INTRODUCTION

Since at least the time of Descartes and Leibniz, there has been current in western thought a conception of language which holds that insofar as language is governed by laws, they are ‘the specifically linguistic laws of connection between linguistic signs, within a given, closed linguistic system . . . Individual acts of speaking are, from the viewpoint of language, merely fortuitous refractions and variations or plain and simple distortions of normatively identical forms’ (Voloshinov 1973:57; see also Hymes 1970a). The prominence, or predominance, of this view in our own century and our own time, makes it especially important to state at the outset of this book our commitment to a contrary view. This work is built on, and intended as a contribution to, a conception which holds that the patterning of language goes far beyond laws of grammar to comprehend the use of language in social life, that such organization inescapably involves the radical linking of the verbal and the sociocultural in the conduct of speaking. The field of inquiry devoted to the discovery of this organization is the ethnography of speaking.

Consistent with current views of the nature and purpose of ethnography, the ethnography of speaking may be conceived of as research directed toward the formulation of descriptive theories of speaking as a cultural system or as part of cultural systems. In order to construct such theories, we need to formulate, heuristically for the present, theoretically later, the range of things that might enable us to comprehend the organization of speaking in social life, the relevant aspects of speaking as a cultural system.1

The point of departure in such a formulation is the speech community, defined in terms of the shared or mutually complementary knowledge and ability (competence) of its members for the production and interpretation of socially appropriate speech.2 Such a community is an organization of diversity,3 insofar as this knowledge and ability (i.e., access to and command of resources for speaking) are differentially distributed among its members; the production and interpretation of speech are thus variable and complementary, rather than homogeneous and constant throughout the community.
Introduction

Within the overall context of the speech community, the ethnographer of speaking seeks to determine, among other factors, the means of speaking available to its members. The means include, first of all, the linguistic varieties and other codes and subcodes, the use of which counts as speech within the community, and the distribution of which constitutes the linguistic repertoires of its members (Gumperz 1964). Also constituting means of speaking are the conventional speech acts and genres available to the members for the conduct of speaking.

An additional aspect of the system is the set of community norms, operating principles, strategies, and values which guide the production and interpretation of speech, the community ground rules for speaking. The interest here, for example, is in the nature and distribution of norms of interaction to be found within the community, insofar as these organize spoken interaction. To the extent that these norms of interaction are goal-directed, they may be viewed as strategies, to be studied with reference to the goals of the participants. Goals, in turn, are closely related to values, hierarchies of preference for the judgment and evaluation of speaking. Finally, there are norms of interpretation, conventional understandings brought to bear on the interpretation of speech by the receivers of spoken communication.

All of the foregoing may be seen as resources available to the members of a speech community for the conduct of speaking. This speaking is situated within and seen as meaningful in terms of native contexts of speech activity, i.e., culture-specific settings, scenes, and institutions in which speaking is done. Moreover, this speaking is carried on by the members of the community as incumbents of speaking (and listening) roles, socially defined and situated in relevant contexts.

The nexus of all the factors we have outlined is performance. We conceive of performance in terms of the interplay between resources and individual competence, within the context of particular situations. Performances thus have an emergent quality, structured by the situated and creative exercise of competence.

The task of the ethnographer of speaking, then, 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. The studies in this volume represent just such analyses, in the form of case studies. None of the contributions purports to be a complete ethnography of speaking; each is, rather, an exploration in the ethnography of speaking, focusing on particular and salient aspects of individual cultural systems. Not all the aspects of the framework we have outlined have received equal attention, but all are at least touched upon in the papers that follow. The sections of the book are
I. Preface and introduction

consistent with the framework and reflect the major concerns of the ethnography of speaking at this stage of its development.

Although the ethnography of speaking was first proposed as ‘a special opportunity, and responsibility, of anthropology’ (Hymes 1962), it has become increasingly clear in the intervening years that its commitments are substantially shared by a number of disciplines concerned with speaking as an instrument of social life. The ethnography of speaking offers a perspective which cuts across these various disciplines, drawing theoretical and methodological insights from all of them, and contributing in its own right to the development of each. Most centrally involved in this common venture are anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and folklore, all of which are represented in this volume through the identifications and interests of the contributors.

From anthropology, besides the ethnographic method and the traditional anthropological commitment to the importance of language, the ethnography of speaking draws the basic relativism of its perspective (Hymes 1961, 1966), the understanding that speaking, like other systems of behavior — religious, economic, political, etc. — is organized in each society in culture-specific ways, which are to be discovered. This is not to deny the existence of universals, but to assert that they, like other generalizations, must emerge through comparison of individual systems, investigated first in their own terms.

In its turn, the ethnography of speaking fills the gap in the anthropological record created by the neglect by anthropological linguists of the social use of language and by the lack of interest of ethnographers in patterns and functions of speaking. The importance of the ethnography of speaking to anthropology cuts far deeper than this, however, for a careful focus on speaking as an instrument for the conduct of social life brings to the fore the emergent nature of social structures, not rigidly determined by the institutional structure of the society, but rather largely created in performance by the strategic and goal-directed manipulation of resources for speaking. It is for this reason that we have stressed the theme of performance in the organization of this volume.

While it is clearly possible — at times even necessary — to account for certain aspects of the patterns and functions of speaking in a community without immediate reference to linguistic detail, a complete ethnography of speaking must incorporate the linguistic means available to the members of the community. To be consistent with the ethnographic perspective, however, those modes of linguistic description based upon a linguistic theory ... concerned primarily with an ideal speaker—listener, in a com-
pletely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (Chomsky 1965:3) are patently inadequate. Recently, however, an increasing number of linguists have begun to argue for an expansion of linguistic theory, recognizing that it is impossible to describe language adequately without taking into consideration aspects of language use that have previously been considered extraneous to linguistic theory such as speech acts, presuppositions, politeness, and conversational rules. It is important to stress the strong philosophical bent of much of this research, however, and the fact that it represents a gradual development out of generative-transformational linguistics.

The papers in this volume approach language from a wider ethnographic and social perspective. In this sense, they contribute toward what Hymes has called a socially constituted linguistics, concerned fundamentally with socially based modes of organization of linguistic means rather than the abstract grammar of a single language (Hymes 1973:316). The locus of description is not limited to single individuals, but includes social networks, groups, or communities. The speech community is viewed as inherently heterogeneous; the structure of the heterogeneity must be described. Language use does not occur in isolated sentences, but in natural units of speaking; stated abstractly: speech acts, events, and situations; stated more concretely: greetings, leave-takings, narratives, conversations, jokes, curing chants, or periods of silence. It should be noted that certain concepts and techniques of formal description provided by linguistics, i.e., phrase-structure and transformational rules, have proven useful for the formalization of the structure of such units.

Linguistic anthropologists and folklorists have long come together on the common ground provided by their shared interest in folklore texts, though each discipline has pursued its own particular lines of analysis in the study of these texts, once collected. With the development of the ethnography of speaking, however, paralleled by the development of interest among folklorists in the socially situated performance of folklore, the community of interest has shifted and developed beyond simply the exploitation of common materials, to the pursuit of certain shared analytical goals. To the ethnography of speaking, folklorists bring a particular sensitivity to genre as an organizing factor of verbal performance, which goes beyond the sentence and directs attention to matters of form, content, performance role, performance situation, and function. By studying the most highly marked, artistic verbal genres in these terms, folklorists contribute not only toward
I. Preface and introduction

the filling in of the ethnographic record, but also give prominence to a notion of performance as creative in a sense which goes beyond simply novelty to encompass transcendent artistic achievement.

Awareness of the broader goals of the ethnography of speaking can allow folklorists to view the performance of artistic verbal forms in terms of the overall structure of verbal performance as a whole, establishing both the continuities and discontinuities between verbal art and other modes of speaking within a single unified system. The perspectives and methods of the ethnography of speaking are also indispensable in the determination of native categories of genres and scenes, as well as the elucidation of culture-specific esthetics of spoken language and functions of verbal art forms. All of these represent a crucial counter to the a priori taxonomies, esthetic principles, and functionalist assumptions with which folklorists have operated since the emergence of the discipline.

Within the discipline of sociology, there has been a convergence with the ethnography of speaking on the part of a group of scholars who have arrived at an interest in the socially situated use of language through a concern with the commonsense understandings that enable participants to enter into and sustain social interaction. Since speech is the principal instrument of social interaction, this effort has led to investigations of the situated meanings carried by verbal messages in the conduct of an interaction. These microfunctional analyses of the implicit intentions and understandings which attend participation in conversation carry the analysis of the social use of speech to a finer level than anthropologists have reached, but in terms quite consistent with the conceptual framework of the ethnography of speaking, in its concern with native understandings and rules for the production and interpretation of speech. A closer convergence between the two approaches sees ethnographers looking more closely at the structure of conversation in interaction, while the sociologists enlarge their scope to include other cultures and the organization of contexts of speaking beyond the conversation, as well as careful attention to the features of language itself as integrated with its use.

We have attempted thus far to locate the ethnography of speaking in terms of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary relations among its practitioners, theoretical commitments, and substantive foci of interest. Allowing this general introduction and the essays and introductions which follow to stand as a composite indication of the present state of the ethnography of speaking, what might be suggested concerning the future? How might the field advance during the next decade?

The development which seems to be most immediately in prospect is the publication of more complete ethnographies of speaking, devoted to partic-
ular societies. Many of the contributions to this volume, in fact, are segments of more comprehensive works in progress. These works, when available, will constitute the first full-scale analyses of the patterns and functions of speaking as they ramify throughout the sociocultural life of whole communities, standing as, or approaching, the comprehensive theories of speaking as a cultural system which represent the first major goal of the ethnography of speaking.

A further prospect, as the ethnography of speaking exploits the momentum it has gained during the past decade, is an increase in the number of available case studies of speaking in particular societies. Although the areal coverage of this volume, for example, spans many of the major culture areas of the world, the studies reported on are in many instances the first and only direct explorations in the ethnography of speaking for those areas. Moreover, in this early stage of the development of the field, the tendency has been for ethnographers to study societies or activities in which speaking is a cultural focus and a positively valued activity. Consequently, a reliable base for comparative generalization is yet to be developed since societies differ as to the importance of speaking, both absolutely and relative to particular contexts. As the record expands, however, a more confident ethnology of speaking will be possible. And, as more research is done within geographical areas already represented in the literature, areal patterns and influences will become amenable to investigation.  

Areal studies, in turn, introduce the dimension of historical process and change. There have as yet been few attempts to utilize perspectives from the ethnography of speaking in elucidating areal distributions and linguistic change (e.g., Gumperz 1967; Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968; Sherzer & Bauman 1972), but it is only in the study of pidgins and creoles that such perspectives can be said to be at all prominent, largely through the contribution of the recent Pidginization and Creolization of Languages (Hymes 1971b). The full potential of an ethnographic framework for the analysis of linguistic change remains to be reached.

Far less developed, even, than an ethnographic view of linguistic change, is a historical view of patterns and functions of speaking. Like most ethnography, the ethnography of speaking has been synchronic in scope, and studies of change in patterns and functions of speaking within particular communities are conspicuously lacking in the literature (for exceptions cf. Abrahams 1967; Bauman 1974; Rosaldo 1973). We expect that this situation will change as ethnographic base lines are established from which processes of change may be analyzed either forward or backward in time, and as ethnographers of speaking turn more to the investigation of historical cases through the use of historical materials.

Many more prospects for the ethnography of speaking might be sug-
I2

I. Preface and introduction

gested, but perhaps the most important lies in its potential for the clarification and solution of practical social problems. Through awareness of and sensitivity to the socioexpressive dimension of speaking, and to intergroup differences in ways of speaking within heterogeneous communities, ethnographic investigators are particularly well equipped to clarify those problem situations which stem from covert conflicts between different ways of speaking, conflicts which may be obscured to others by a failure to see beyond the referential functions of speaking and abstract grammatical patterns. Understanding of such problem situations is a major step toward their solution, laying the groundwork for planning and change. Some work in this branch of applied sociolinguistics has already been proposed and carried out (e.g., Abrahams 1972; Bauman 1971; Cazden, John & Hymes 1972; Gumperz & Herasimchuk 1973; Kochman 1969; Philips 1970; Shuy MS.); and we are convinced that the next decade will see more and more ethnographic studies of speaking in schools, hospitals, and other institutions of contemporary culture in heterogeneous societies, toward the solution of practical social problems. If our work leads us to understand speaking in social life as adaptive and creative practice, and as a means for the creation of emergent structures, it is only appropriate that we endow the ethnography of speaking with a similar role.
II

COMMUNITIES AND RESOURCES
FOR PERFORMANCE
INTRODUCTION

A basic element of an ethnography of speaking is the description of the speech community and its linguistic resources. Investigators are continually struck by the diversity of linguistic means in use in communities and the concomitant ability of members of the communities to communicate with one another nevertheless.

Every society makes available to its members a repertoire of linguistic alternatives or resources which they draw on (in an ecological sense) for both referential and stylistic purposes (see paper by Hymes in section VI). The nature of the communicatively meaningful contrasts within the ‘sociolinguistic’ repertoire varies dramatically from society to society. It might involve slight differences in the pronunciation of single sounds that must be described in terms of statistical tendencies. Thus Labov (1966) studies the social implications of the variable pronunciations of the sounds /th/, /dh/, and /r/, among others, in New York City. Gillian Sankoff here discusses the pronunciation of the variable /l/ in Montreal French; speakers have available to them the choice of pronouncing this variable as either [l] or φ. This choice depends on both linguistic and social contexts of usage.

A society’s linguistic resources might, on the other hand, consist of a complex of related dialects. Thus, James Fox shows that on the island of Roti, individuals speak the particular dialect of their nusak ‘native domain’ in everyday, colloquial speech, but draw on other Rotine dialects for the formation of formal, ritual speech.

Or a society’s linguistic resources might include wholly different and perhaps even unrelated languages. One cannot but be impressed by the linguistic ability of the Indians of the Vaupés area of Colombia (as described by Jean Jackson), who are fluent in at least three and often four or five languages and who sometimes understand as many as ten.

What characterizes a speech community is a heterogeneity of linguistic means organized by rules of speaking and interpretation shared by members of the community. By sharing we do not mean a monolithic ‘replication of uniformity,’ but mutually compatible ways of participating in speech activities (see Wallace 1970). Just as the typological nature of the linguistic resources varies from society to society, the nature and functions of the rules can be quite diverse. Thus the variable pronunciation of /l/ as [l] or φ in certain contexts in Montreal French reflects an individual’s sex as well as membership in the professional or working class. A single linguistic variable is mapped onto several important social dimensions.
II. Communities and resources for performance

The many languages in the Vaupés linguistic repertoire function primarily as badges of membership in particular social groups. These social groups have no geographic boundaries and practically no overt markers other than the linguistic badge associated with them. The social groups and the languages which are associated with them function in the regulation of marriage partners in that the groups are exogamous — no one is permitted to marry someone who wears an identical linguistic badge. It is interesting that there is no hierarchical ranking of Vaupés languages in terms of prestige and no mapping of linguistic choices onto a scheme of social stratification. The native Vaupés attitude toward language relationships, language learning, and language use fits well with the notion of language as a badge. Vaupés Indians stress the mutual unintelligibility of Vaupés languages. Furthermore, individuals will not speak a language until they know it quite well and will not ‘mix’ languages while speaking.

Rotinese dialect differences are not ordinarily exploited by speakers in colloquial discourse; nor do they map onto or relate in any way to Rotinese social stratification. Rather they are drawn on as the primary resource in the construction of parallelistic structures characteristic of ritual speech. (For discussion of parallelism see section V.) Thus the Rotinese seem to orient themselves to their own nusak ‘domain’ for the purposes of everyday interaction, while they orient themselves to the entire island of Roti, with its dialect complexity, for the purpose of formal, ritual speech.

The Rotinese situation is a good example of the fact that individuals are typically oriented to participation in several and overlapping speech communities. Thus a New Yorker is usually a participating member of the New York City speech community as well as the United States speech community. He may also be a member of the New York City Italian speech community or the Brooklyn Jewish speech community. Roger Abrahams’ paper (in section IV) might be read as evidence for a single Black speech community within the United States as a whole. Of course, the individual members of this community might also be members of the New York City speech community, the Oakland speech community, etc. What is important is that each of these communities can be defined in terms of shared linguistic repertoires and rules for speaking. Which one or ones an individual orient himself to at any given moment is part of the strategy of speaking.

The two speech communities focused on by Sankoff are relatively delimitable in geographic space. They are:

1. the native French speakers of Montreal, Canada, and
2. the Neo-Melanesian speakers of Lae, New Guinea.

Given these speech communities, the analyst’s task is to describe the sociolinguistic rules which organize them. Here, methods become crucial. Adequate representation of different social groups within the community and of different contexts of language use are essential. The results are impressive. A careful investigation of the patterning of a single linguistic variable, for example /l/ in Montreal French, reveals much more about the social organization of the community than would an impressionistic approach to many linguistic variables.

Speech communities in the Colombian Vaupés are not so easily delimited. In fact, their nature and limits form the focus of Jackson’s entire paper. Given the patterns of marriage-partner selection in the context of Vaupés multilingualism, it