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A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as usually formulated, searches for isomorphisms between grammar and culture and views language as either providing the means for thought and perception, or, in its stronger form, conditioning thought, perception, and world view. In this article I consider discourse to be the concrete expression of language-culture relationships. It is discourse that creates, recreates, focuses, modifies, and transmits both culture and language and their intersection, and it is especially in verbally artistic and playful discourse, such as poetry, magic, verbal dueling, and political rhetoric, that the resources provided by grammar, as well as cultural meanings and symbols, are activated to their fullest potential and the essence of language-culture relationships becomes salient.

MY INTENTION HERE IS TO DELVE INTO AN ANCIENT TOPIC in the history of linguistics and anthropology, the relationship between language and culture. This topic is both so ancient and so basic to these disciplines and yet so thorny that, like other ancient and thorny questions (for example, the origin of language), it is a given of the disciplines, not talked about much in general terms, and even considered by many to be either tabu or else too old-fashioned to speculate about. But, and in some ways like the question of the origin of language, certain developments in anthropology and linguistics make it possible to talk about the relationship of language and culture in new and interesting ways. The development I have particularly in mind is the analysis of discourse that is rooted in social and cultural contexts of language use and considers questions of speech play and verbal art to be central.

Concern with the language-culture relationship finds its best-known modern expression in the writings of Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf. Boas insisted on the study of language and languages as essential to training and research in anthropology. Part of his reasoning, as expressed in the introduction to the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (1911), is that language patterns are unconscious and provide access to unconscious cultural patterning otherwise inaccessible to researchers. This position leads rather naturally to what has come to be called the Whorf or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, namely that language (that is, grammar) constitutes the means with which individuals think and therefore, especially as stated in its strongest form, language (that is, grammar) conditions or determines cultural thought, perception, and world view.¹

Since my aim here is to recast the relationship among language, culture, and society, it is necessary to begin with some brief definitions. For the purposes of my argument here and in keeping with conceptions of culture from Sapir to Geertz and Schneider, I view culture as symbolic behavior, patterned organizations of, perceptions of, and beliefs about the world in symbolic terms. According to this definition, the locus of cultural behavior can be a single individual. It is more typically manifested in or shared by groups of individuals. Society is the organization of individuals into groups of various kinds, groups that share rules for the production and interpretation of cultural behavior and

typically overlap and intersect in various ways. Language is both cultural and social. It is cultural in that it is one form of symbolic organization of the world. It is social in that it reflects and expresses group memberships and relationships. Language includes grammar, but goes beyond grammar. As a sign system, language has the interesting property of being both unmotivated and arbitrary (purely symbolic in semiotic terms) and motivated (iconic and indexical in semiotic terms).² It is unmotivated and arbitrary from the point of view of its properties as a formal, abstract system. It is motivated from the point of view of the meaningfulness and appropriateness that individuals feel about their language as it is used in actual social and cultural contexts. This takes us to discourse.

Like culture, society, and language, different people define discourse in different ways. In my view, discourse is a level or component of language use, related to but distinct from grammar. It can be oral or written and can be approached in textual or sociocultural and social-interactional terms. And it can be brief like a greeting and thus smaller than a single sentence or lengthy like a novel or narration of personal experience and thus larger than a sentence and constructed out of sentences or sentence-like utterances. My definition of discourse is purposely vague. This is because discourse is an elusive area, an imprecise and constantly emerging and emergent interface between language and culture, created by actual instances of language in use and best defined specifically in terms of such instances.

Notice that according to my conception, discourse includes and relates both textual patterning (including such properties as coherence and disjunction) and a situating of language in natural contexts of use. Context is to be understood in two senses here: first the social and cultural backdrop, the ground rules and assumptions of language usage; and second, the immediate, ongoing, and emerging actualities of speech events. Obviously the textuality of a brief greeting is slim, the essence of its structure being the sociocultural and interactional matters lurking behind it. On the other hand the textual structure of a three-hour myth narration will be quite intricate and complicated. Nonetheless it too intimately involves sociocultural and interactional features and these must be attended to analytically.

The Boasian tradition within American anthropology and linguistics did not ignore discourse. Quite the contrary. Boas and Sapir and their students insisted on the collection and publication of texts as part of a three-fold investigation of language, which consisted of grammar-texts-dictionary. But while texts were collected and published, they were not analyzed as discourse per se. They rather served the function of providing both linguistic and ethnological data. Furthermore, this tradition conceives of texts as fixed, inscribed objects and not in terms of text-context, language-in-use relationships.

Taking a discourse-centered approach to the language-culture relationship enables us to reconceptualize the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Instead of asking such questions as does grammar reflect culture or is culture determined by grammar, or are there isomorphisms between grammar and culture, we rather start with discourse, which is the nexus, the actual and concrete expression of the language-culture-society relationship. It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies, and fine tunes both culture and language and their intersection, and it is especially in verbally artistic discourse such as poetry, magic, verbal dueling, and political rhetoric that the potentials and resources provided by grammar, as well as cultural meanings and symbols, are exploited to the fullest and the essence of language-culture relationships becomes salient.

The perspective I argue for here has illustrious predecessors, Sapir and Whorf themselves primary among them. Sapir, in his book *Language*, and elsewhere, views language as a resource for social and expressive usages and notices the poetic potential inherent in grammar. He compares language to a "dynamo capable of generating enough power to run an elevator" but operating "almost exclusively to feed an electric doorbell" (1921:14). Roman Jakobson insists in many places (e.g., 1968) on the intimate association of grammar and poetry. It is in verbally playful and artistic discourse that we find language turned on to its fullest potential and power, possibilities inherent in grammar

made salient, potentials actualized. It is where, I believe, we should look for the language-culture-thought intersection. Whorf's concept of "fashions of speaking" goes beyond grammar to include style and some of his examples (e.g., 1956:148–156) include forms of discourse (see Hymes 1961, 1974 for discussions of Whorf). Nonetheless, Whorf, like Sapir and Boas, and in spite of their commitment to the collection and publication of texts, lacks a consistently systematic distinction between language structure and language use.

Dell Hymes's concept of cognitive style moves the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis beyond purely grammatical concerns into the area of verbal style, and his recent work in Native American narrative (1981) focuses on language-culture intersections as manifested in discourse. Paul Friedrich (1979, 1986) reformulates the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, placing what he calls the "poetic imagination" at its heart. Dennis Tedlock (1983:324) chides anthropologists for dealing with culture as if there were no discourse, as if the natives never speak. The natives Tedlock describes do speak and the narratives they speak are highly poetic.

Erving Goffman (1974) conceives of language, culture, and society as providing resources which take on meaning and structure by means of the communicative frames that activate them. Investigators of such everyday and institutional verbal behavior as face-to-face and telephone conversations, negotiations, interviews, gatekeeping, therapy, and court cases, while not focusing or insisting on verbal art or speech play per se, are very much concerned with the ways in which language-culture-society relationships emerge as pragmatically and strategically salient in discourse (see Erickson 1981; Gumperz 1982; Labov and Fanshel 1977; and Schegloff 1981).

Increasingly, contemporary research in linguistic anthropology takes discourse as its starting point, theoretically and methodologically, for linguistic and cultural analysis. As distinct from viewing texts as metaphors (in the sense of Geertz 1973), an increasing number of researchers, each in quite different ways, analyzes discourse, large and small, written and oral, permanent and fleeting, as not only worthy of investigation in its own right, but as an embodiment of the essence of culture and as constitutive of what the language-culture-society relationship is all about.³

My discussion so far has been general. Now to some illustrative examples. My first has to do with the way a grammatical category is used in poetic, magical, and political discourse. Grammatical categories, especially optional grammatical categories, were the focus of much of the discussion in the Sapir-Whorf tradition. Sapir, Whorf, and adherents to the hypothesis associated with them often focused on grammatical categories which are not found in Indo-European languages and are in this sense exotic. These grammatical categories reflect a different way of expressing meaning from "our" ways, and, perhaps, a different unconscious patterning of thought.

It is because grammatical categories are economical and efficient ways of expressing meaning, particularly when compared with the cumbersome translation that rendering in other languages, such as English, requires, that they often have a poetic feel to them and seem to touch at the heart of the genius of a language and especially the language-culture-thought relationship. This is no doubt part of what Sapir meant when he compared Algonquian words to tiny imagist poems. Optional grammatical categories provide speakers with conscious or unconscious decisions, choices, ways of expressing meaning, which, I would say, are actualized in discourse.

This example comes from the language of the Kuna Indians of Panama. It is a grammatical category used to express body position in relation to action. This category, which indicates ongoing action as well as body position, is encoded in a set of four verbal suffixes: *-kwici* (standing, in a vertical position); *-mai* (lying, in a horizontal position); *-sii* (sitting); *-nai* (perched, in a hanging position). Several aspects of this grammatical category are worth noting, as they contribute to or serve as a backdrop to its use in discourse. First, it is an optional category. That is, any verb can be used without necessarily marking it for position. Second, many verbs are associated with one of the set of positionals as the most normal, ordinary, natural, or unmarked usage. Thus:

sunmak-kwici (talking-standing)
kam-mai (sleeping-lying)
maskun-sii (eating-sitting)
ua so-nai (fishing-perched)

Since this category is optional, its use in a particular context is salient, that is noticeable. It becomes all the more salient when it is either used in a marked way (e.g., *kap-sii* "sleeping-sitting," for someone who falls asleep on a bench in the public gathering house) or contrasted with other possibilities in a verbally playful or artistic way, as in the two illustrative cases I will now provide.

The first is a magical chant which is addressed to the spirit of a dangerous snake and is used to raise the actual snake in the air (see J. Sherzer 1981). The magical power of the chant works in the following way. The spirit, on hearing the chant addressed to it in its special language, immediately does what the narrative of the chant describes and, at the same time, the real, actual snake does so as well. As in all Kuna magical and curing chants, this one is literally teeming with and organized in terms of mosaics of grammatically and semantically parallel lines. Parallel lines are often identical except for a difference in a single word or morpheme. The lines that concern us here occur at the climax of the chant, the moment at which the chanter tells the snake he is raising it in the air. This occurs as follows. The snake is first described as dragging and turning over, in the *-mai* (horizontal) position, that is free on the ground, in two grammatically parallel lines.⁴

kali mokimakkemaiye
kali piknimakkekemaiye

The vine (euphemism for snake) is dragging *-mai* (in horizontal position).

The vine is turning over *-mai* (in horizontal position).

Then there is a magical formula:

"*'unni na pe onakko' anti sokekwiye*"

"'Simply indeed I raise you' I am saying."

during which the snake is raised in the air. Then it is again described as dragging and turning over, but this time in a *-nai* (hanging) position, in two lines which are identical to the two I quoted above except for the change to the suffix *-nai*. They are thus parallel to one another and constitute a couplet parallel to the earlier one.

kaliti mokimakkenaiye
kali piknimakkenaikusaye

The vine is dragging *-nai* (in hanging position).

The vine is turning over *-nai* (in hanging position).

The text never explicitly and specifically states its most important meaning, that the specialist has actually succeeded in grabbing and raising the snake. Rather, this is expressed economically and laconically, by means of the simple shift from one verbal suffix of position to another, within a parallel line framework.

There are several points to be made here. First, the *mai/nai* opposition is a basic element in the general poetic structuring of this text. By occurring regularly throughout the text, followed by the suffix *-ye*, the positional suffixes contribute, in conjunction with pauses and musical melody, to the marking of lines within the text, an important aspect of their poetry. These suffixes also enter into and contribute to the parallelistic structure of the text. And the *mai/nai* alteration is, in the terms used by Roman Jakobson, a projection of the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis, precisely Jakobson's definition of poetry. Here we have then a good example of what I call the *poeticization of grammar*—the grammatical function of a grammatical element or category is backgrounded, or combined with a poetic one. But in addition, the shift from *-mai* to *-nai*, at the climactic moment of the text, has a very powerful semantic effect crucial to the magic of the chant. When the snake is in the *-mai* position, in the first two lines quoted, it is still on the ground. But when it is in the *-nai* position, in the two later lines, it is "hanging" or "perched" in the air, that is, the chanter has performed the magical action of raising it, precisely

through the magic involved in shifting from *-mai* to *-nai*, from horizontal position to hanging position. Through this mini-max solution (Labov 1972:349), this packing of a maximum of meaning into a minimum of form, grammar becomes poetry and poetry becomes magic. Notice that the difficulty, really impossibility, of translating into English these poetic/magical lines which constitute the most heightened moment of the text is an argument for my point that discourse, especially verbally artistic discourse, is the expression of the essence of the relationship, often unconscious, between language and culture.

A completely different usage of the grammatical category of position occurs in the figurative, symbolic language characteristic of Kuna politics, centered in the Kuna gathering house, the meeting place for political leaders together with members of their communities. The particular discourse form I draw on here is the speech performed as an inauguration for a new chief (see Howe 1977 and J. Sherzer 1983:96–97). These speeches are typically bristling with intersecting and overlapping metaphors and other figures—for chiefs and other political leaders—which speakers creatively draw on, manipulate, and create narratives out of. In one speech I have recorded and analyzed, the speaker uses the positional suffixes metonymically, in conjunction with a complex of metaphors, largely drawn from the Kuna plant and animal world, in order to represent Kuna political structure. Chiefs are *-nai* (hanging) because they are perched in their hammocks in the center of the gathering house when they chant myths in public performances, or *-mai* (lying) because they rest or even sleep in these same hammocks while other chiefs are chanting or at various times during the day. Chiefs' spokesmen are *-kwici* (standing) because they stand when making speeches in the gathering house or *-sii* (sitting) because they sit on special benches surrounding the chiefs. And ordinary villagers are *-sii* (sitting) because they sit on ordinary benches behind both chiefs and spokesmen.

Here the metaphor of chiefs as *-mai* (lying) is combined with the metaphor of chiefs as poles⁵:

walakan mamait, tayleku pel ipya kwinnitik.

The poles who are lying here, it seems all have their eyes alert.

Just as poles rot, chiefs become bad:

immar nunkumai, pe takke tayleku, suar icakkwasaar tayleku nunkumai.

Something is lying rotting, you see it seems, a bad pole it seems is lying rotting.

Here the metaphor of chiefs as *-nai* (perched) is combined with the metaphor of chiefs as animals, again, in this case, in a negative sense, symbolizing chiefs who have turned bad:

usis tulakan taylee simuryapa namaynai pe ittoto pittosursin.

You will hear the *usis* bug people it seems chanting-perched within the knot hole don't you hear.

akkwaser namaynai pe ittotappo.

You will hear the spider chanting-perched there.

iskwir namaynai pe ittotappo takken soke.

You will hear the cockroach chanting-perched there see I say.

tior tayleku tior tatakwat namaynai.

The scorpion it seems Grandfather Scorpion will be chanting-perched.

In this example, the grammatical category of position is poeticized, not by functioning in the creation of line structure and parallelism as in the magical snake-raising chant, but by entering into the figurative complex basic to the poetic rhetoric of Kuna political discourse.

Taken together, these two examples demonstrate the ways in which the grammatical category of position is exploited and actualized in the verbally artistic discourse of the Kuna. My point here is not that the Kuna, because of their language, are more aware of position or more capable of perceiving position than are speakers of European languages, as the best-known interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis would have it. Heightened awareness, conscious or unconscious, emerges from the multiple inputs provided by language-culture relationships. The grammatical category of position is a resource, a po-

tential, a way of conceiving and perceiving the world which the Kuna language offers and which is made salient by entering into a web and network of associations actualized in discourse, especially verbally artistic discourse. This is Sapir's dynamo. The resulting depth, thickness, and intricacy is what Clifford Geertz finds characteristic of culture.

The Kuna grammatical category of position, especially as manifested in the snake-raising chant, reveals aspects of grammatical and semantic relations and relations between language and culture rarely studied by anthropologists and linguists, precisely because they can only be discovered through attention to actual instances of discourse. Traditional and conventional methods would not reveal the full meaning and potential of this grammatical category. Notice in particular that the shift from *-mai* to *-nai*, from the horizontal to the hanging position, in the crucial, climactic lines of the snake-raising chant, depends on the possibility, in this particular context, of ranking or ordering the suffixes semantically with regard to one another. That is, *-nai* is stronger, more powerful than *-mai* and it is on this fact that both the poetry and the magical power of the text depend. This kind of economical shift to a stronger or more powerful form within a set of grammatical or semantic relations is an instance of a phenomenon widespread in the world, the exploitation of sets of alternatives in discourse. It is often a crucial feature in a set of related forms of dialogic discourse—comebacks, verbal dueling, and bargaining. This takes me to my next extended example.

I draw this example from a short article by K. M. Tiwary dealing with a grammatical process widespread in India and beyond, known as the echo-word construction (Tiwary 1968). The language Tiwary describes is Bhojpuri, spoken in northern India. The echo-word construction is a form of reduplication in which a word is repeated without its initial consonant, sometimes with a vowel change. Thus the word *dudh* (milk) is reduplicated as *dudh-udh*. It is the kinds of meanings this grammatical process takes on and its use in discourse that interests me here. According to Tiwary, the echo-word construction serves as a label for the semantic field in which the base word occurs. Thus *dudh-udh* means "milk and the like" or "dairy products." Notice then that any member of the set of dairy products can be "echoed" to produce a word which can potentially be used as a label for the whole set. For example, *dehi* (curd) or *maTha* (butter-milk). But in actual discourse the selection is by no means neutral, in several ways and for several reasons. First, semantic fields are not absolute givens that are merely reflected in language use. Rather it is language use which creates and develops semantic fields. This is an illustration of what I mean when I say that language does not reflect culture but that language use in discourse creates, recreates, and modifies culture. Meaning, which is at the heart of the symbols-oriented conception of culture I am operating with here is on the one hand a mental construct; but it is a mental construct that is influenced by, as well as it influences, actual language use. Tiwary points out that the echo-word construction can be used as a secret-language of concealment. For example, a child, in the presence of his parents, from whom he wants to conceal the fact that he smokes, can ask someone, for example, a servant, to buy cigarettes for him in the market by overtly asking him to buy *deslai-oslai* (a box of matches and the like). The parents do not know, but the speaker and addressee do, that the semantic field of matches includes in this case cigarettes and that it is really cigarettes that the speaker wants.

Second, the choice of echo-word label for a semantic field is not neutral because the members of the field are often ranked hierarchically in one or another way. Returning to dairy products, the ranking of them depends on social and economic differences between the speaker and the addressee. If the addressee is of the lower income class, it is appropriate to select *maTha-oTha* (buttermilk and the like), since buttermilk is used by those who cannot afford other dairy products. On the other hand, forms such as *dudh-udh* (milk and the like) or *dehi-ohi* (curd and the like) are appropriate for individuals of means, who can afford these items.

It is in bargaining, and the verbal dueling which is at the core of the kind of elaborate bargaining that occurs in India, that we see this grammatical process operating to the

fullest. If I am a buyer in a market and want to purchase goods for the lowest possible price, I will call dairy products *maTha-oTha*, thereby indicating that I am the kind of person who uses buttermilk and therefore cannot pay high prices. If on the other hand I am a seller and want to maximize both the politeness I demonstrate to a potential buyer and his or her ability to pay a high price, I will use *dudh-udh* or *dehi-ohi*, thereby showing respect for the buyer as a social person and also expressing my expectations that he or she can pay high prices. Ultimately there is a negotiation of both the linguistic form to be used and the price. With regard to the echo-word construction, Tiwary notes, as I have for the Kuna category of position, that it is impossible to uncover its full meaning without studying naturally occurring discourse in actual social and cultural contexts.

In different parts of Asia such verbal-dueling bargaining occurs in different ways. In Bali, market bargainers use the lexical sets that reflect social caste and social rank, for example, the five or six different ways of expressing the meaning "eat." Sellers will often select forms that are relatively high socially, showing polite respect for potential buyers, but also an expectation of receiving a high price. As in India, buyer and seller verbally duel and negotiate both appropriate linguistic form and price of goods.

In the following example seller (S) and buyer (B) jokingly duel about the price of an item eventually purchased, both of them switching language levels as part of the give and take of language play and barter. Under each word of Balinese I have indicated its level as "a" (relatively high: *alus*) or "b" (relatively low or ordinary: *biasa*).⁶ In one utterance, a speaker uses Indonesian, the national language of Indonesia; I have indicated this with "I."

S: *napi pindang?*

(a) (b)

How about some salted fish?

B: *ji kuda niki?*

(b) (b) (a)

What's the price?

S: *niki, anak pindang bes ageng jié.*

(a) (b) (b) (b) (a) (b)

This one, is a very big fish.

B: *inggi!*

(a)

(Yes)!

S: *kala nak ji tigang atus, cingakan dumun, kéné nyangluhné, to to.*

(b) (b) (b) (a) (b) (a) (b) (b) (b) (b)

But the price is 300 [rupiahs], look at this, this is tasty.

B: *tiga ratus! bengu jié boné ah.*

(I) (I) (b) (b) (b) (b)

Three hundred! It smells very rotten.

S: *kanggé?*

(a)

Do you want it?

B: *tak éket nggih?*

(b) (b) (a)

250 OK?

S: *tak telung benang nggih. mamané bé ni angelé uug basangné, bé grago uluh-uluhe. siki?*

(b) (b) (b) (a) (b) (b) (b) (b) (b) (b) (b) (b) (b) (a)

270 OK. The fish got a broken stomach, because it had a small meal. You want only one?

B: *polih tak éket?*

(a) (b) (b)

Is 250 enough?

S: *siki siki?*

(a) (a)

Just one just one?

B: *kalih-kalih*.

(a) (a)

Two-two.

S: *aéng mokoh-mokohné, nasné pempen?*

(b) (b) (b) (b)

These are big, do you want the head in the bag?

B: *baang apa?*

(b) (b)

To give to what?

S: *baang kucit, baang méng.*

(b) (b) (b) (b)

To give to a pig, to give to a cat.

Notice that after the price has been determined, all the forms used by buyer and seller are relatively low (b).

Tiwary, in his discussion of the Bhojpuri echo-word construction, provides an interpretation that assumes that language is a mirror reflection of culture and society. "This construction reflects certain set expectancies of a society in which the economic distinctions are glaring, quite old, and widely accepted for them to be congealed into linguistic constructions" (1968:36). I do not deny the economic and social distinctions. In both India and Bali they are old and indeed glaringly omnipresent. But I want to offer an alternative interpretation for both the Indian and the Balinese cases, one that sees discourse as the mediation between language and culture. The verbal dueling that is the centerpiece of economic bargaining negotiates status and role as it does price. It functions as if interlocuters either do not know one another's caste and socioeconomic status or else that such status is fluid, to be determined in actual verbal interaction. Both of these propositions are of course false, but nonetheless constitute the assumptions of verbal dueling and bargaining. This informal, colloquial, popular, and fleeting discourse form then is a verbal counterpoint played against the backdrop of the quite real Indian and Balinese social, economic, and verbal worlds, that of sharply defined and expressed caste and status distinctions. Verbal dueling, in its own playful way, also reinforces these distinctions. This is most serious and deep verbal play. In this example, as in the Kuna forms of ritual discourse, we see not an isomorphic matching up of grammar and culture, but rather discourse as a rich, intricate, and dynamic expression of, mediator of, and indeed creator and recreator of the language-culture-society-individual nexus.⁷

One final illustration concerns our own culture and society and the notion of cultural logic, as reflected in narrative. One of Whorf's favorite and best-known examples contrasts Hopi and Indo-European tense-aspect systems. Whorf argued that Hopi grammar is more attentive to verbal aspect than to tense, while Indo-European languages are just the opposite. He suggested that this makes Hopi a more appropriate language, for example, in which to talk about contemporary physics. This was more of a rhetorical stance I feel than an actual belief on Whorf's part, but it makes its point. But again, where is discourse in all of this? Nowhere, or at least surely not prominent in Whorf's discussions.

Whorf's view of Hopi grammar has been challenged recently by Ekkehart Malotki (1983), who provides a massive set of sample sentences in which Hopis talk about tense and time in very concrete terms. But the Whorf-Malotki argument is about grammar, not about the actualization of grammar, in this case, tense and aspect, in discourse. This conflation of grammar and discourse, on the part of both Whorf and Malotki, confuses the issue. If we look, not at grammar, but at discourse, then a deeper correctness of Whorf's insight, namely that it is possible for a language to pay more attention to aspect than to temporality, emerges.

One quite appropriate place to examine tense-aspect systems is in narratives, which are reformulations of previous events. Narratives in English, and indeed in all European languages, whether written or spoken, formal or informal, are essentially a replay of a series of events in temporal sequence. That is, the organizing principle of Western nar-

rative is time (see Genette 1972; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Mitchell 1981; Prince 1973). Notice that I did not say past tense, since the present tense (sometimes called the historical present in such cases) can be used as well to reflect temporal sequences in the past. And in colloquial, spoken narratives, such words and particles as "well," "so," "then," "OK," and "and" are used to move descriptions along in temporal sequence.

Here is a rather typical example of an American English oral narrative, a portion of a hunting-related story told in central Texas about the exploits of a coyote and deer.⁸

But that little ol', little ol' yearlin', up there, man he threw up that tail 'n' went runnin' off round up through, round the edge of the hill.

An' uh, when he did, then, the ol' coyote time he creeped on up where the deer was.

An' he's standin' there, sniffin' the ground, sniffin' the ground. I was watchin' through the binoculars. He's out about a hundred 'n' fifty yards.

Man all of a sudden, that rascal jus' tore loose a-runnin'. I mean jus' diggin' it like this. He wasn't he didn't start off you know sumthin' that turned round and looked like this 'n' then run. He just took off to runnin'.

And ah. I was watchin' him run, cause he's runnin' up this sendero.

About, oh two hundred 'n' fifty yards up there before we got to brush.

'N' then what do you think run in run up in them glasses with him while I was watchin' him run goin' this away?

Whadda you think run in there with 'im?

That ol' doe.

That ol' doe run right in there with him an' she could run up close enough to 'im, to where his tail was was between her front legs like this, went running.

But she had to skip one step to get at 'im with that foot.

And when she'd skip one step, then he'd gain, he'd gain a step.

Then she couldn't reach 'im.

And an' then, then she'd catch up with 'im again, an' when she tried to catch that next step like that, she couldn't git 'im.

Then ah, she was runnin' 'im like that an' then here them two little ol yearlin's they come runnin' off out here right on the edge o' the sendero watchin' mama run the coyote off.

The temporal ordering of events in this narration is identical to their original, actual ordering, or at least as we as listeners are supposed to imagine them as having occurred. Given the temporal organization of most narratives told in European languages, it is not surprising that narrative theorists, often without knowledge of non-European narrative traditions, define narrative universally in terms of temporal sequence. But this is not necessarily so in other languages, cultures, and narrative traditions. Instead of Hopi, let me return to the Kuna, whose narratives I am much more familiar with. Kuna grammar offers much more elaboration in aspect than tense. And Kuna narratives, while they do reflect temporal order, focus much more on aspectual matters, the location, direction, and ways actions are performed, so much so that Western readers have difficulty following translations.

Here is a passage that is particularly difficult for English readers, who tend to find it temporally illogical; but it was not for the Kuna audience that heard it.⁹

tek ipakwen maskuttasunnoe.

"maskunnar" sokele punorka sokkartasunto sus kepe "muuu tikkarpa kep ainiarsun" soke a.

(visiting chief: *etto so.*)

"ainiarto tiylesat nappa askin ainiarto immar mattutikki ainia" soke.

(visiting chief: *eee.*)

tey tunkutanisun mu taytisunna i-pi-wa.

(visiting chief: *ipi ainiali?*)

eye.

tey pinna nakkwe ainitani ainitani ainitani tey turpamakarsunto.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

tey turpamakkarku e san nakuar takkarku kaa.

(visiting chief: *kaa.*)

mm, "ka" takken soke.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

tey muu ka, akkwemasunna mukatka kusparsunto kate a. ka ai ok-kin-no-te (voice vibrates) *ka kuarku.*

weparte e macikwa purkwisatteka, maskunnalile, sokkartasunto mimmi punorka.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

"punorye we mu maitse pe anka ka wis ekisna takkenye kapa maskunpiye a."

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

kal ekisnattasunto.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

tey wepa muka soytapsunnoe "pe ka wis apeye."

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

mu "napir" soke mu kar ka kwannattasunna.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

ka, kwane tek mu kuti.

tek ipakwenkine, maskunnetkinpali, ekisnatparsunna.

(visiting chief: *ee.*)

wep punoloka soysunna "ka pe kwanna takkenye."

(visiting chief: comment.)

"teki ka kwannapsun" soke.

(visiting chief: *eee muse, comment.*)

teki, muse kwannattasunto, mu ka ipetka kusparsunna.

tek e punoloka na kaa kwannai tule sunmakarsun nappa yapa.

(visiting chief: *aaa.*)

Well one day always as they were going to eat.

"While they were beginning to eat" it is said the boy always said to his sister "near the grandmother's house then there is something growing" he says ah.

(visiting chief: So it is.)

"It was growing on top of the ground something very small was growing" he says.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

Well the grandmother saw that it was getting bigger what-was-it?

(visiting chief: what was growing?)

Yes.

Well slowly it rises it keeps growing up keeps growing up keeps growing up indeed it produced fruit.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

Well when it produced fruit its flesh got ripe in fact it was pepper.

(visiting chief: Pepper.)

Mm, "pepper," see it is said.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

Well the grandmother is taking care of, a pepper plant and the pepper plant belonged to the grandmother ah.

(visiting chief: aah.)

The pepper my friend got-ripe (voice vibrates) that is what happened to the pepper.

And as for the boy who had died, while he was beginning to eat, he always said to his baby sister.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

"Sister go to that grandmother who is there and ask for some pepper for me see I want to eat with pepper ah."

(visiting chief: Yes.)

She would always go to ask her.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

Well she went there and said to the grandmother "I want some of your pepper."

(visiting chief: Yes.)

The grandmother says "all right" and the grandmother would always go to gather pepper for her.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

pepper, gather well the grandmother was there.

Well one day, while eating again, she went to ask again.

(visiting chief: Yes.)

And she (the grandmother) says to the girl "you go and gather the pepper see."

(visiting chief: Comment.)

"Well she went to gather the pepper" it is said.

(Yes to the grandmother's place. Comment.)

Well, she always went to the grandmother's place to gather it, the grandmother is the owner of the pepper plant.

Well a person began to speak from inside the ground to the girl who was gathering pepper.

(visiting chief: aaah.)

In this passage the narrator constantly jumps back and forth from place to place, from the home of the brother and the sister to the home of the grandmother to the grandmother's garden, and in time, from when the brother was alive to when he had died and was buried under the pepper plant, always being quite precise about the movement and direction of actions and the ways in which actions are performed. One feature of this narration that non-Kuna find particularly strange is the fact that the pepper plant is growing before the boy dies and that the boy is later found buried under the plant, as if his burial had caused the plant to grow.

There is no doubt that this passage is illogical for a Western European or North American audience or readership. But what we are talking about here is cultural logic, as expressed in discourse. Contemporary, postmodern novelists, in Europe and North and South America, consciously break with Indo-European temporal logic, in order to achieve avant-garde effects, producing texts quite similar in some ways to Kuna narratives (see Dina Sherzer 1986).

Here is a passage from a novel by the most recent nobel prize winning author, Claude Simon (1981:21)¹⁰:

He is fifty years old. He is general-in-chief of the artillery of the army in Italy. He lives in Milan. He wears a tunic with a collar and breastplate embroidered in gold. He is sixty years old. He oversees the completion of the terrace of his castle. He is shivering, wrapped up in an old military greatcoat. He sees black spots. At night he will be dead. He is thirty years old. He is a captain. He goes to the opera. He wears a three-cornered hat, a blue tunic tight at the waist, and a drawing-room sword.

Notice how difficult it is to follow temporal progression in this text. But as distinct from Simon's text, which is felt to be avant garde by its intended readers, Kuna narratives are not avant garde for the Kuna. Quite the contrary. They are steeped in Kuna tradition and represent a natural and logical intersection between Kuna language and culture. The degree to which the seeming logic of our own narrative structure is also an expression of the intersection of language and culture is best appreciated through comparison with such radically different possibilities as Kuna. And it is important to recognize that this cultural logic is not a result of or an isomorphic reflection of a particular tense-aspect system. Rather, discourse, in this case narrative, draws on tense-aspect, as it draws on other features of the grammar and the lexicon, in the creation of temporal and spatial cultural logical systems.

Both linguists and anthropologists have traditionally treated discourse as an invisible glass through which the researcher perceives the reality of grammar, social relations, ecological practices, and belief systems. But the glass itself, discourse and its structure, the actual medium through which knowledge (linguistic and cultural) is produced, conceived, transmitted, and acquired, by members of societies and by researchers, is given little attention. My stance here is quite different from the traditional one, and reflects a growing interest in discourse in many disciplines. I view language, culture, society, and the individual as all providing resources in a creative process which is actualized in discourse. In my discourse-centered approach, discourse is the broadest and most comprehensive level of linguistic form, content, and use. This is what I mean by saying that discourse and especially the process of discourse structuring is the locus of the language-

culture relationship. Furthermore, it is in certain kinds of discourse, in which speech play and verbal art are heightened, as central moments in poetry, magic, politics, religion, respect, insult, and bargaining, that the language-culture-discourse relationship comes into sharpest focus and the organizing role of discourse in this relationship is highlighted.

This is a theoretical position. But it has methodological implications as well, for both anthropologists and linguists. Since discourse is an embodiment, a filter, a creator and recreator, and a transmitter of culture, then in order to study culture we must study the actual forms of discourse produced and performed by societies and individuals, the myths, legends, stories, verbal duels, and conversations that constitute a society's verbal life. But discourse is also an embodiment of language. Grammar provides a set of potentials. Since these potentials are actualized in discourse they can only be studied in discourse.

Notes

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¹It is important to recognize that Boas, Sapir, and Whorf were clearly each struggling with the question of the relationships between grammar, thought, and culture. Thus seemingly contradictory positions can be found within their own writing on these questions. In particular, the strictly and strongly causal view that language determines thought or culture, often attributed to Whorf, can be found nowhere explicitly in the writings of Boas, Sapir, or Whorf.

²A point nicely expressed by Emile Benveniste in 1939. See also Friedrich (1979:1-61).

³Among others, see Ellen Basso 1985; Keith Basso 1979; Bauman 1986; Feld 1982; Gossen 1974; Hanks 1986; Heath 1983; McLendon 1981; Philips 1983; Scollon and Scollon 1979; Tedlock 1985; Urban 1986; and Woodbury 1985.

⁴From *The Way of the Snake*, performed by Pranki Pilos of Mulatuppu, San Blas, Panama. For transcription of Kuna discourse, see Sherzer (1983:41-42).

⁵From a speech performed by Muristo Pérez of Mulatuppu, San Blas, Panama.

⁶The binary *alus/biasa* distinction is a common way of talking about language levels in Bali. The actual situation is often more complicated and some of the words in the example provided here enter into lexical sets with more than two members (see Kersten 1984; Ward 1973; and Zurbuchen 1981). Notice that the language of the market is not a random mixing of languages and levels, a reflection of speakers' lack of knowledge of their own languages and appropriate language use. Quite the contrary. It is a sophisticated manipulation of the resources provided by the complex Balinese sociolinguistic situation, a manipulation involving economic strategies, politeness, play, and humor.

⁷Long and ritualized forms of verbal dueling are extremely common in the world, found among urban Blacks in the United States, Mexican Indians, Mestizo populations in South America, Turkish adolescents, and probably many other places. The basic principle of verbal dueling is for each speaker to provide a comeback which "tops" its predecessor by being maximally semantically more powerful with a minimal economy of formal effort, as defined within an underlying framework of grammatical and semantic relations (see Bricker 1976; Dundes, Leach, and Özkök 1970; Gossen 1976; and Labov 1972). The relationship between verbal dueling and bargaining is an intriguing one, worthy of further exploration.

⁸Told by G. H. of Austin, Texas. In this transcription, I use English orthography together with the symbol ', following conventional means of rendering English oral speech in print. In the representation, performance lines begin flush left. They are determined by a long pause coupled with noticeable falling pitch. Within lines, short pauses without noticeable falling pitch are indicated with a comma; short pauses with falling pitch, with a period. A long pause without falling pitch is represented as a long space within a line.

⁹From *The Hot Pepper Story*, performed by Mastayans of Mulatuppu, San Blas, Panama. In this transcription and translation, each performance line, determined by pause and intonation patterns, is represented by a line of written text. Pauses within lines are represented by spaces. Stretched out

speech is represented by dashes between syllables. The performance is in the form of a dialogue between Mastayans and a visiting chief, whose comments are also represented here (see Sherzer 1987).

¹⁰Translated by Joel Sherzer.

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