Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socioculturally grounded “meanings” and “functions” of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explicate the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic data, whether spontaneously occurring or experimentally induced, whether normative or variational, whether synchronic or diachronic. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to the debate over the sociocultural-function and structural-formal nature of language, and will represent the concerns of scholars in the sociology and anthropology of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socioculturally informed psycholinguistics.

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EXPLORATIONS IN
THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING
SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY
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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

When we published Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking back in 1974, we framed the work as ushering in a new phase of research in the ethnography of speaking. The first phase, beginning with the publication of Dell Hymes’s foundational essay, ‘The Ethnography of Speaking,’ in 1962 and proceeding through the early 1970s, was preliminary and programmatic, marked by a series of articles and edited collections that sought to define this new subfield of linguistic anthropology and to suggest what kinds of research might be carried out under its aegis (see Preface; Bauman and Sherzer 1975). Much of this work was seen to be converging and contributing toward the ethnography of speaking, but not yet exemplifying it, insofar as little research published in that first period was expressly and primarily undertaken for a purpose that might appropriately be called the ethnography of speaking, that is, carrying out the program outlined by Hymes and Gumperz. By the early 1970s, however, the ethnography of speaking had finally developed to a point where a number of scholars had taken up the repeated calls for fieldwork issued in the first decade and carried out original research guided by its principles. Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking grew out of our mutual concern to present the first fruits of that research and to attempt to synthesize its results – however exploratory that synthesis might be – in a way that might help to shape the subsequent development of the field. We are gratified that the book has in fact fulfilled that goal and that it has remained useful to scholars in a number of disciplines who have been persuaded of the productiveness of the ethnography of speaking as a vantage point on social life as communicatively constituted and on language as socially constituted.

The years since Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking was published have certainly proven the program and its perspective to be a significant stimulus to primary research. Among the prospects for the development of the ethnography of speaking in its subsequent phase that we anticipated in our original Introduction to the volume were the publication of more extended and complete ethnographies of speaking and a general increase in the number of available case studies of speaking in
particular societies. We noted, in fact, that many of the contributions to
the book were segments of more comprehensive works in progress, and
indeed, six of the chapters are linked to subsequent full-length books or
monographs, to which the original essays remain useful introductions or
complements. Susan U. Philips’ chapter on Warm Springs ‘Indian Time’
is summarized in her monograph, *The Invisible Culture: Communication in
Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Reservation* (1983); Anne
Salmond’s essay on the Maori hui became *Hui: A Study of Maori Cerem-
onial Gatherings* (1975); Joel Sherzer’s survey of three types of Kuna
speech event establishes one of the principal organizing dimensions of his
*Kuna Ways of Speaking: An Ethnographic Perspective* (1983); Michael
Foster’s analysis of three Iroquois longhouse speech events is extended and
amplified in his *From the Earth to Beyond the Sky: An Ethnographic
Approach to Four Longhouse Iroquois Speech Events* (1974); Gary Gossen’s
exploration of the metaphor of heat in Chamula speaking is continued and
elaborated in *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya
Oral Tradition* (1974); and Richard Bauman’s treatment of the role conflict
of the seventeenth-century Quaker minister introduces some of the major
themes of his *Let Your words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence
among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (1983). The last work, we might note,
is historical in subject and scope, demonstrating some of the advantages
and disadvantages that attend the extension of the perspectives of the
ethnography of speaking to historical cases.\(^1\) A recent bibliographical
survey of fieldwork in the ethnography of speaking by Philipsen and
Carbaugh (1986) lists more than 200 items, among which the work of
contributors to *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* has a prominent
place, though they represent but a fraction of the more than 150 authors
whose work is listed. The compilers of the survey acknowledge that their
bibliographical inventory is not exhaustive, and a complete listing would
be significantly longer. This is a lot of work. What has it yielded? How
might the directions and achievements of the ethnography of speaking
since 1974 be characterized?

In *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* and the review article we
wrote for the *Annual Review of Anthropology* the following year (1975), we
set out a number of needs and anticipated directions for the further
development of the new field in the phase that we hoped would be ushered
in by the work. In addition, several reviewers of the book (especially Bloch
1976; Borker 1976; Leach 1976) took the opportunity to proclaim what the
field – and our book – had not yet achieved, thus suggesting still further
directions for the next phase. And, not content to leave the criticism to

\(^1\) In addition, Bricker’s essay in this volume is a useful complement to her full-length study of
*Ritual Humor in Highland Chiapas* (1973), published earlier.
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others, Sherzer himself published a firm critique of work in the field – including prominently our own – pointing out the gaps to be filled and the lines to be explored (1977).

One question brought to the fore quite early by the publication of *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* has to do with the problem orientation of the ethnography of speaking. Here are eighteen substantive essays, dealing with societies from all over the globe – what is the point of all this ethnographic particularism? Where are the ‘generalizing propositions,’ the ‘common problems’ to be solved? This is a complex issue, one that implicates the basic goals and purposes of the entire enterprise represented by the ethnography of speaking. Our primary motivation in producing the book was to establish the viability and productiveness of the ethnography of speaking program, that is, to elucidate the patterns and functions of speaking as a cultural system or as part of cultural systems organized in other terms. It is important to remember that this was a concern that up to that point had fallen through the cracks between grammars and ethnographies, taken separately or analytically combined. With a small handful of exceptions, there were no accounts in the anthropological literature of speaking as a cultural system, cross-culturally variable in organization, before ours. Therefore, we took it as our task to show that there is pattern, there is systemic coherence, and there is difference in the ways that speaking is organized from one society to another, and that this pattern, this coherence, this difference are to be discovered ethnographically. They needed – and they still need – to be demonstrated in all their culture specific particularity, not taken for granted or assumed a priori. At the most basic level, then, that is the central problem, or proposition, of the book.

There are, however, different analytical and presentational vantage points represented in the collection. Some of the contributors take speaking itself in a particular society as the point of departure, and attempt to elucidate the principles by which it is organized and by which it ramifies throughout social life. Others begin with a particular social or linguistic problem – phonological variation, marriage, role conflict, gender, etc. – and demonstrate how it can be illuminated in speaking-centered terms. Either way, however, the unifying principle is that society and culture are communicatively constituted, and that no sphere of social or cultural life is fully comprehensible apart from speaking as an instrument of its constitution. We felt it necessary, then, to be extensive rather than intensive, to let speaking lead us where it might rather than circumscribing the scope of the book by imposing a set of shared problem orientations. The book was intended as an adumbration of broad possibilities, not as a work in the service of this or that limited linguistic or social problem, even at the risk of
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offering a collection that might appear diffuse to readers with more specific research agendas or theoretical concerns.

From the beginning, though, we saw the accumulation of case studies as providing the basis for generalization, for a meaningful ethnology of speaking that would in turn inform the ethnographic enterprise by focusing the problem orientation of the field; the Introduction, the final section of the book, and several of the papers, most notably Grimshaw's, call for such generalization, as do subsequent papers of our own (Bauman and Sherzer 1975; Sherzer 1977). And indeed, an effort at generalizing comparisons, drawing on the growing base of available case studies, has proceeded apace, and the number of clearly problem-focused works has burgeoned.

For example, one of the most fully and richly developed lines of comparative inquiry generated by the ethnography of speaking concerns the nature, forms, functions, and situational contexts of use of political language. This growing literature, linked with classic concerns in political anthropology and in social theory more generally (e.g., the domain of politics in small-scale societies, the foundations of social authority), is founded more immediately in the recognition of forms of talk as constitutive of political action (Bloch 1975:4) and in the service of exercising power and reproducing the mechanisms that make power possible (Brenneis and Myers 1984:4). This work, then, provides a valuable critical complement to the predominantly social structural tradition in political anthropology, demonstrating that the political process as enacted turns fundamentally on the control and use of expressive means, whatever might be the structure of power and authority in a given society. In the writings of participants in this unfolding discussion (including Arno 1985; Bloch 1975; Brenneis and Myers 1984; Howe 1986; Irvine 1979; Paine 1981; Parkin 1984; Watson-Gegeo 1986; Werbner 1977), the core concepts of the ethnography of speaking figure centrally and prominently: the work is fundamentally about patterns and functions of speaking in the conduct of social life, framed in terms of genres, speech styles, speaking roles, the multifunctionality of speaking, form-function interrelationships, and speech events. In addition, this work develops an impressive range of generalizing comparisons, illustrating well the scope of comparative investigation in the field. Some scholars, for example, have essayed broadly cross-cultural generalizations, drawing their data from ethnographic case studies the world over, including both complex Western societies and relatively more

2 We also note (p. 454, note 10) that this collection itself provides the basis for areal study of speaking in native Mesoamerica in the papers of Bricker, Gossen, and Stross, and the literature on this area has grown to impressive proportions in the years since this volume was published. See for example Bricker (1973), Burns (1983), Gossen (1974), Hanks (1986, 1987), Haviland (1977), Hill and Hill (1986), Tedlock (1983, 1985, 1987)
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small-scale and traditional ones. Others, by contrast, have operated with a more limited areal focus, with Polynesia and Melanesia figuring especially prominently, and both together providing the basis for Pacific-wide comparison. Typology has also figured prominently in the development of an ethnology of political language, some of it socially based, as in Brenneis and Myers' contrast between egalitarian and hierarchical societies (1984), some founded on speech function, such as Arno's distinction between impressive and persuasive speech (1985), still others centering on varieties of speech styles and events, as in Irvine's examination of formality versus informality in communicative events (1979). This last essay, an incisive and widely cited critique of concepts too loosely and uncritically employed, is an excellent example as well of the way in which comparative study in the ethnography of speaking serves to refine the core concepts of the field itself (for other critical reviews of concepts, see Bauman 1987; Gumperz 1984; Irvine 1987; Philips 1987).

While the comparative study of political language is perhaps the most extensively developed line of generalizing inquiry founded in the ethnography of speaking, and thus can stand as a useful index of the larger enterprise, comparative work of great richness and variety has been undertaken at an accelerating rate over the past decade. To cite only a few illustrative studies that might serve to indicate the scope and diversity of the field, we might mention Fox's consolidative work on canonical parallelism (1977), Brown and Levinson's influential exploration of politeness phenomena (1978), Ochs and Schieffelin's richly textured essay on language acquisition and socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 1982; see also Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), Urban's rigorous areal investigation of ceremonial dialogues and ritual wailing in South America (Urban 1986, 1988), Sherzer's typologically suggestive examination of speech and gender (Sherzer 1987a), and Katriel's and Brenneis's examinations of direct and indirect speech, respectively (Katriel 1986; Brenneis 1986). None of this work, it is safe to say, would have been possible without the proliferation of case studies in the ethnography of speaking, guided by the principles first set out by Gumperz and Hymes and furthered – we are immodest enough to believe – by Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking. We must recognize, though, that comparative and generalizing work in the ethnography of speaking is still in its nascent stages; Philipsen and Carbaugh's (1986) bibliography should be invaluable in advancing the enterprise in its next phase.

Analogous in certain ways to cross-cultural comparative work in the ethnography of speaking is a line of study devoted to the patterns and functions of speaking in cross-cultural encounters and multilingual speech communities, where culturally different ways of speaking are brought
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together (Tannen 1985). To comprehend such contact situations requires the comparative understanding of speaking in the respective groups from which participants in the contact situation are drawn and of the emergent system that organizes speaking in the contact situation itself. As the ethnography of speaking extends the study of language beyond lexicon and grammar, so these studies extend the study of language contact beyond traditional investigations that focus on language differences alone. In fact, some of the most illuminating studies of speaking in interethnic encounters are those that focus on situations in which all participants speak mutually intelligible varieties of English, but have culturally different ways of speaking; it is not language in the narrow sense where interference resides, but rather the ways in which it is used. Gumperz has been especially influential in investigating interethnic communication in terms of conversational inference based on culturally organized systems of discourse cues (1982), while Kochman has analyzed black and white communication in conflict in terms of significant differences in expressive style (1981). While Gumperz and Kochman focus on the interethnic encounters themselves, Basso (1979) offers a penetrating analysis of joking routines that are expressive take-offs of white ways of speaking by Western Apaches, pointed, tendentious, and delicate representations that comment trenchantly on the differences between them. Interestingly, in the light of our anticipation in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking that the ensuing period would see the development of historical studies in the ethnography of speaking, a number of the most innovative and illuminating studies of speaking in situations of culture contact are historical in orientation, such as Foster’s study of speaking precedence in eighteenth-century Iroquois-white councils (1984), Abrahams’s establishment of the creole genesis of Afro-American traditions of eloquence (1983), and Hanks’s rigorous and detailed tracing of the emergence of new discourse forms out of the interaction of Maya and Spanish systems of communication in colonial Yucatan (1986, 1987). Gal’s methodologically sophisticated study of social determinants of language shift over time in a Hungarian–German bilingual community in Austria (1979) and Scollon and Scollon’s meticulous tracing of linguistic convergence at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta (1979), illustrate especially clearly the productiveness of the ethnography of speaking in the diachronic study of language contact and multilingualism.

One species of cross-cultural or interethnic encounter of special significance for anthropologists is the ethnographic encounter itself, the speech events in which the field researcher interacts verbally with a native consultant for the purpose of eliciting ethnographic data. These encounters, no less than those involving lay people of different cultures, are susceptible to misunderstanding rooted in different ways of speaking, not
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just differences in language. Thus, it behooves every ethnographer who gathers data in verbal encounters of any kind to understand first how the getting and giving of information is patterned in the native culture and his or her own, that is to be a comparative ethnographer of speaking. This reflexive vantage point on ethnographic practice, founded in the ethnography of speaking, is the focus of a small but vitally important line of exploration, pursued by Paredes in a telling critique of ethnographers of Mexican and Mexican-American culture who are led to embarrassing errors by their inability to understand when they are being performed to, played with, or outright lied to by their informants (1977; cf. Howe and Sherzer 1986), and by Briggs in a meticulous appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research, including detailed formal and functional analysis of interview transcripts, that must be required reading for all would-be ethnographers, regardless of the problems they wish to investigate (1986). Let us make the point explicit: these works demonstrate beyond question that the ethnography of speaking can no longer be viewed simply as one line of special investigation within linguistic anthropology, but must be a critical and reflexive part of any ethnographic investigation that involves the gathering of data by verbal means.

As Paredes and Briggs both focus on Anglo fieldworkers’ encounters with members of Hispanic groups in the United States, their work is also relevant to a further trend that we foresaw in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking and elsewhere, namely, the extension of the ethnography of speaking into studies of contemporary North American society and the application of these research findings to the solution of practical social problems. To be sure, the problematics of interethnic communication figure significantly in ethnographic studies of speaking in the United States, focusing on the ways in which members of minority cultures are placed at a disadvantage by having their ways of speaking ignored, disvalued, or misunderstood by the agents and institutions of mainstream culture – in schools, courts of law, medical institutions, job seeking, and so on and on. Here, though, by contrast with the former trends in the field that we have discussed, developments subsequent to 1974 are more difficult to assess in clearly ethnography of speaking terms. The problem, essentially, is that while linguistic anthropologists tend to have the field largely to themselves in the study of language in the more exotic parts of the world, and this work is relatively easy to identify in terms of its disciplinary orientation and the influence of the ethnography of speaking upon it, the study of language in complex Western societies is conducted by scholars from a host of disciplinary vantage points, including many that share a concern with aspects of language in use: sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, folklore, psycholinguistics,
linguistic pragmatics, and more. Moreover, there has been an energizing and productive methodological and conceptual eclecticism among practitioners of these various lines of investigation. Consequently, while one can identify certain studies of language use in medicine, education, law, minority groups, traditional communities, and so on, explicitly identified with the ethnography of speaking, the lines become blurred before very long and it gains us little to try to draw them apart. Eclecticism notwithstanding, however, surveys of language use in American life do clearly and explicitly acknowledge the significant contribution of the ethnography of speaking to the larger enterprise (e.g., Ferguson and Heath 1981; Heath 1984; Mehan 1985; O’Barr 1982; Shuy 1984), and Dell Hymes, the founder of the field, has devoted significant effort to the application of the ethnography of speaking in educational contexts (Hymes 1980).

Especially interesting in this regard is Shuy’s recent survey of linguistics in medicine, education, and law (1984). At the conclusion of his review (1984:440), Shuy outlines nine common threads that unite the recent work of linguists (he uses the term broadly here, to include the ethnography of speaking as well as all other language disciplines) in the study of the professions:

1 Reliance on direct observation of the communicative event rather than quantified, symbolized, or interpreted representations.
2 Analysis of the human interactions themselves rather than of artifacts or interpretations of these communicative events.
3 Discovery of the structure of these communicative events in order to obtain a holistic, contextualized perspective of these communicative events.
4 Permitting the language data to suggest the units of analysis rather than beginning with a unit of analysis and then searching for it in the language data.
5 Reliance on performance data rather than on represented, or pre-interpreted, or self-report data.
6 Taking the perspective of the patient, defendant, plaintiff, and learner in addition to the perspective of the physician, lawyer, educator.
7 The use of recent technology (audio and video taping and photocopying in particular) to capture and freeze the event being studied for multiple examinations.
8 The expansion of the previously perceived domain of linguistic study to the everyday, dynamic language events of the real world.
9 Meaning, referential and inferential, is constructed by the interaction of participants in a conversation.

What we find noteworthy about these points is that they accord extremely
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closely with the program of the ethnography of speaking, whatever other lines of inquiry they may characterize. Perhaps the essential point, then, is to acknowledge a broad community of interest drawing together scholars with a range of disciplinary or subdisciplinary affiliations around the study of language use in modern society, with the ethnography of speaking standing as a full partner in the enterprise. And however the scholars engaged in this work may wish to identify themselves, our ethnographic understanding of language and medicine (e.g., doctor–patient communication, therapy talk, hospital admission interviews), language and law (e.g., lawyer–client communication, language in the courtroom), language and education (e.g., teacher–parent communication, language in the classroom, the social acquisition and uses of literacy, educational testing), the social implications of bi- and multi-lingualism and social dialects, and related problems are all significantly richer, deeper, and more nuanced than when Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking first appeared.

One area that deserves special mention in this regard is the relationship between spoken and written discourse, which has figured prominently in research on language in education. The extension of the perspective of the ethnography of speaking to writing is explored in this volume by Keith Basso, in what has since become a foundational essay (pp. 425–32). The intervening years have seen a great burgeoning of interest in many disciplines in orality and literacy, much of it, as in the work of Ong (1982) and Goody (1977, 1987), a revival in language-centered terms of the nineteenth-century typological and evolutionary tradition devoted to differentiating ‘primitive’ from ‘civilized’ society. As with all such gross social typologies, the oral-literate contrast is susceptible to grand a priori generalizations, and here the ethnography of speaking/writing has had an especially vital role to play in providing ethnographic correctives to such speculations. The literature in the field is far too extensive to review here, but we might mention the work of Finnegan (1977), Basso (1980), Chafe and Tannen (1987, especially useful as a review of the literature) as effective critiques of the ‘Great Divide’ theorists as against careful empirical investigations of the patterns and functions of speaking and writing in specific societies, and Frake (1983) as a clear statement of the political implications of this problem. The productiveness of the perspectives offered by the ethnography of speaking to the study of the interrelationship between spoken and written discourse in American (including Canadian) educational contexts is demonstrated with rigor and elegance in Shirley Brice Heath’s Ways with Words (1983), Ron and Suzanne Scollon’s Narrative, Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication (1981), and Amy Shuman’s Storytelling Rights (1986).

When it comes to the application of this research in all its dimensions, it
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is clear that students of language use in American society at least have been centrally concerned with the relevance of their work to the politics of culture and to practical problem solving, including conspicuously the training of educational, legal, and medical practitioners. O’Barr, for example, devotes an entire section of his survey of the language of law in American society to the implications of research in this field for the training of lawyers (1981:404–6), noting that, based on the language-centered work he reviews, ‘there are serious discrepancies between what a lawyer is taught to do and what he is actually required to do in the practice of law’ (1981:404). Ethnographers of speaking have been most actively engaged in incorporating its perspectives and findings into the training of educators: Dell Hymes, Courtney Cazden, Shirley Brice Heath, and a growing number of others have worked energetically in the training of school teachers and educational administrators. It is also worth mentioning that the Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, an important outlet for case studies in the ethnography of speaking (Bauman and Sherzer 1980, 1982), were published for a time under the auspices of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a research and development laboratory in education, and with the sponsorship of the National Institute of Education. Still, one must acknowledge that the impact of this work still remains to be felt in any significant way: Heath (1981:84), O’Barr (1981:404–6), and Shuy (1984:425–6) all say as much, though their commitment and that of many of their colleagues remains undiminished.

One of the points on Shuy’s outline warrants somewhat more attention with regard to the concerns and contributions of Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, namely, ‘Reliance on performance data’ (1984:440). The notion of performance is the most central organizing concept in our volume. As stated in the Introduction (p. 7):

The task of the ethnographer of speaking . . . is to identify and analyze the dynamic interrelationships among the elements which go to make up performance, toward the construction of a descriptive theory of speaking as a cultural system in a particular society.

There are, in fact, two basic senses of performance that have assumed a place near the center of the ethnography of speaking (Bauman 1987). The first of these we might call performance as speaking praxis, the situated use of language in the conduct and constitution of social life (Duranti 1988). Performance here is seen as a creative and emergent accomplishment, a form of social production and reproduction. Speech performance in this sense is a part of the basic charter of the ethnography of speaking; there can be no true ethnography of speaking without it.

It is worth remarking that the performance-centered approach to lan-
language presented in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking has been identified by Ortner (1984) as one of the early lines of that agent-centered, practice-oriented perspective on society and culture that she advances as anthropological theory for the 1980s. While it is gratifying to know that we as ethnographers of speaking got there early, we should be reminded that agent- and practice-centered perspectives are currently being developed as counterbalances to traditional structural, systemic, collective, normative conceptions of society and culture, and this takes us to the heart of the deepest problem in the social disciplines: the dynamic interplay between the social, conventional, ready-made in social life and the individual, creative, and emergent qualities of human existence. In the ethnography of speaking, no less than in other sectors of anthropology, the illumination and comprehension of that key problem demand a great deal more work.

In addition to speaking praxis, the second, more marked sense of performance that has figured prominently in the ethnography of speaking centers on performance as artful, the poetics of performance (see Section V). Performance as practice illuminates spoken art as productively as it does any other mode of speaking, but offers no special insight into artistic verbal performance. Accordingly, there have been a number of efforts to construct a framework for the study of the poetics of performance, including such definitional efforts as those of Hymes (1975) and Bauman (1977a, 1987, 1988–9) and the translational and analytical enterprise of ethno-poetics in its various guises (Hymes 1981; Sherzer and Woodbury 1987; Tedlock 1983). Performance in its artful sense may be seen as a specially marked way of speaking, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. In this sense of performance, the act of speaking is put on display, objectified, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance makes one communicatively accountable; it assigns to an audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s accomplishment. To the extent that the skill and effectiveness of expression may become the focus of attention in any act of communication, the potential for performance is always present. In these terms, then, performance is a variable quality, relatively more or less dominant among the multiple functions served by a communicative act. It may range along a continuum from sustained, full performance to a fleeting breakthrough into performance.

This approach to performance has proven useful in a number of lines of investigation, helping to distinguish between renditions of verbal forms framed as performance as against other modes of presentation (report, play, etc.). It has directed attention to the social patterns and functions of artistic verbal performance in many dimensions of social life, from politics
and diplomacy (Beeman 1982; Duranti 1981) to curing (Hanks 1984; Sherzer 1986), from sociable encounters (Bauman 1986a, Bell 1983) to the acquisition of communicative competence (McDowell 1978; Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1976; Trosset 1986), from the symbolic construction of the moral landscape (Basso 1984, 1988; Fernandez 1988; Kuipers 1984) to the management of gossip disputes (Goodwin 1982) — the ways in which artistic verbal performance may work in the ultimate service of persuasion, power, pleasure, and the general intensification of social experience. And in its convergence with ethnopoetics, it has directed close attention to the formal devices and patterns of spoken art and the formal means of keying the performance frame. Indeed, it is in the examination of verbal art as performance that the ethnography of speaking has been most formal in its analysis, moving ever more steadily into the close analysis of artistic texts in terms of linguistic patterning principles from phonology and intonation to syntax to generic structures to conversational structures (Bauman 1977b; Mannheim 1986).

While it is firmly rooted in the ethnography of speaking, this approach to performance has been a ground on which the perspectives of the ethnography of speaking have gained currency in adjacent disciplines. Scholars in other fields with an interest in the poetics of performance, such as folklore (e.g., Limón and Young 1986), speech communication (e.g., Fine 1984; Fine and Speer 1977), literary criticism (e.g., Wiget 1985), and semiotics (e.g., McDowell 1985; Prosch 1983; Stoeltje and Bauman 1988), have taken up and explored the notion of verbal art as performance from the scholarship in the ethnography of speaking. Moreover, this same performance orientation has been taken up as well in at least one field of study that does not center on language, namely, ethnomusicology, where it has been found useful in the conceptualization and analysis of musical performance (Basso 1984; Béhague 1984; Brenneis 1987; Feld 1982; McLeod and Herndon 1980; Stone 1982), thus carrying us from the ethnography of speaking to a more general ethnography of communication. Such extension may also be seen to be operating from within anthropology as well, as scholars begin to draw ideas of artistic performance beyond the verbal channel into other realms of behavior (e.g., Bauman 1986b; Herzel 1985).

Connections of these kinds that link the ethnography of speaking to various disciplines in terms of performance or other concepts were of special concern to us in framing and organizing Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking. The contributions to the conceptual framework of the ethnography of speaking of Kenneth Burke’s literary theory, Bronislaw Malinowski’s social anthropology, and Edward Sapir’s and Roman Jakobson’s linguistics were acknowledged from the very first (Hymes
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1962), and the incorporative vision of Gumperz and Hymes ensured that the foundation they laid down would cut across disciplinary boundaries. In the publication of Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, the multidisciplinary relevance of the ethnography of speaking was maintained by the inclusion in the collection of contributors from anthropology, linguistics, folklore, and sociology; thus the effort in the general Introduction to the volume and the separate section introductions to make explicit the significance of the ethnography of speaking to those disciplines, suggesting that as the ethnography of speaking had drawn from or shared concepts, orientations, methods from those various fields, so might it in turn have something to offer back to them.

In the years since then, clearly, that offer has been taken up in those four disciplines and others with an interest in the sociocultural dimensions of discourse. Not only is ‘anthropology . . . currently sensitive to the “ethnography of speaking” ’ (Turner 1986:21), but the ethnography of speaking has found a place – sometimes a prominent place, sometimes just a corner as yet – in linguistics, primarily in those lines of linguistic inquiry that attach central importance to language in use, such as pragmatics (e.g., International Pragmatics Association 1987; Levinson 1983) or functional grammar (e.g., Nichols 1984; Nichols and Woodbury 1985; Silverstein 1976, 1978, 1985); in folklore, most centrally in relation to problems of genre, performance, oral poetics, and oral narrative (e.g., Bauman 1977a, 1986b; Ben-Amos 1976; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975; Limón and Young 1986); in sociology, in studies of conversation and other aspects of the interaction order (e.g., Goffman 1983; Goodwin 1980; Grimshaw 1988); in history (e.g., Bauman 1983; Burke 1981; Burke and Porter 1987; St George 1984); in literary studies, particularly in explorations of the relationship between oral and written literature and literature as socially and culturally grounded discursive practice (e.g., Ormsby-Lennon 1977; D. Sherzer 1986; Stewart 1978); and so on. But it is precisely the extent to which the ethnography of speaking has infiltrated these various disciplines that makes it far more difficult now than it was in 1974 to view the ethnography of speaking itself in disciplinary or subdisciplinary terms. Perhaps in some general institutional sense the center of gravity of the enterprise still lies within linguistic anthropology, if one were to count, say, the number of its practitioners who gather under the aegis of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology or are affiliated with anthropology departments as against other scholarly societies or departments. Such institutional considerations aside, however, we would suggest that in broader intellectual terms, the ethnography of speaking is currently in

3 On the ethnography of speaking and the study of discourse, see Duranti (1985) and Sherzer (1987b, 1988–9).
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transition from subdisciplinary to transdisciplinary status, as part of that
refiguration of social thought heralded by Clifford Geertz (1980). That is to
say, we envisage the ethnography of speaking in the next phase of its
development as assuming a place ever more clearly as an integrative,
discourse-centered perspective on language, literature, society, culture,
and history that transcends disciplinary divisions of intellectual labor. The
pages that follow represent part of the foundation of that transdisciplinary
perspective on which the ethnography of speaking can continue to build.

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PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION
PREFACE

This volume is rooted in the conviction that something has been missing from our understanding of language, and that established lines of linguistic research will not—even cannot—fill the gap. Whether one’s concern is with the analysis of language as a purely scientific subject, or with the role of language in practical affairs, questions arise that are quite outside the declared scope of the conventional disciplines which claim an interest in language. Patterns and functions of speech are recognized that are not taken into account in grammars, ethnographies, and other kinds of research. Differences in the purposes to which speech is put and the ways it is organized for these purposes are observed, whereas the scholarly literature seems to consider only the ways that languages and their uses are fundamentally the same. In recent years, work to remedy this situation has come to be known as the ethnography of speaking.

The ethnography of speaking has had a relatively short history as a named field of inquiry. It was called into being by Dell Hymes’ seminal essay of 1962, which drew together themes and perspectives from a range of anthropological, literary, and linguistic scholarship, and brought them to bear on speaking as a theoretically and practically crucial aspect of human social life, missing from both linguistic descriptions and ethnographies, and on ethnography as the means of elucidating the patterns and functions of speaking in societies. The 1962 essay was programmatic, intended as a stimulus and guide to ethnographic research. Much the same was the purpose of The Ethnography of Communication, published two years later under the editorship of John Gumperz and Dell Hymes (1964). Here, a further development by Hymes of the framework for the ethnography of speaking was accompanied by a series of exemplary essays, mostly substantive treatments of phenomena relevant to the ethnography of speaking, though not undertaken under its charter, but converging and contributing toward the establishment of the field (Gumperz & Hymes 1972: vi; 1964:9).

The decade which followed the definition of the ethnography of speaking as an area of anthropological research produced further efforts to develop
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the conceptual and methodological framework of the field (e.g., Ervin-Tripp 1969; Gumperz 1962, 1964; Hymes 1964b, 1967, 1971, 1972; Sherzer & Darnell 1972; Slobin 1967), and a suggestive corpus of substantice studies undertaken under the stimulus of the ethnography of speaking or convergent with it in some way (e.g., Bright 1966; Gumperz & Hymes 1972). By 1972, the field had developed to the point where a significant number of scholars had undertaken research directly on the ethnography of speaking and were ready to report on their findings. On the premise that the field would be materially advanced by bringing these researchers together in a forum which would allow them to present and discuss their findings toward some kind of synthesis, however exploratory, the Conference on the Ethnography of Speaking was held in Austin, 20–23 April 1972.

The present volume is in large part an outgrowth of that conference. To the core of papers derived from the conference, others have been added; all have been revised, or, in some cases, written or rewritten, for this volume in the light of discussions at and subsequent to the conference. The result, we think, is a more unified work on the ethnography of speaking than any of its predecessors. Little credit can be claimed by the editors for this unity of scope; it is rather a sign that earlier works provided a firm and productive basis for a significant line of research. The organization of the papers into sections is meant to facilitate the presentation of what seem to us to be significant themes emerging from the ethnography of speaking in this second exploratory stage of its development, but readers will, we hope, be aware of the many common threads which run through the entire volume and contribute to its overall unity; we have tried to indicate some of these in the general introduction which follows, and in the introductions to the several sections. Sections II–V are made up of detailed substantive studies of various aspects of the patterning of speaking in particular societies, including cases from North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Section VI brings together a range of papers which summarize the present state of the ethnography of speaking and recommend extensions of its focus or scope, or both, toward a more general theory of the social use of language.

The preparation for and of this volume involved several years and many people, without whom it would not have been conceivable, much less possible. Our oldest and greatest debt is to Dell Hymes, mentor, sponsor, and friend. It will be obvious what we owe to his scholarship, but we must also acknowledge with gratitude his extensive aid and encouragement in the planning of the conference and the shaping of this book. As Chairman of the Social Science Research Council Committee on Sociolinguistics, he was instrumental in securing the support of
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the Social Science Research Council for the Conference on the Ethnography of Speaking under a grant from the National Science Foundation; we would also like to express our thanks to the other members of the committee at that time, Charles Ferguson, Allen Grimshaw, John Gumperz, and William Labov, and to David Jenness of the SSRC, for their aid and counsel. We are grateful also to Gordon Whaley, then Dean of the Graduate School, and Winfred P. Lehmann, then Chairman of the Department of Linguistics, for their aid in securing for us the support of the Graduate School of the University of Texas.

All of the contributors, as well as the editors, owe much to the following individuals, for their participation at the Conference on the Ethnography of Speaking: Dan Ben-Amos, Ben Blount, David DeCamp, Dale Fitzgerald, Nicholas Hopkins, Rolf Kjolseth, Edgar Polomé, Michelle Rosaldo, David Roth, Mary Sanches, Henry Selby, Roger Shuy, John Szwed, and Rudolph Troike.

Special thanks and credit must be given to Nancy Hewett, for her very perceptive, intelligent, and careful editorial assistance in the preparation of this volume. The contributors may not be aware how much they owe to her, but the editors certainly are. Frances Terry has been involved with us on the project from the writing of the first exploratory letters to the proofreading of the manuscript and preparation of the index, invaluable, as ever, at every step of the way.

Finally, more than thanks are due to Louise and Dina, for their capacity to bear with us through all those hours of talk about talk about talk . . .

October 1973

Richard Bauman
Joel Sherzer