housing. What situation? Which situation?

H.O.: Why have you come in to see me now?

Mr O.: Well I've been on the waiting list, and the housing list …

HANDOUT 4 – white talk/black talk

A: I feel black and I'm proud of it, to speak like that. That's why when I talk it, I feel better than when I'm talking like now. You know what I mean?... When I speak more dread I feel more lively and more aware. In a way I feel more happier.
Do you reckon you speak it more now than you used to?
Yes. Much more. 'Cos, sounds funny but I just kind of feel that as a black I should speak it and I feel that now if I'm ... Say I'm walking the street and a black man goes to me. 'Dread d'you have the time?' If I turn round and say, 'No. Sorry I haven't got the time'. I'm gonna sound funny. So I go, 'No, man mi na got de time. Sorry Dread. 'That's the way it is. And sometimes you just look at someone and you know you've got to speak it - You'd feel a right idiot if you went up to a Rasta and said, 'Excuse me have you got the time?' He's gonna think. 'No. man, you na black.'That's it. So you have to speak your own language . An' say you go to a blues an all this, you see them smoking up weed an' that. when they talk to you you have to talk like them. You know what I mean? You've gotta feel like you're one of them. (107)

B: They should stick to their own culture, and not try to impersonate no one else. (Black boy 15 years)

I think they're taking the mickey. (Black boy, sixteen years)

It seems they are stealing our language. (Black boy fifteen years)

The Rastas round our way say it's our identity. They identify their speech with their colour and their actual cult. And they say that somebody is trying to intervene if they copy their ways. (Black girl, sixteen years)

When I hear white girls talking like that it's poison to my ears. (Black girl, seventeen years) (161)

C: [At school] I went around with a girl who was half Burmese, and half English. so she was rather like me [The informant's parents were both black Jamaicans. She appears to mean that her ethnicity was not 'fixed' in any sense] and there was another girl who was Jamaican Chinese. She was into this big 'black' thing as well. The other girl was black with an English teacher father, so that helped her out, and the other one was Swedish. Now she just lived with her mother. She didn't have a father and I think she always found things to cling to. And when she went around with us she was ever so 'black' with us you know. And it was funny because she had to prove more than we did. She went out with all the scruffy black boys we wouldn't have touched. She dressed in a certain way and it was weird. And I think because she was insecure, she had to prove to us that she was ... not even good enough to go round with us, but that was her idea of how we should be. - She had a

HANDOUT 5 – the ethnography of communication

S	Settings
P	Participants
E	Ends
A	Act sequences (message form and context)
K	Keys: tone, manner and spirit
I	Instrumentalities: channels and forms of speech, e.g. varieties and registers
N	Norms: of interaction, interpretation
G	Genres: prayer, 'rapping' (not necessarily co-incident with speech event)

HANDOUT 6 – 'Did you have a nice weekend?'

Contrastive Styles in French and Anglo Australian Conversation.

STEREOTYPES

Extracts from taped interviews:

Australian about the French:

Aust.: ...and they start giving other people's names, and, I mean, we don't particularly want to know all these things and yes they tend to do that. Yeah they do that in ... what could you say ... "How was your week-end?" you know, normally you say "oh good..." and, you know, sometimes they really go into detail... start talking about all these people they... I... I wouldn't know who they're talking about, you know, they tend to do that sometimes, but, that's all right, I mean, you know, that's fine.

They they'll probably go into a lot more detail and, you know, like tell you where they went, and how their kids liked it, what their wife thought about it, whereas ... whereas you'll find with an Australian, even though they have got time they still won't ... they still won't come out with it all, you know, they'll just say "oh yes we had a good time" and perhaps they'll tell you where they went and that's it. Whereas the French, they'll tend to tell you what ... what they had to eat, and if it was nice, and, you know ... I ...

French about Australians:

French: Oui, ben oui, je me suis rendu compte que c'est vraiment des formules de politesse! (petit rire de dérision). A la limite si on vous pose la question, c'est plus qu'on veut vous dire "Bonjour, comment ça va?", en fait ils attendent pas la réponse.
(Si on pose cette question entre français) c'est qu'on s'y intéresse, parce qu'autrement on dirait "Bonjour, comment ça va?" c'est tout. Bon. Mais si effectivement on demande "Alors vous avez passé un bon week-end?" ça va bon, ça encourage à dire: "Qu'est-ce que t'as fait?"
Alors que ici, à la limite, non c'est bon, "How was your week-end?" mais c'est, bon, "Bonjour, comment ça va?" et puis on écoute pas. Ou si, effectivement, si on développe, bon, à la limite, ils en attendaient pas autant! (petit rire)
J'avais remarqué chez les commerçants, on vous demande 'Comment ça va?' ils s'en foutent! (rire)
Moi disons que si on me pose... moi je suis resté toujours avec mon réflexe français, j'ai pas changé, si on me demande comment était le week-end, je vais dire ce que j'ai fait pendant mon week-end!

Translation

French: Yes, for sure, I realised it was all just to be polite (short derisive laugh). I mean, when someone (an Australian) asks you, it's more a way of saying "Hi! How are you?", in fact, they don't even wait for the answer. (If you ask the question between French people) it means you're showing real interest, otherwise you'd say "Hi! How are you?" and that's it. But if it's "How was your weekend?" it's an encouragement, like saying "What did you do?" Whereas here, I mean, if it's "How was your weekend?" it means "Hi! How are you?" and nobody listens, actually, if you give a detailed answer, they don't expect anything like that! (short laugh). I noticed, in the shops they ask you how you are, they couldn't care less! (laugh). As far as I'm concerned say if someone asks I mean, I've still got this French reflex, I haven't changed, if someone asks me how was my week-end, I'm going to tell them what I did during my week-end!

EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL "DID YOU HAVE A GOOD WEEK-END?" ROUTINE BETWEEN ANGLO-AUSTRALIANS

(The following examples are all authentic recorded conversations)

Woman: Did you have a pleasant weekend?
Man: I did. What about you?
W: I did too.
M: What did you do?
W: We went to a birthday dinner on Saturday and a barbecue on Sunday. Food food food
M: Yes, we ate our way through most of the weekend.

- Short
- Friendly
- Reciprocal
- Mentions typical weekend activities.

The following were typical conversational routines:

1. **Be positive without being over-enthusiastic.**

Examples:

a) How was your week-end? 'T was good, nice and quiet.

b) How was your week-end? Great The wedding? A lot of fun.

c) So how was your father's party? It was good.

d) How was the weather? Oh, it was nice, t'was a bit cold but once you get the fire going, and the stove going, it's beautiful.

e) It's really good. It's got a lot going for it (a lodge)

f) It's nice down there (a place on the coast)

g) It's a good break (a weekend away).

2. Mention typical weekend activities.

Examples:

a) I stayed with some friends of mine in W--------. Mmm which I was in and out mmm and (gestures with his hand that he drank a lot).

b) I went to that that lodge

c) I watched telly Saturday night, nothing yesterday. Then we went to a party last night.

3. Give facts (rather than opinions)

Locations, distances, prices, temperature, actions in chronological order.

Examples from one conversation:

It's an hour and a half, hour and three quarters, if you went at night it'd take an hour and three quarters, two at most, an hour and three quarters.
Mmm, did you go on Friday night?

A hundred and twenty dollars for the week-end.
Not expensive.
No there was eight of us this week-end, so it was $20 each for the weekend plus food. It's not bad.

Examples taken from another conversation about a music festival:

a) At least the weather was O.K.

b) Did you have tickets by the way?

c) Did you camp?

d) How much did they charge the night?

4. Find common ground: make it relevant for the other person.

Examples:

a) a)I'll give you the number if you wanted to see it.

b) I'll give you the address
Yeah, thank you, pleasure
You'd like it, you'd enjoy it
if we have time to go there! (laughs)

c) Did you go down to Port Fairy? Yes I did!
Did you?

Did you enjoy it?
Yeah.

5. **Use conversational style to show that you are 'considerate':**

- Speak in turns.
- Listen to the other person.
- Reciprocate questions.

EXAMPLES OF A TYPICAL "DID YOU HAVE A GOOD WEEK-END?" BY FRENCH AUSTRALIANS

Woman: Le week-end a été bon?
Man: très bon, très bon. (A mi-voix) : très bon. On a fait du train
W: du train?
M: du petit train à vapeur, qui se ballade dans les D-------
W: Ah, dans les D--------- oui c'est sympa ça!
M: Une bonne partie du retour on s'est retrouvé entre deux wagons, sur le marche-pied (petit rire).
W: tellement y avait du monde?
M: tellement y avait du monde.
W: Mais c'est fou! Le dimanche soir?
.....

W: (petit rire.) A l'extérieur, en rappel?
M: oui, oui! Ça, y a la plate-forme entre les deux wagons, on...
W: oh ben, Eric (fils de M) a dû adorer ça!
M: oui, sauf que... il avait des charmilles dans les yeux alors il ...il voyait plus
W: Ah oui alors là c'est moins bon. Bien bien...
M: et vous c'était bien?
W: oui, assez calme... Nous sommes allés au cinéma hier après-midi,
M: oui, Dennis (ami de W) m'a dit.
W: voir un truc complètement dingue, mais en fait je crois qu'il faut le voir quand même. Mais j'irais pas deux fois, hein! On était avec Robert (collègue et connaissance des deux)
M: Ah oui, Robert m' l'a dit
W: Mélissa (la femme de Robert) avait refusé de venir
M: Robert m' l' a dit qu' c'était...
W: je crois qu'elle a bien fait! (rire)
M: Il m'a présenté ça comme une version modifiée de "La Grande Bouffe."
W: Très modifiée très modifiée.. oui (A mi-voix): complètement dingue

<u>Translation</u>

Woman: Was your weekend nice?

Man: Very nice, very nice. (under his breath): very nice... We took a ride on a train.
W: A train?
M: That little steam train, the one that snakes through the D---------
W: Ah, in the D ---------! Yes! It's a lot of fun, that!
M: For quite a bit of the journey back, we ended up in between two carriages, on the step-ladder! (short laugh)
W: because it was so crowded?
M: because it was so crowded.
W: but that's crazy! On Sunday evening?

.....

W: (short laugh). Right on the edge, virtually abseiling!
M: Yes yes! That there's a platform between the carriages, we/
W: /in that case, Eric (his son) must have loved it!
M: yes, except he... he got coal dust in his eyes, so he... he couldn't see!
W: Ah right, not so much fun, then! [:] Ah ha...
M: And what about you, was it good?
W: Yes, rather quiet... we went to the movies yesterday afternoon
M: /yes Dennis (friend of the woman) told me.
W to see something really mad, but in fact, I think it was worth seeing all the same. But I wouldn't go again, that's for sure! We were with Robert (a colleague and acquaintance of both).
M: Ah yes, Robert told me
W: Melissa, (Robert's wife) had refused to come along
M: Robert told me it was...
W: I think she had the right impulse! (laughs)
M: The way he told me, he said it was some variation on "La Grande Bouffe"
W: Some variation, some variation indeed! Yes... (under her breath): really mad.

General rules:

1. **Don't ask everybody:** only ask where there is already a good rapport or you want to get closer.
2. **Expect (or give) a fairly detailed answer** (see above)
3. **Be "sincere":** and describe your feelings, even negative
4. **Be "entertaining":** focus on the memorable moments and dramatise adventures and mishaps.
5. **Display your knowledge of relevant people and places in each other's lives.**
6. **Use conversational style to show involvement.** and in doing so (see above): interrupt: Turns 15-20; overlap: Turns 4 & 5-9 & 10; speak in a chorus: Turns 22 to 25.

(Based on Beale, C (1990) '"It's all in the asking": a perspective on problems of cross-cultural communication between native speakers of French and native speakers of Australian English in the work place', *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 8 (7)).

NB: This type of contrastive study needs to be read with caution. For example, it is possible the differences between the conversations are as much to do with gender as with French/English differences. Also, the 'rules' are not, of course, rules at all but tendencies or habits, subject to variability. One of the tasks of the linguistic ethnographer is to collect recorded data such as this to look for patterns. But to be aware all the time that there may be other contradictory patterns which challenge simple generalisations. Also, the ethnographer needs to go beyond these conversations to ask why these differences might occur.

HANDOUT 7 – language and social identity

What do we mean by 'social identity'?

Identity within a social hierarchy.
It may include class, ethnicity, gender, region.

How do language and social identity connect together?

As well as giving information and maintaining social relations, language has a symbolic function, i.e. when we speak we are both involved in some kind of conversation and interaction and we are presenting images of ourselves (Bateson says we give off messages and metamessages, that is, messages about messages, and these metamessages tell others about us.)

The languages we speak and how we speak are intimately connected with our social identity (e.g. choice of vocabulary, intonation, deciding what is a taboo subject to talk about). In using language we actively produce/achieve our identity (Gumperz: *Language and Social Identity*)

But there is no simple correlation between particular features of talk and a particular identity (e.g. Hewitt has shown that white kids talk black sometimes and black kids talk white.)

Whether we speak quickly, use a lot of slang or jargon, take a long time to get to the point, etc. is a relative matter. As Tannen has shown, we may seem slow and deliberate when talking to one group, fast and quixotic when talking to another.

There is a lot of variety within any linguistic and ethnic group. As a foreign language speaker, your job is to try to understand the particular style of speaking of the group that you are studying.

When analysing language data, remember there are three elements: the individual's personal style, the aspects of an interaction that occur in any face-to-face encounter, e.g. taking turns to talk, saving face; and the conventions that a particular group uses to communicate, e.g. showing politeness in a particular way

What methods are used to find out about communicative style?

- collecting language data in a systematic way (see your task)
- undertaking language interviews (see below)
- collecting naturally occurring interactions, e.g. like Tannen, tape-record a dinner table conversation.

What are the different ways in which language relates to social and cultural practices?

1. Sociolinguistic/sociology of language Some of the major concerns here are: who gets to speak which languages and where? How do some languages become marginal and even die out? How do nations plan their use of language/s?

2. Social psychology and linguistics Some of the concerns here are to do with how ways of speaking help to maintain linguistic groups and how dialect and accent are socially evaluated.

(For 1 and 2, see Delamont, S (1995) *Appetites and Identities*)

3. Linguistic anthropology The concerns here are about how language and thinking are connected. Linguistic interviews are used to find out how vocabulary and grammar classify events, ideas and objects

4. Ethnography of communication This is concerned with the middle ground between grammar and ethnography. It is an analysis of events which are seen as representing at a micro level the wider social system, e.g. telling a joke or doing a wedding involves ways of communicating which tie in to the norms and assumptions of society more generally.

5. Ethnography Here language is not focused on with the same degree of intensity but is part of how groups manage and make sense of their social lives.

Language, social identity and stereotyping

We tend to judge others according to our own norms of communicating. We assume that the other shares with us ways of negotiating meaning. But these ways are part of the conventions for communicating within our group and our intentions are often conveyed indirectly and implicitly. With someone who does not share these conventions, things can often go wrong. This is the basis of much intercultural misunderstanding and stereotyping (see Beale on the French and Australian conversations and Gumperz and his associates).