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Culture and Communication

James M. Wilce's new textbook introduces students to the study of language as a tool in anthropology. Solidly positioned in linguistic anthropology, it is the first textbook to combine clear explanations of language and linguistic structure with current anthropological theory. It features a range of study aids, including chapter summaries, learning objectives, figures, exercises, key terms, and suggestions for further reading, to guide student understanding. The complete glossary includes both anthropological and linguist terminology. An appendix features material on phonetics and phonetic representation. Accompanying online resources include a test bank with answers, useful links, an instructor's manual, and sign language case study. Covering an extensive range of topics not found in existing textbooks, including semiotics and the evolution of animal and human communication, this book is an essential resource for introductory courses on language and culture, communication and culture, and linguistic anthropology.

JIM M. WILCE is Professor of Anthropology at Northern Arizona University. He is the author of three books, *Eloquence in Trouble* (1998), *Crying Shame* (2008), and *Language and Emotion* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). He is also the editor of *Social and Cultural Lives of Immune Systems* (2003) and the book series *Studies in Discourse and Culture* (2005 to 2016).

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Culture and Communication

An Introduction

JAMES M. WILCE
Northern Arizona University

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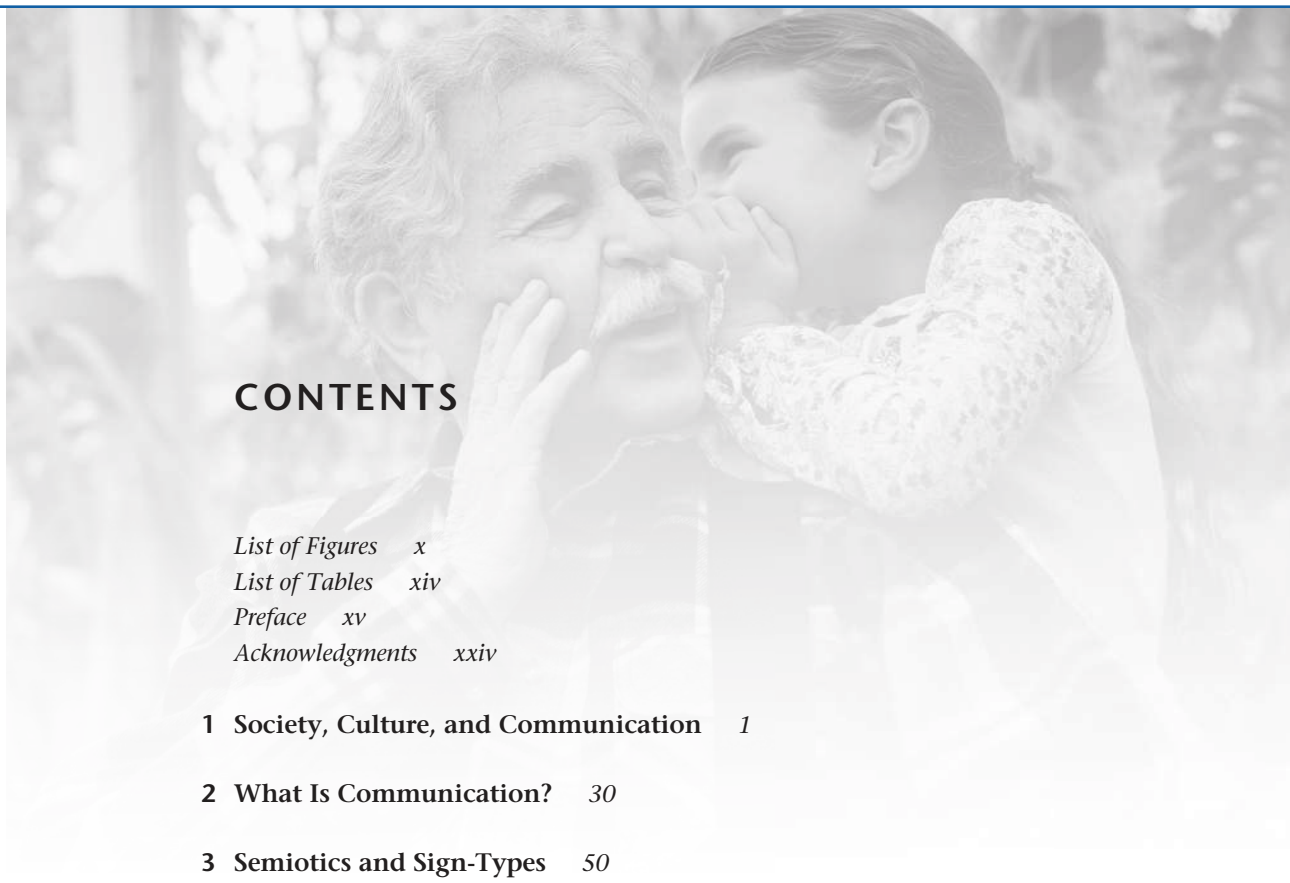

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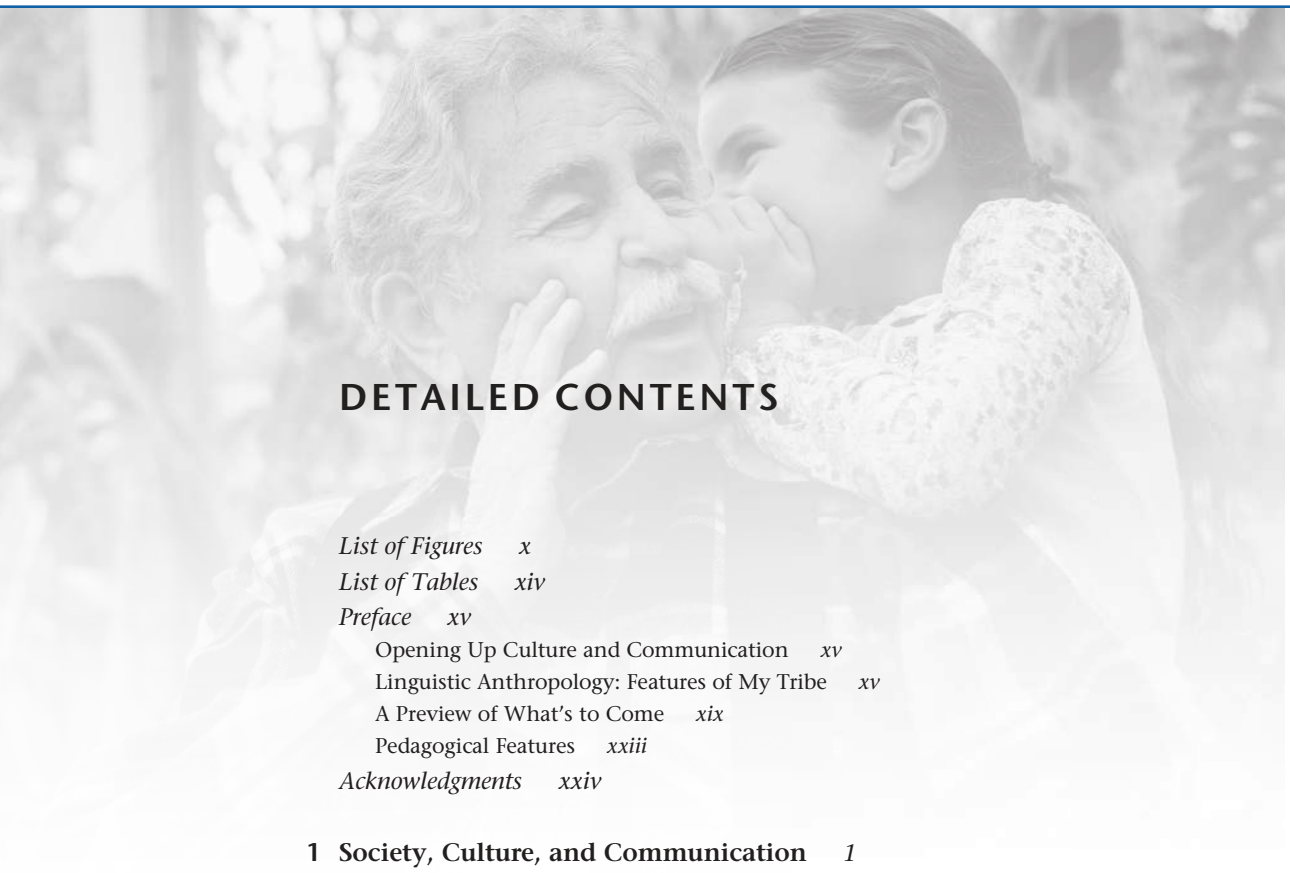

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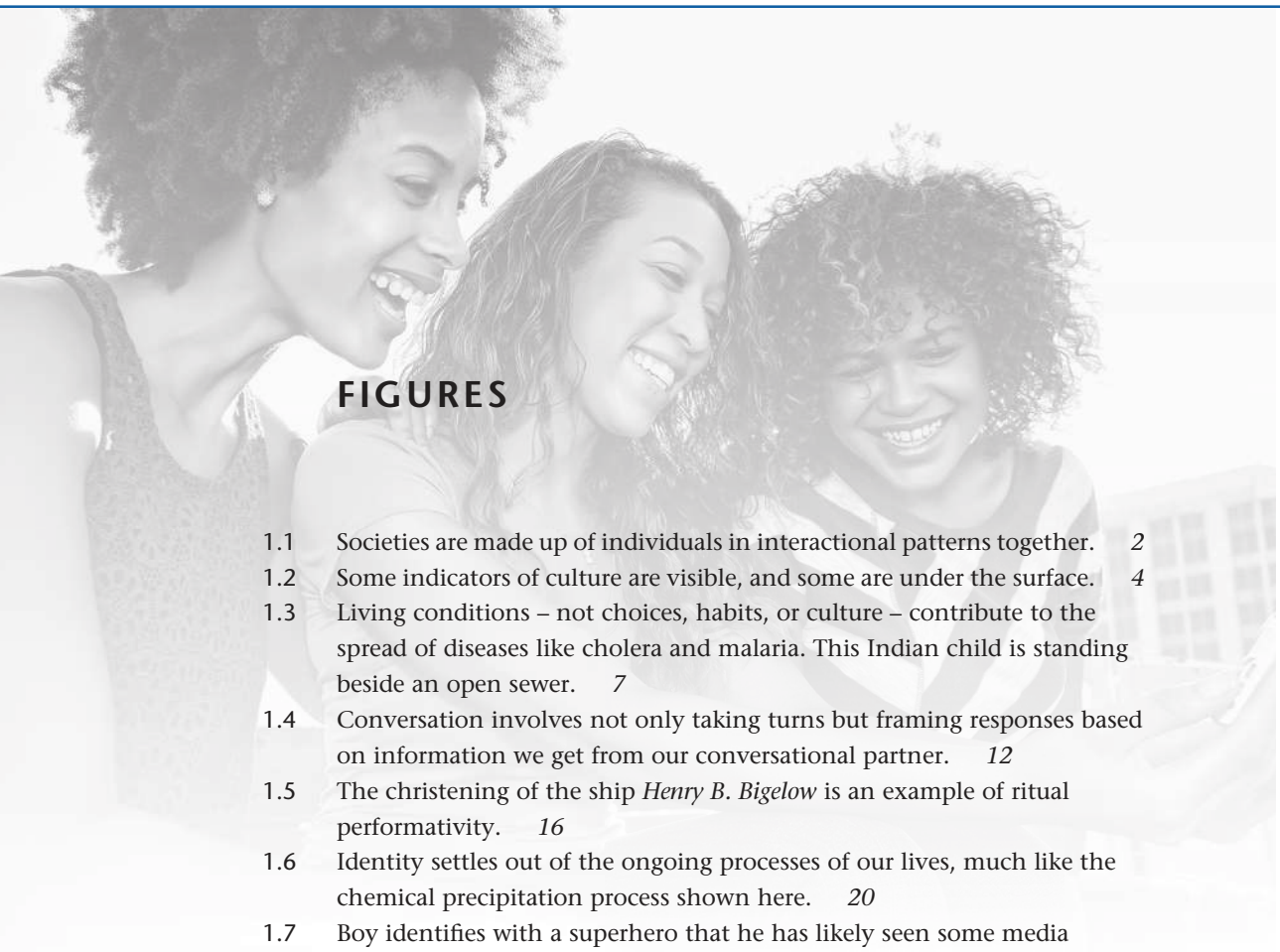

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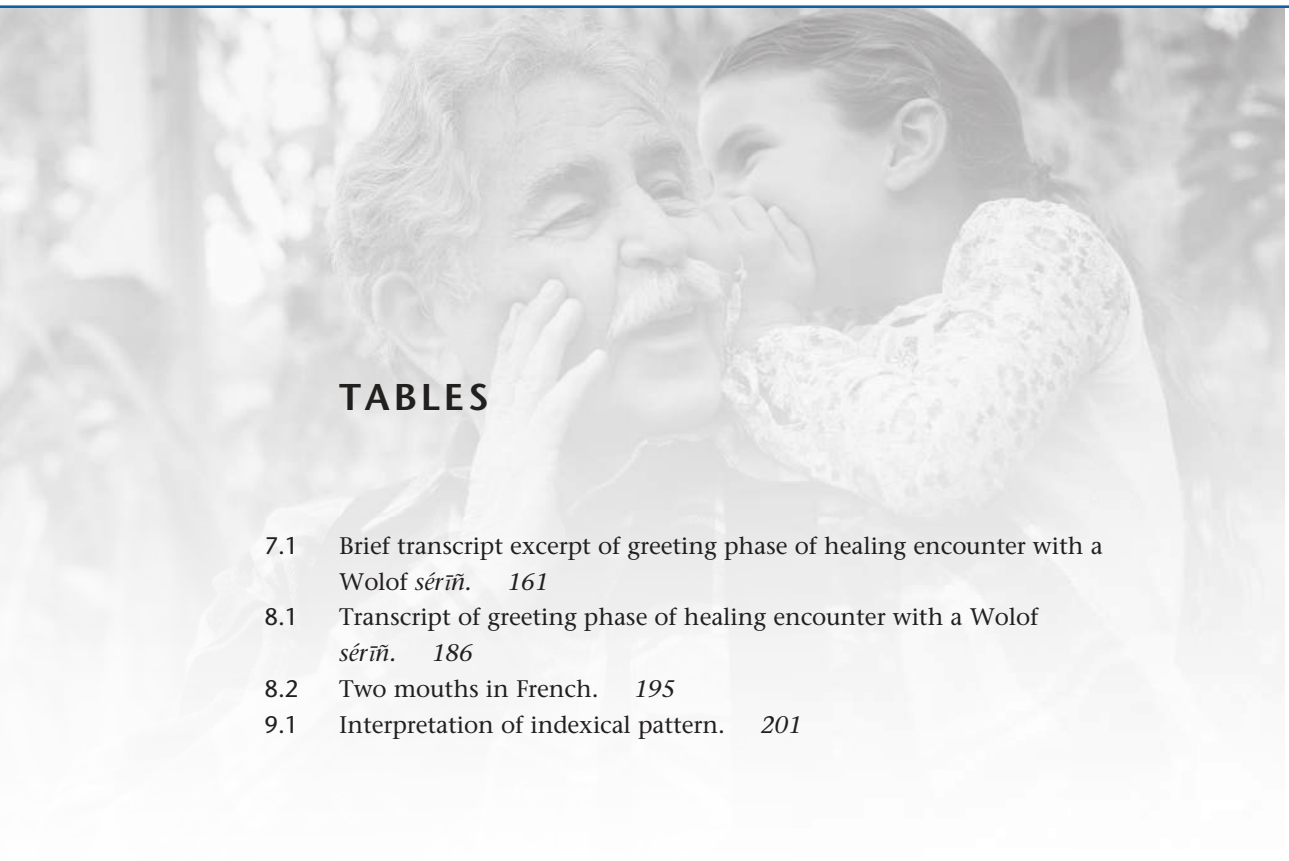

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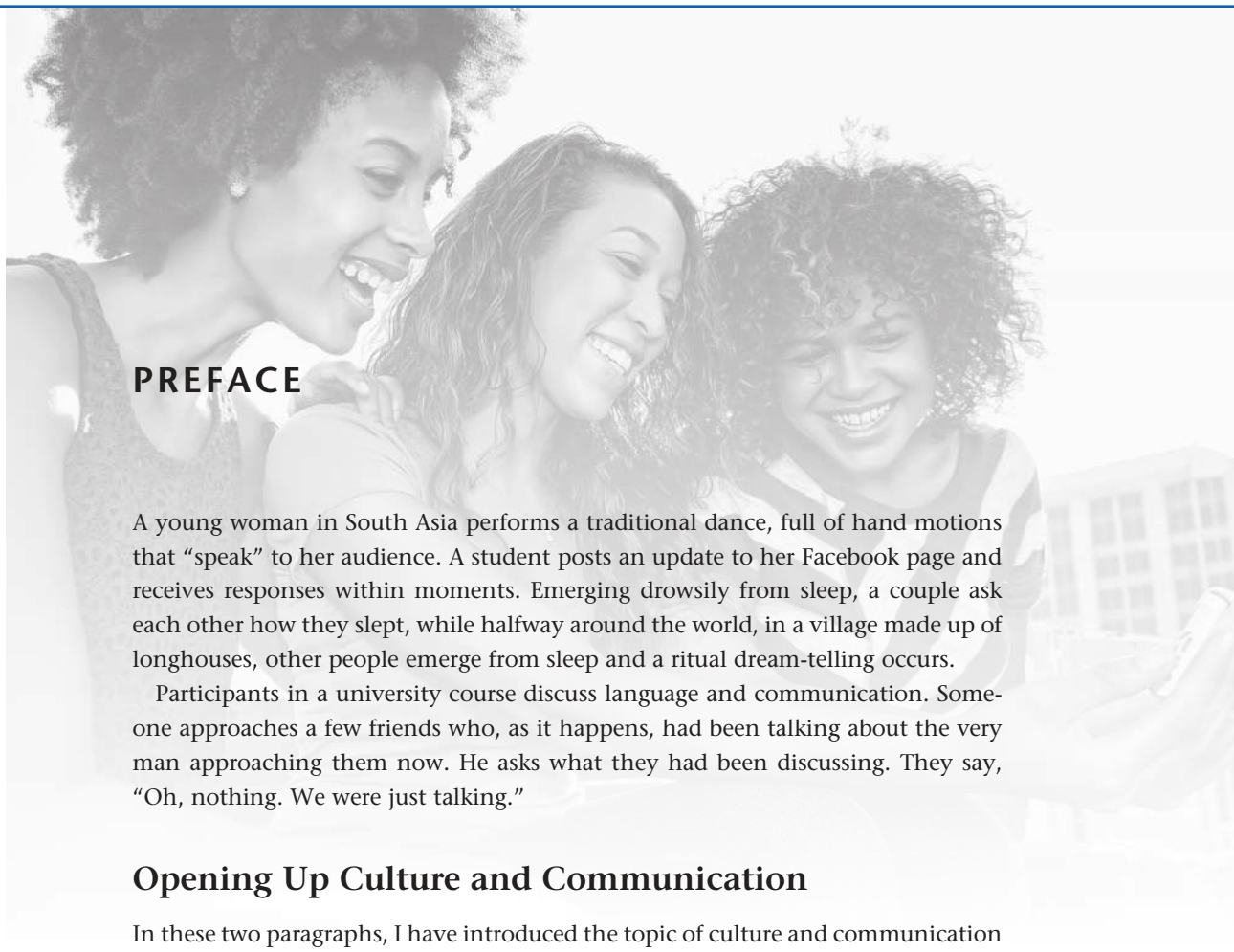

PREFACE

A young woman in South Asia performs a traditional dance, full of hand motions that "speak" to her audience. A student posts an update to her Facebook page and receives responses within moments. Emerging drowsily from sleep, a couple ask each other how they slept, while halfway around the world, in a village made up of longhouses, other people emerge from sleep and a ritual dream-telling occurs.

Participants in a university course discuss language and communication. Someone approaches a few friends who, as it happens, had been talking about the very man approaching them now. He asks what they had been discussing. They say, "Oh, nothing. We were just talking."

Opening Up Culture and Communication

In these two paragraphs, I have introduced the topic of culture and communication in a way that illustrates a theme I develop throughout this book: We not only communicate with each other in many ways, in many **media**, all the time, but we also *communicate about our communication* – we engage in **metacommunication**. (Note that bolded words like this are defined in the Glossary at the end of this book.) As exotic as metacommunication might sound, it is really quite ordinary and pervasive in our lives.

This book is intended for students on **anthropology**, linguistics, or communication courses receiving their first exposure to **linguistic anthropology** – to "culture and communication" as seen through the lens of linguistic anthropology. If anthropology is *the study of humankind from many angles*, linguistic anthropology is *the anthropological field that mines the practices of communication – language in particular – for their sociocultural significance. It studies human life, human culture, and human societies through the social production, exchange, circulation, and reception of signs in society*.

Linguistic Anthropology: Features of My Tribe

My tribe – linguistic anthropologists or "linganths" – is as exotic as any other. Note that I associate "tribe" here with "the exotic" – in a purely tongue-in-cheek manner! I use "tribe" elsewhere in this book in the technical anthropological sense (Ranjan 2012).

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My tribe works well with others, in the sense of having related interests and sometimes approaches to what we do. At the same time, my linganth tribe is also unique in what we do, in how we explore and reflect on the interconnections between culture and communication. I want to introduce you here to some of the important elements of both our commonalities with others and our uniqueness.

Our Commonalities

My tribe joins other tribes in the hard work of analyzing such things as human interaction (also studied by conversation analysts) and music and culture (also studied by ethnomusicologists). My tribe shares with folklorists an interest in traditional **performance**. Along with sociologists and psychoanalysts, linganths study *identity* and, more and more frequently, the *process* of **identification** (Smith 2010) – of identifying *with* someone or *as* this or that (Kulick 2009). Linganths, finally, share with communicologists specializing in media studies an interest in trendy new media and the communities that create and are created by those media.

Additionally, linguistic anthropology is one of the four subfields of anthropology, so my linganth tribe's work overlaps, unsurprisingly, with the work of archaeologists, biological anthropologists, and, especially, social and cultural anthropologists (*anthropologists focused on society on the one hand and culture on the other*).

And, since anthropology is a social science, linguistic anthropologists share common concerns with political scientists, social psychologists, and sociologists, to name but a few examples. Thus, linguistic anthropology links the fine details of face-to-face interaction and communication on old and new media with the great questions of the social sciences – What is power? Who "has" it? How do people become good representatives of their **society** rather than of humankind more generally? How does social inequality come about, and how and why does it last? What are the mysteries of everyday life and how does the mundane relate to community-creating ritual and to world-shattering events? Language and other forms of communication play key roles in all of these.

Finally, linguistic anthropology is not only a social science but also, in some ways, a humanistic discipline. So you will find much in this introduction to linguistic anthropology that may remind you of humanistic studies of **culture**, history, **poetics**, rhetoric, and music.

If at times our self-positioning between a variety of academic disciplines, in both the sciences and the humanities, leaves us with our feet in two boats (or many boats), linguistic anthropologists can also be said to enjoy the richness of all of these perspectives together.

Our Uniqueness

What sets linguistic anthropology apart from other disciplines is the way we **contextualize** *communication, especially language, in relation to culture*.

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In describing the distinctive and defining work of our tribe, linguistic anthropologist Alessandro Duranti hits the nail on the head:

> [These] contributions on the nature of language as a social tool and speaking as a cultural practice have established a domain of inquiry that makes new sense of past and current traditions in the humanities and the social sciences and invites everyone to rethink the relationship between language and culture. (1997:1)

As we explore *Culture and Communication* together, you will find many examples of what Duranti is describing. Hopefully, you will find them as interesting, even exciting, as I do.

As you read this book, you will also find a different style of writing than you might be expecting – I use words like "you" and "I" (or "me" or "my") and sometimes "we" (or "us" or "our"). Although the presence of "you"s and "I"s, "me"s, and "my"s – and "we"s, "us"s, and "our"s – may surprise you, it is no accident. Indeed, it signals that linguistic anthropology is a different kind of science than some – neither a set of opinions nor a so-called hard science, but one of the "human sciences."

Now that you know something about how this book is situated in a particular discipline, which is situated among many disciplines, let me introduce you to the book's major themes.

Overarching Themes: Reflections on Reflection

Although this is a textbook, and thus fulfills its obligation to introduce our field in a way my fellow linguistic anthropologists can recognize and validate, *Culture and Communication* also reflects my "take" on the topic. For example, I describe communication in relation to *the scientific study of signs* known as **semiotics**. Taking a semiotic approach to communication means saying much about language in the context of other human (and even nonhuman) sign systems.

This book also demonstrates the many ways in which *communication is action* – and *all human action communicates*. It reveals the multilayered nature of **discourse** (i.e., language in use, or speech and writing deployed in events of social interaction), always as a particular form of communication.

I use the word "multilayered" here to mean **reflective** or self-reflexive – capable of reflecting on itself. Indeed, the kinds of things we do with language *reflect* various realities and are quite *likely to be reflected on*. Thus, the book peels back the layers of language, uncovering how language is uniquely suited to reflect on the world – the supposedly prelinguistic or nonlinguistic world "out there" – *but also on itself*. Unlike other forms of communication, language is very capable of focusing on speaking, signing, and other forms of "languaging" (Becker 1991). So, just as people like to reflect on what people do, in this book, we reflect on what people do with that unique toolkit we call language.

As we begin this introduction to *Culture and Communication*, you may find yourself wondering:

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- What *is* culture?
- What *is* communication?
- How are communicating and communing related?
- If communication is more than conveying information – if indeed communicating is a form of **social action** – what does it accomplish?

We do explore those questions here, along with others that are still more vexing:

- When we speak about our feelings, are we "expressing ourselves" (our subjectivity, our inner life), or are the words, kisses, and grimaces by which we "express ourselves" somehow the feelings in and of themselves?
- If subjectivity is an important area of anthropological concern – and it is – how much more important is intersubjectivity (shared experience, feelings, and thoughts, which all add up to sharing a sense of "what's going on here")? How can anthropologists interested in communication and language get at both subjectivity and intersubjectivity?
- How do members of a community or participants in shared or **social activities** – activities defined by speaking, signing, or writing as well as others like eating (Cavanaugh et al. 2014) or playing chess (Desjarlais 2011) – manage to understand each other?
- How do members of communities come to share common feelings and values? How do they commune with each other?
- How is "the social" (the complexity of interaction that brings about enduring relations, all the phenomena pertaining to society or societies) born? For that matter, how are we to understand the relationship between society and persons? And is "the social" transformed by social media?

Many people I know, including beginning students, assume that human beings are first and foremost private creatures (i.e., that it makes sense to speak of "the individual," with an emphasis on "the"). In fact, many people conceive of **the social** as the sum total of the actions of distinct individuals. By contrast, this book shares the broad social science assumption that *we become who we are in a dialectic or two-way process*.

Taking this idea further, we not only *adapt* to our physical and social environments but, in both micro and macro processes, *shape* our environments. And both are manifestations of **agency** or action. Linguistic anthropologists explore how we are shaped by, for instance, the **micro-interactions** we have as babies with our caregivers (Gratier and Trevarthen 2008; Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; Trevarthen 1979) and by interacting in/with the wider circles of participation into which we grow and from which we learn, by listening, speaking, and other forms of "doing"/"acting."

So we focus here on action, especially *interaction*. And we explore **subjectivity** (our inner life), but particularly **intersubjectivity**. Finally, we consider how we create understanding. Here in the world of human beings, we connect with one another – even when such connecting means sharing misunderstanding or conflict.

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To borrow a metaphor from Clifford Geertz (2000), introducing you to culture and communication from a linguistic anthropologist's perspective is like trying to sail a boat upwind: We must tack back and forth – from signs to metasigns (see Chapter 3), from first communicative **moves** to second moves (as in a game), from linguistic and interactional details to questions of "what is at stake" locally and globally in acts of communication. This is the path we travel in this book – from examining what makes everyday speech, song, **ritual**, great political **oratory**, or globally circulating media (Chapter 11) what it is (normal, prestigious, stigmatized, beautiful), to reminding ourselves of the local *and* global stakes in communication – it is this rich and interwoven journey that reveals all that is linguistic anthropology.

A Preview of What's to Come

Overall, this book introduces you to the **anthropological perspective** on communication known as linguistic anthropology. Although "linguistic" implies a focus on language alone, this subfield of anthropology actually studies other forms of communication as well. So it is *that* broad anthropological perspective on which I will be focusing throughout this book.

You will also be introduced to one of the defining concepts of anthropology – **culture**. In this book, I often assert the value of looking at cultural *processes* and not just *products*. The book offers ways to avoid treating such concepts as language and culture as things (i.e., "objectifying" or **reifying** them). Thus, I try to use "processualizing" terms – words that emphasize process rather than product, such as "communication," "identification," and "languaging." The central achievement of human linguistic communication – and, perhaps more than any other kind, face-to-face communication – is **intersubjectivity**, which for now we can define as shared experience. This shared experience is often bound up in mutual **identification**, in which we feel and act upon a sense of commonality. Identification is typically complex and even conflicting. It is certainly a process rather than a thing, whereas statements such as "language shapes our identity" can easily sound like one thing determines another thing. Thus, keep in mind as you read this book that, when I use words like "culture," or "language," that sound like things – and I do so frequently – *these terms are shorthand for complex processes more accurately labeled with such odd terms as* ***languaging***.

With that as a brief overview, let me describe the basic concepts that each chapter covers.

Chapter 1 explores terrain that is, on the one hand, typically dealt with in anthropology textbooks, particularly defining "culture." Such words are deceptively familiar. Popular discourse too often confuses culture and society, too often using "cultures" to mean populations or groups. In this book, I explain that a population is a society, and culture is a catch-all term for *all* of the things that define a particular society – its ideas, values, modes, and patterns of action (including

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communication as action), and the material manifestations of all of these. In talking about these manifestations, keep in mind that we may only experience language via its material forms (for instance, sound waves conveying spoken language, light waves coming off of this page, and the areas of the brain associated with language).

Chapter 2 introduces "communication." It starts with a critique of a popular model of communication that locates meaning in individual minds and, in some way, envisions sentences and other building blocks of language as pipelines through which the mental things called "meanings" travel. In this **conduit model** – critiqued by me in Chapter 3 and by Reddy (1979) – the pipeline (i.e., specific languages and even more specific grammatical forms) in no way influences the ideas or meanings being conveyed through the conduit. Chapter 2 explores two alternative models that linguistic anthropologists prefer over the conduit model. The **pragmatic** or **practice** approach looks at speech, writing, and communication more generally as forms of action. Viewing communication as **semiosis** draws on Charles Peirce's (1931–1958) understanding of the process of forming **signs** and of their circulation and effects.

Chapter 3 continues to explore Peirce's model of semiotics, centering on the triad of signs or **sign-vehicles** (signs themselves), objects (which sign-vehicles represent in some way), and **interpretants** (signs' effects). Peirce liked triads, the best known of which is the trio of sign types or modalities – **icons**, **indexes**, and **symbols**. Each of them "means" in a different way: by virtue of the sign's similarity to its object (**iconicity**), by virtue of proximity or of some tangible relationship (**indexicality**), and by virtue of cultural convention (**symbolicity**). Chapter 3 also asserts the fundamental importance of the process of semiotic reflection, the capacity of signs in some systems (language, in particular) to reflect overtly on themselves or on the sign system of which the reflecting sign is a part. This chapter then turns to the historical and cross-cultural diversity of sign theories.

Chapter 4 opens up the subject of language. Textbooks that address language tend either to treat it as a system (i.e., a set of structures with no apparent relevance to social relations or culture) or to include very little about the various levels of **linguistic structure**. By contrast, Chapter 4 offers a serious introduction to the details of linguistic structure – **phonetics** and **phonology**, **morphology**, **syntax**, **semantics** and **pragmatics**, and **textuality** (structure at the highest level, that of discourse) – while demonstrating the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which this uniquely structured human invention called language becomes a tool for accomplishing social and cultural work. I focus particularly on the ways in which ritual oratory around the world tends to take advantage of linguistic structure in creating poetic effects through what is called **parallelism**.

Chapter 5 covers the evolution of communication and, specifically, language. The chapter's uniqueness is in doing so from the perspective of linguistic anthropology rather than linguistics, biological anthropology, or cognitive science. Textbooks typically approach the evolution of language both as a manifestation of the

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large brain size that characterizes *Homo sapiens sapiens* and as a crucial tool for the highly complex social interactions that became necessary in our evolution. Clearly, these two phenomena overlap or are mutually constitutive, and each is relevant to topics central to linguistic anthropology. The chapter also introduces "**Theory of Mind**."

The first phenomenon, which is the topic of Chapter 6, contributes significantly to the ways in which language becomes a crucial cultural resource. And that is central to the way that linguistic anthropologists approach language. This phenomenon is also related to **linguistic relativity**, or the sometimes vexing question associated with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf of how linguistic diversity might be linked to perceptual or cognitive diversity. The treatment of these issues in Chapter 6 differs from that in other textbooks insofar as it draws on work being done today.

This contemporary work in linguistic anthropology entails and requires a contemporary toolkit – the topic of Chapter 7. Linguistic anthropologists share many methods and theories with other anthropologists, including methods used by sociocultural anthropologists, such as **participant observation** and **interviewing**. However, Chapter 7 also emphasizes a particular form of interviewing especially suited to linguistic anthropology – the **playback interview**, a method pioneered by Bambi Schieffelin (1979). Just as we use participant observation and interviewing in our own unique way, we linguistic anthropologists make digital video and audio recordings and transcribe them – but transcribe them in ways best adapted to our particular research goals.

After this methodological shot in the arm, we go back to developing our models of human communication. Chapter 8 expands on earlier chapters' treatments of language as a tool for social action (Duranti 1997:1–2; 2003) – an expansion that well reflects linguistic anthropologists' increased emphasis on that theme. To revisit what was said about the two-sided relationship between language as a reflection of modern human brains – a capacity residing in the brain – and as a means by which we enact our humanity and reinforce and even expand on our brain-based cognition, Chapter 8 emphasizes the social over the individual, external communication over (sometimes) internal thought. It revisits the theme of semiotics, and particularly the three sign modes – **iconicity**, **indexicality**, and **symbolicity**. This time, however, the relevance of those modalities to human social life takes center stage. This chapter explores how signs and their use or workings help create the sociocultural realities we inhabit. It shows how the sign-types "iconicity" and "indexicality" both break down into two subtypes, and it introduces the idea that human social interaction typically involves many channels of communication in use simultaneously (semiotic "multimodality").

Chapter 9 builds on that survey of human social semiotics. If Chapters 5 through 8 are in part about language-based communication as a reflection of our humanity – evolved as it is to incorporate a complex interaction between the brain and the rest of the body – then Chapter 9 addresses communication as the

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enactment of culture, the embodiment of society. It introduces dynamic ways to view the phenomena discussed in previous chapters, especially iconicity as "iconization" and "society" as "socialization." It introduces the process of **socialization** by which cultural insiders pass on to children, newcomers, and adults in changing roles the knowledge they need to navigate particular cultural worlds successfully. More specifically, it introduces **language socialization**, which refers to the many times when socialization works *through the use of language* (e.g., when parents tell children to wash their hands before eating) and, of at least equal importance, those times when insiders such as parents and other caregivers overtly train children how *to use language* in socially appropriate ways (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986).

Chapter 10 puts **performance** under the lights and examines its power as a cultural force. It defines performance in ways that go far beyond what actors, stand-up comics, or musicians, for example, do. In fact, every time you say something to make a friend laugh, you are engaging in performance. (Whereas those of us from the so-called West often believe that performance and sincerity are incompatible, many communities around the world regard performance – especially in the sense of speaking in a manner that is appropriate to a **context** – as admirable, and they find the Western obsession with sincerity hard to understand.) Chapter 10 reintroduces readers to the concept of **performativity** – the ability of language-in-use to accomplish things and even, in the eyes of cultural insiders, to move the world, the cosmos. This chapter also presents a brief history of performativity and theorists in and beyond anthropology who have developed the concept.

Chapter 11 covers cutting-edge work on globalization in relation to language and media. It turns out that, to grasp the sorts of sea changes that "cultural globalization" entails requires taking into account both media, its spread (sometimes called "mediation"), and the increasing degree to which what spreads around the globe and through our media partakes of emotion. Our world is more and more interconnected, and languages and new *forms* of language are spreading at breakneck speed. Chapter 11 emphasizes the significance of the intensifying co-occurrence of these communicative forms in complex single events. Globally mobile and interconnected actors are, more and more, using multiple languages and multiple communicative media in single situations (Jacquemet 2005:64–65). Chapter 11 explores recent work by linguistic anthropologists at the complex intersections of globalization, media (i.e., mediated communication), "mediatization," and emotion. This work recognizes that our focus on "face-to-face" conversation involving two people in the same place and time – and our implicit or explicit claim that such talk is the most typical and important example of communication from an anthropological perspective – ignores large swaths of culturally and emotionally significant communicative activity (Agha 2007). Thus, contemporary linguistic anthropologists study **new media** and particularly "social media" – both of which refer to Web 2.0 (Wesch 2007) in which users create their own new content (posting it on blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and so on) – as well as "old" media (e.g., print and broadcast

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media). Chapter 11 explores the burgeoning interplay between linguistic anthropology and studies of media and mediatization.

Chapter 12 offers ways in which the book's concepts of culture and communication can be fruitfully applied, as in **applied anthropology**. These include linguistic anthropologists collaborating with indigenous groups who are breathing new life into their traditional languages, helping children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders (and their families) better manage everyday life, and helping medical practitioners, their patients, and patients' families and partners consider new ways of communicating.

Dealing as they do with such rich areas of inquiry, these chapters combined should take you on a journey of discovery – one I hope you enjoy!

Pedagogical Features

To assist and maximize your learning, this book also contains a number of features that you will notice as you read. Each chapter starts with Learning Objectives and an Introduction and ends with a Conclusion, Summary, Questions, and Exercises. Each chapter also includes a section titled Additional Resources, with annotations explaining the importance of each publication included there.

The Conclusions section of each chapter summarizes and synthesizes its content. These sections also point forward and backward to the content of following and previous chapters, to situate each chapter in relation to the whole. While the Conclusions tie together and describe the significance of each chapter, the Summaries list each chapter's key concepts. These Summaries can be important tools of self-assessment, allowing you to gauge what you have learned as you read.

In addition to these chapter-linked features, at the end of the book you will find a Glossary of key terms. And when you see a word bolded in the text, you will know you can find it defined in the Glossary.

Finally, I have included an Appendix that explains the somewhat mysterious International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), since its symbols appear in various parts of this book. The IPA is a scientific tool. Whereas the roman alphabet as used in English spelling is inconsistent at best, each IPA symbol always represents one sound, and only, and precisely, that sound. This Appendix provides a glimpse into the specifics of how it is used, by linguistic anthropologists among others.

I also want to mention the website associated with this book, where you can find online auxiliary material related to the text (see www.cambridge.org/wilce).

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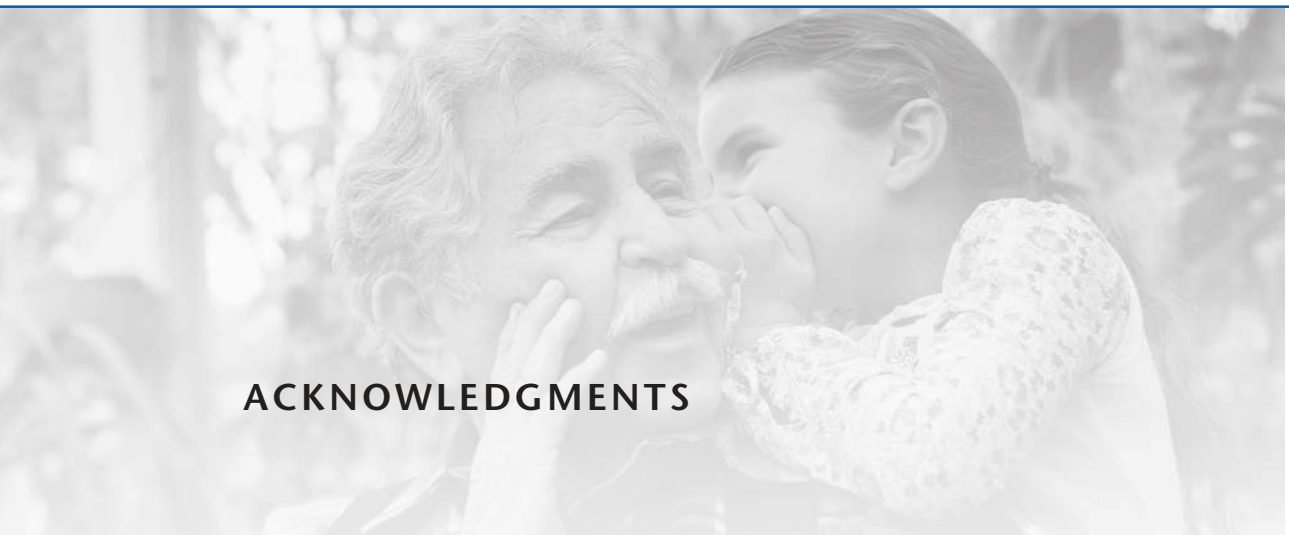

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Preparing a textbook like this can take many years – and many before the many. During that time, countless individuals and groups have contributed, each in their own ways, to shaping me and my thinking.

Because I want to stress that this book comes only partly from me, I begin with words of gratitude to my students, my teachers, and friends both on and off "the field."

In looking back on my many years of professional preparation before writing this book, I am thankful for my doctoral studies at the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA). It is hard to convey how excited I was to embark on the study of anthropology – particularly linguistic anthropology. At UCLA, I learned the content of the discipline and how to teach it – indeed how to teach. From Paul Kroskrity, my first linguistic anthropology teacher, my friend, and mentor-in-chief, I learned to link language with art – verbal art. To Paul, my warm and heartfelt thanks for countless face-to-face meetings and for our always helpful threads of correspondence over the years (even before email became our standard means). Thanks also to Sandro Duranti, who also modeled and taught the methods and theory of linguistic anthropology. And to the members of my "linganth" cohort, who shared in the scintillating seminars that helped develop my thinking.

As I launched my career in teaching and research, I was fortunate to encounter a whole new set of teachers-at-large – elders who contributed to my growing vision of culture and communication through their roles as editors of, and commentators on, my publications. Fond thanks to those who have been so generous in helping me develop my own vision – Don Brenneis, Charles Briggs, Michael Herzfeld, Jane Hill, Judith Irvine, Bruce Mannheim, Susan Philips, and Michael Silverstein. Also, Bambi Schieffelin helped me to launch a richly fulfilling book series, sustained by a wonderful editorial board, which has allowed me to learn about the publication process from a different vantage point.

Of course, my fieldwork experiences, particularly in Bangladesh and Finland, have taught me myriad other kinds of lessons. I am grateful to the residents of Habibur Rahman Bari, who taught me Bangla. Likewise, I thank Tiina-Maija Jäskeläinen, Anu Salmu, Jussi and Anne Mänkki, and Aku Talikka for teaching me Finnish. Among those who gave me guidance in the field and challenged my intellectual models were Pirkko Fihlman, Tuomas Rounakari, Sirpa Heikkinen, Aira Vasikaniemi, and Aino Pusa. As can happen in anthropological fieldwork, my relationships with Gazi Nazrul Islam Faisal in Bangladesh and Heidi Haapoja in

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Finland began formally and evolved into friendships that always included new lessons for this linguistic anthropologist in the wonders of their respective languages and cultures.

I have also learned from years of professional collegiality and exchanges of ideas. For long, rich sessions of dialogue about the concepts that eventually found their way into this book, thanks also to Betty Sue Brewster, Aaron Denham, Bob Desjarlais, Heikki and Lea Laitinen, Leila Monaghan, Daniel Negers, and Olga Solomon. I shall always remember the help I received in understanding Finnish folklore from Aili Nenola, Aleksandra and Eila Stepanova, and Frog, as well as from Pertti Anttonen and his doctoral and post-doctoral students at Helsinki University.

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Numerous other gifts of learning have come my way over the years. Special lessons in the values of passion and humility – and the nature of the soul, of poetry, and myth – have come to me via Brad Olson. And sadly, many givers of these gifts have since passed away. I will forever appreciate Tom Brewster and Hans Ruyter, who encouraged my interest in languages, and John G. Kennedy, who encouraged my interest in emotion during my graduate student years. I am also indebted to Wasu and F. Majumdar in Bangladesh; Karen Armstrong and Anna-Leena Siikala in Finland, and my dear friend and teacher in Finland, Ensio Fihlman. I will always be grateful for each of your unique contributions to my life and my ideas!

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Finally, as I hope to convey here, being a linguistic anthropologist involves gaining deep human relationships, sometimes even families, wherever one studies culture and communication. Families by ties of blood and love remain cherished as well. I am grateful to my family, especially my wife Sarah Wilce, for support and help throughout this process. I can never fully express my appreciation.

I ask the forgiveness of those who are on this page unnamed but in my heart still thanked.

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