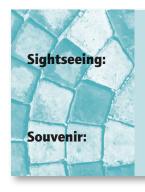# Culture in Conversation

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Journey Through Chapter 5

Sightseeing: On your journey, you will use the social constructionist approach from a dialogic perspective to explore how culture is a construction produced through conversation in speech communities and in communication practices, such as speech acts, person referencing, and conflict.

Souvenir: After your journey, you will take away an ability to analyze how culture is communicated in conversation and understand its role in conflict.

You go to a coffee shop in a city where you have never been. You order your drink, give the cashier some money, and collect your change. You wait for your drink to be made, then take your drink and leave. As a description of getting coffee, this may seem like too much information. If you mention it at all to someone, you would probably just say, "I got coffee" or even just hold up your to-go cup. The incident is unremarkable because it went as you would expect and a lot of description would seem unnecessary.

On the other hand, an interaction in a coffee shop may feature noticeable communication differences between each person in the situation. You might use a different word for the drink you are ordering than the cashier does. You might pronounce certain words differently. Or maybe you follow different social rules for how to order drinks in a coffee shop. If such differences are unexpected, you might be more likely to remember them and share them with others. These characteristics of the interaction could indicate a cultural or intercultural situation. This is because features of talk—word choices, pronunciation, phrasing—often refer to culturally marked ways of speaking. The following section discusses some basic concepts related to cultural ways of speaking and is followed by sections on speech communities, cultural communication practices, and conflict.

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL WAYS OF SPEAKING

Ways of speaking are viewed as culturally marked because of the concept of indexicality. Indexicality means that one thing (e.g., communication) refers to or is associated with another thing (e.g., cultural background) (Ochs, 1990). A list of people and ideas in an index at the back of a book provides page numbers where you can look up larger explanations of the listed items. In a similar way, what people say and how people say things refer to general cultural patterns that are not explicitly referenced in a conversation. However, indexicality triggers awareness of a cultural context. Fluency in the abbreviations used in text messages and online communication indexes membership in a technologically savvy community. As another example, if you are dining in France, asking for the check long after finishing dinner is considered the norm. If a table asks for the check as soon as they are finished eating it will index a cultural background to make sense of the strange behavior. For example, the waiter might conclude the diners are U.S. Americans, who do not tend to linger after a meal. Indexicality references ways that culture seems to influence how people talk and can help people make sense of an unexpected or awkward interaction.

Knowing what people say and how they say it is useful for understanding how culture is indexed in an interaction. Consider a transcribed version of the coffee shop example in which you can see what each communicator actually said. A transcript is a verbatim typed-out version of exactly what each person said (Roberts, 2008). A transcript from an audio recording of a real coffee-shop encounter is as follows:

Customer: I'll have a latte.

Cashier: What?

Customer: Latte?

Cashier: Cafe au lait?

Customer: Latte.

Cashier: Oh, a latte.

In this instance, you have a conversation that does not seem to have proceeded as planned. This example is likely to bring up *why* questions: why, for example, did the customer have to give his order three times? As a result, it is an experience that might be noticed and even described later to others. When something is accountable, it demands an explanation (Buttny, 1993). In the coffee shop example, you may wonder why the cashier did not understand the order. The situation's strangeness demands a reason for the "problem." A cultural reason might include the dialect or way the words were pronounced. Other examples include showing up late for class. This event is accountable because you need to give a reason why; you have to explain yourself. Likewise, declining an invitation to dinner is also accountable. Why some situation happened or some action occurred is potentially attributable to any number of reasons.

In everyday life, people generally do not ask why when things go as expected. Instead, people ask why when something surprises or goes awry. During such instances, your

assumptions about how "normal" interaction should occur—for example, that the cashier should appropriately hear, understand, and respond to your order—are revealed. Such assumptions are taken-for-granted in that they are assumed to be true, expected, and ordinary. You are unlikely to think about or question what is taken-for-granted unless something goes wrong. You probably take it for granted that if you text your friend a question, she will respond fairly promptly. If she does not, you may make note of it and try to make sense out of it. In the interaction and stories told about it thereafter communicators construct the meanings of and reasons for violations of taken-for-granted practices also known as **breaches**. Because cultural groups may share ways of communicating, "coming from different cultures" is sometimes offered as a reason for communication breaches, misunderstandings, and conflicts.

REFLECT 5.1: Have you ever invoked generational identity as an explanation of someone's behavior? How? What other cultural groups have you invoked in order to explain a breach, misunderstanding, or conflict?

SPEECH COMMUNITIES

As mentioned in Chapter 4, one way of dividing up cultural communities is by ways of speaking. A **speech community** defines a group not strictly by ethnicity, region, religion, or other cultural markers, but by speech codes. **Speech codes** are patterned ways of speaking which are shared and intelligible among community members (Carbaugh, 1996; Fitch, 1994). The same speech codes do not exist everywhere because they are specific to and useful for a specific cultural context. For example, anyone who works in a restaurant—where people are hustling and bustling with trays of food—will understand why you need to give a verbal warning if you are behind someone. Why? Because if the person in front of you turns around suddenly without knowing you are there, the food could go flying! On the other hand, it would be strange to shout "behind you!" as you walk behind a coworker in a clothing store or legal office.

An important aspect of speech codes is **interpersonal ideologies**, which are the norms for speaking to different people, including how and under what circumstances particular codes should be employed (Fitch, 1998). Interpersonal ideologies are the logic or "reasoning" behind speech codes. They are the community's answer for why the speech code exists. Interpersonal ideologies are rules for interaction. An **interpersonal ideology** such as "respect your elders" may cross many cultural boundaries. But the speech code for "respect your elders" may be as varied as being polite and paying attention in the United States to following elders' romantic advice in Korea. Table 5.1 outlines examples of different codes for respecting elders in the United States and Korea (Sung, 2004).

Communities can also have different interpersonal ideologies and different codes to go along with them. In Internet blog posts by Christians and Muslims, members use U.S. religious Internet speech communities' conventional ways of speaking to perform the appropriate code which represents the values in their respective communities. Christianblog.com and TalkIslam.info are comparable blogs because both are active and occur in the same format. Each website features lists of posts by bloggers who self-generate topics, unlike other

Table 5.1 Interpersonal Ideology.

What codes are communicated in your culture to express respect for elders? In the United States and Korea, the codes are distinct. A culture might incorporate a variety of codes into their way of communicating in order to express respect to elders.

Common Codes in the U.S.	Common Codes in Korea
Display affection such as hugging.	Bow when greeting.
Ask how they are doing.	Give them material gifts.
Listen to their words.	Call them by an appropriate title of honor.

websites which feature blogs in response to articles or videos or are primarily for social networking. Neither of these blog sites represents the Christian or Muslim communities broadly—rather, they are their own speech communities within the larger ones.

In the blogs on TalkIslam.info, participants often reference current events and discuss various views on Islam. They identify particular people and groups who display hostility toward Islam and frequently reference "ignorance" as a problem with other groups' opinions about Islam. The blogs cover a vast range of topics but in identifying community issues, the ignorance of outsiders is a common theme in the following quotes from TalkIslam.info:

- "European Christians allying with secularists against Islam are basically dupes. The secularists want to destroy us all. If anything, they are the common enemy against our shared values."
- "Forgive the hyperbole, but I think that to many religiously illiterate Christians today the traditions you're talking about are almost as alien and 'external' as Ramadan. Many American Christians can't even give a coherent explanation for the differences between a Catholic and a Protestant, so I'm not optimistic they can grasp pre-Reformation religious practice."
- "A lot does go to bad stereotypes by rather ignorant and aggitated [sic] folks."

In the blogs on Christianblog.com, participants focus on spiritual and philosophical discussions that are more personal or related to everyday life. They regularly draw on the ideas of belief in Christ and sinfulness as important questions for the community. The blogs are varied but when discussing problems with the Christian community, the weak Christianity of so-called Christians is a common theme:

- "An unsaved man can choose to do right and still do wrong in the eyes of God. The intent was right. The action was wrong because Christ was still rejected and there was no righteousness from God within the heart of man."
- "Are the churches of our day lukewarm? Wanting to fill seats, they worry about offending with the word of the Lord. They concern themselves with numbers, not about truth."
- "It is time we focus on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE. Without Jesus Christ, we have none of these. It is that simple."

Whereas the TalkIslam.info blog identifies community problems as coming from the outside—from "Islamophones," "secularists" and religious groups within outside Islam in general—the Christianblog.com blog identifies community problems as coming from the inside—from "lukewarm" Christians and well-intentioned people who reject Christ. Table 5.2 shows what speech codes are present in the blog posts and the interpersonal ideologies to which the speech codes are tied.

Table 5.2   Speech Codes and Interpersonal Ideologies.

How are your communication practices tied to your beliefs? In religious communities, certain ways of talking and arguing about beliefs are ways of showing faith, knowledge, and other markers of spiritual membership.

Website	Common Speech Codes	Ideological Logic
TalkIslam.info	References to Islamic practices: Ramadan, etc.	References to Islamic practices display familiarity and active participation in Islam. Posts discuss the value of such practices, particularly discipline and sacrifice as community norms. Distinctions are made between similar practices (i.e., fasting = lent) in other religions. The meaning of the "same" practice is unique to the community.
	References to Islamophobia, hate, or persecution: know nothing about Islam, vilify Islam, etc.	The fear and hate of Islam is based on ignorance. This is presented as the ultimate threat to Islam. Even among blog posters, the claim that the other does not know enough about Islam is a common challenge in arguments.
	Displays of knowledge regarding subtleties of Islam: Islam is, etc.	Displaying formulations of important Islamic values and nuances of Islamic laws outside the United States again demonstrates the problem of attacks on Islam being based in stereotypes and ignorance.
Christianblog. com	Dedication to Christ as a condition of community inclusion: only Christ can save you, etc.	Good deeds are not enough; one is a sinner if one has not "fully" accepted Christ. Someone can participate minimally in Christian practice (go to church, pray) and still be a sinner.
	Formulaic references to Christ: Christ is life, Jesus Christ is the way, Christ is love, etc.	References to Jesus Christ display that the blogger is in the category of "saved" and therefore has authority to comment on the sin of others. Conventional expressions are peppered throughout posts to emphasize the focus on Christ.
	Scripture quotations: Joshua 24.15, Romans 10, etc.	Almost every post includes quotations from Scripture. Displaying intimate knowledge of exact Biblical quotations and producing them in appropriate arguments emphasizes the closeness to God as being aligned with deep familiarity of God's words (through Christ).

Speech communities, as with any cultural category, are not homogenous. From a **cultural perspective** which focuses on conversation, culture is not something that people carry around, live in, or "are" in some obvious sense; rather, culture is a symbolic and material category for patterned ways of communicating (Fitch, 1998). People do not have culture, but instead display, perform, and participate in culture. **Cultural participation** refers to the extent to which people use particular speech codes and other communicative modes in order to display membership in socially recognizable communities. If you study abroad in Japan, you may notice some people are more traditional than others. Not everyone in Japan will bow deeply forward from the waist. Often, particularly among younger people of similar social status, a quick nod of the head and slight angling of the upper body will do (Tohyama, 1991). People choose which aspects of cultural life to take on as their own. You might participate minimally in your regional community, but actively in a religious community.

REFLECT 5.2: When was the last time you communicated your culture to someone else? How did you do this? In what way did people respond? Why do you think they responded this way?

The enactment of cultural participation in conversation is inherently **dialogic** (Bakhtin, 1981). This means that cultural enactments interact with, can be compared to, and exist in dialogue with other cultural enactments. A **cultural enactment** describes a situation where people do a cultural communication practice, such as speaking a certain language. If you speak Spanish, you speak a language that has multiple varieties all over the world. Spanish spoken in Mexico is a bit different from Spanish spoken in Spain, but Mexican Spanish is dialogic with Spain's Spanish because they can contrast with and relate to each another. In the following example of a family living in Finland, two languages are used in dialogic contrast. The choice of what language to speak and when to speak index culture.

1	Albert:	Jan had to wait til nine to start so I was just talking to Mom before
2		she had—but um Ivan has a card ((kisses Tina)) for Ivan waiting for
3		him on the computer ((sets Tina down))
4	Mina:	Will you take this to JR? ((to Tina))
5		(18 seconds deleted)
6	Tina:	((speaking in Finnish))
7	Mina:	((speaking in Finnish))
8		(2.0)
9	Tina:	speaking in Finnish =
10	Mina:	= speaking in Finnish
11	Albert:	You wanna see the email Ivan?

Transcript Notation. Researchers often use transcripts to study conversation. Symbols represent the meaning of nonverbal communication within the conversation, such as the following, adapted from Jefferson's system (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). This system is used throughout the rest of the chapter.

=	indicates that one event followed the other with no silence
(( ))	surrounds notes on details of the interaction
__	emphasis
:	stretched or elongated sound
( )	encloses items that are in doubt
[	marks the onset and termination of simultaneous activities
°	encloses words that are quieter than surrounding talk
-	represents a short un-timed pause of less than a second
(Numbers)	denotes elapsed silence in tenths of seconds
Capitalization	indicates louder volume than surrounding talk

In this transcript, Mina is a native Finnish speaker who speaks fluent English, while Albert is a native U.S. English speaker who speaks some Finnish, and their children are bilingual in both languages. Albert has been working in the other room, but came to deliver a message about Ivan's birthday while the rest of the family eat dessert (Lines 1–3). After Tina returns from taking candy to the researcher, she initiates a conversation with her mother in Finnish (Line 6). She and her mother are both fluent English speakers, so Tina participates culturally by the action of choosing a language that indexes Finnish rather than U.S. American.

It is interesting also that rather than carrying on a side conversation in English with Ivan—which he could easily do because Tina and Mina appear to be speaking to each other exclusively—Albert instead waits for the conversation in Finnish to end before speaking in English to Ivan (Line 11). The performance of English and Finnish in the same familial context puts the two languages in contrast with each another. In this interaction, the languages of English and Finnish interact dialogically. As a result, analyzing one without the other would be incomplete.

In addition to being analyzed in an inter/cultural communication textbook, cultural enactments can also be noticed and commented on by people in the interaction in which they occur. This indicates that people are aware of and can draw upon the idea of culture to make sense of what is going on (Schegloff, 2007). In **orienting to culture**, conversational participants would explicitly label their own or others' practices as cultural. For instance, a person is orienting to culture if saying, "That's the American way." If you travel outside of where you

grew up, the contrast between what is normal for you and the people around you will probably result in you talking about cultural differences explicitly. You might say things like "that's just how they do it in South Africa," or "I don't know how to talk to people in Cambodia." People can even use the term *culture,* rather than referencing a specific speech community explicitly, in order to orient to culture as in this example of an interview between U.S. American and Thai exchange students:

I: Was it hard to adjust to coming here?

R: Yes, at first I had some cultural problems ((laughs)).

There are a number of communication practices which demonstrate cultural variability and which discourse analysts study. Cultural communication practices are methods by which people in a conversation index and participate in cultural interaction. The next section introduces several potentially cultural communication practices.

CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Accent

People use many cultural communication practices to index their participation in particular speech communities. This section discusses some ways in which talk can index culture and indicate a cultural moment in everyday life. Perhaps one of the most apparent communication practices which conversational participants notice is how talk sounds. An **accent** is a way of pronouncing words that is indicative of a specific speech community. Ways of pronouncing that are not consistent with how others in the speech community talk index a cultural difference. Consider another version of the transcript from the beginning of the chapter:

1   Customer: I'll have a la-tay.

2   Cashier: What?

3   Customer: La-tay?

4   Cashier: Cafay oh lait?

5   Customer: La-tay.

6   Cashier: Oh, a lah-tay.

In this version of the transcript, you can see that each speaker pronounces the trouble word, *latte,* differently. The customer is pronouncing it with a short *a*, as in the word *cat* in Lines 1, 3, and 5. The cashier does not identify the term because the cashier, as seen at the end in Line 6, pronounces latte as in the word *car*. Notice also that this struggle between the word the customer produces and the sound the cashier expects to hear causes the cashier to supply a candidate for the customer's order which is something in between—a café au lait, pronouncing *lait* with a long *a*, like the word *late*.

You can imagine that once the participants identify the pronunciation difference, they might remark on it to one another. The customer might have said, "Sorry, I've never heard it said that way" or the cashier might have said, "Where is your accent from?" or even "Where are you from?" The cashier might have at that point displayed an orientation to culture by associating the accent with a region or country, which is how most people in everyday life understand culture as in such descriptions as a *southern accent* or a *Russian accent*.

Language Selection

Language selection is an even more marked indicator of culture than accent particularly when the language differs from how others speak in the community. Language selection refers to what language a person chooses to speak at a particular moment (Tracy, 2002). Though two people may hear each other as having different accents, that both people in the conversation are speaking the U.S. English language would still include them in a larger cultural category. If a group of people are speaking Farsi in an area of mostly British English speakers, or if someone asks for directions in Korean in an area where Japanese is the dominant language, then a particular cultural identity will be indexed through this language selection. Additionally, bilingualism, multilingualism, and code switching index participation in several cultural communities (Bailey, 2000b). Code switching occurs when a person goes back and forth between languages in a single conversation as indicated in the earlier example of the Finnish-American family.

Conversational Style

In contrast to accent and language selection, a more subtle aspect of language and dialect is conversational style. Conversational style refers to aspects of directness and intonation in speech, which are ways of producing particular speech codes (Tannen, 1981). One notable stylistic difference that is visible in different speech communities involves the way in which questions are asked. Some questions may have a very direct format, such as "Do you want a biscuit?" while others are more indirect, for instance, "Would you perhaps like a biscuit?" The latter is perceived as being more polite than the former in some cultural contexts, although in others it might be viewed as too wordy. More indirect conversational style is often associated with "women's language" or a more "feminine" style (Lakoff, 1973). Intonational style refers to where tone rises and falls. In U.S. English, questions usually end with a rising tone; in British English, for many kinds of questions, the tone rises in the middle of the utterance and falls slightly at the end (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982).

Speech Acts

Another aspect of style involves what social action individuals are trying to achieve with their talk. For example, a *question* can be completing a certain action, which is not just about seeking information. Speech acts name utterances, like those grammatically known as questions, by their social function: When someone says something, they are also doing something or making something happen (Searle, 1969). For example, in the previous paragraph, the question about the biscuit is really an offer. An offer is not just any kind of action, but an attempt

to give something to another person. Asking a question is just one way of "doing" an offer. You could also "do" the offer nonverbally just by holding a tray of biscuits toward the other person. Not all questions are offers, obviously. Questions can seek information, challenge someone's opinions, or ask permission to do something. In the next example, Matt speaks to his girlfriend in the format of a question.

Matt: Do you think it's courteous to call somebody and check in on them every five minutes? I mean, don't take it the wrong way.

Matt's utterance begins with "do you think" and ends with rising intonation, indicating a question. The "do you think" at the beginning of a sentence is often a formulaic way of asking for someone's opinion rather than asking for, say, information. It could also potentially be used as a politeness marker before a request as in, "Do you think I could get one of those envelopes?" However, the function of Matt's entire utterance does not seem to be asking for an opinion, but rather challenging the other person to provide an account for the action of "calling somebody and checking in on them every 5 minutes." The fact that Matt follows up the "question" with a disclaimer ("don't take it the wrong way") shows that Matt is aware of the challenging or even face-threatening nature of his so-called question. Speech acts can be enacted across cultural groups in similar ways, such as similarities between British English and U.S. American English. Some examples of speech acts include (Searle, 1969):

- *Commissives* commit a person to a future action such as a threat or a promise.
- *Declarations* create the social reality they state such as a marriage or sentencing someone to prison.
- *Expressives* display attitudes and emotions such as thanking someone.
- *Directives* get someone to do something such as ordering or commanding.

The same speech acts can also be expressed in a different way depending on culture. For instance, in Columbia it is common to do the speech act of directing—getting someone to do something—in a direct way: "Get me a coffee" rather than "would you mind getting me a coffee?" (Fitch & Sanders, 1994). In a similar example to the one described in the previous paragraph, a Dutch speaker also demands an account for questionable behavior, but much more directly:

D: goed je gezegd, ja. maar we willen weten waarom het gebeurt iedere keer
       Well you said so, yeah. But we want to know why it happens every time.

Culture-specific speech acts describe social actions (i.e., speech acts) that are particular to a speech community. For example, in Australia *chyacking* refers to playful insults ritually exchanged among friends (Wierzbicka, 1991). In Israel, *kiturim* is a ritual form of griping which is distinct from the concept of griping common to many speech communities because it can only be about publically significant problems (Katriel, 1990). Not all publically significant gripes count as kiturim, either. Table 5.3 notes the rules for when a speech act counts as kiturim.

Table 5.3   Rules for *Kiturim*.

Do you think kiturim should count as a speech act? Why or why not? Can you think of any cultural specific speech acts for the cultural group to which you belong?

Participants of Kiturim	Kiturim usually occurs face-to-face with intimates and provides a sense of solidarity. (Kiturim with less intimate people will be more topically general.)
Control of Situation	Kiturim is about events people individually cannot control.
Relationship to Problem	Kiturim cannot be too personal or directed toward someone who can solve the problem (see about)—this would transform it into "complaining."
Attitudes Toward Kiturim	Kiturim is seen as negative, as something that occurs because talking is all that can be done about the problem.
Solutions for Kiturim	Because talking is all that can be done, the alternative to kiturim is to change one's outlook (because the situation can't be changed).

A more extended speech act practice with cultural variability is how people "do" **narrative** or tell stories. The organization of stories and what makes them worth telling can differ (Labov, 1997), as can the sorts of stories deemed appropriate for telling. Narratives present culturally appropriate versions of the self. In the United States, telling stories about your job or your personal achievements is valued in ways that are not elsewhere (Linde, 1993) because of the importance of individualism and competition for U.S. Americans. In contrast, in Columbia, a *palanca* narrative (meaning "lever") is a story that demonstrates how a person has helped another advance professionally. The cooperation involved in the story implicates the value of community for Columbians (Fitch, 1998). Stories may have particular practices within them that are culturally specific functions too. In Estonian stories, the word *see,* similar in meaning to the English *this,* functions as a filler which can also request collaboration from the listener, as in the following example in which the listener supplies the sought-after word (Keevallik, 2010):

M: a koige tahtsam on see

   but most important is this

L: ajalugu

   history

M: e jah

   yeah

Another important aspect of conversation with cultural implications is how interaction unfolds. In many dialects of U.S. English, people engage in **turn-taking** in which they go back-and-forth quickly in conversation, literally take turns talking. U.S. English-style turn-taking

overwhelmingly includes quick speaker changes and little overlapping speech (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). A typical example of minimal overlap is reproduced as follows:

1   Claire: [Uh]

2   Chloe: [Well] Then it was her fault [Claire].

3   Claire: [Yeah] She said no one trump.

In other speech communities within and outside of the United States, however, longer pauses may occur between speakers with more or less than the expected overlap (Philips, 1990). In a study comparing U.S. English speakers and Spanish speakers, Berry (1994) offered many examples in Spanish such as the following, which looks quite different from the previous example with Claire and Chloe:

1   Marisa: si of un reportaje de horas end la televi[sion].

2   Paula: [si] pero

3   Marisa: y han y han encontrado agendas con direcciones [de los].

4   Paula: [pero Ma]risa

5   Marisa: [de los]

6   Paula: [eso]

7   Marisa: pisos

8   Paula: sabes como funciona ETA? [funciona a]si

9   Marisa: [(muffled)]

10   Emi: [uando unos bajos otros suben y   ]

10   Paula: [(muffled) en piramide. Exacto. [O sea]

11   Marisa: [yeah]

12   Paula: [cogen a los tres]

11   Emi: [(muffled) o sea]

12   Paula: gordos e inmediata-.

Although there are cultural differences in conversation, most of the basic interactional principles in human communication appear to be cross-cultural. Almost all speech, in any context, displays progressivity. **Progressivity** is a progression or advancement toward completing certain conversational actions. If Person A invites Person B to a party, Person B will be obliged to accept or decline the invitation—regardless of Person B's answer, how long B takes to provide it, or in what format the speech act is produced. In an example of intercultural front desk encounters at a university-sponsored English language program, Kidwell (2000) demonstrates how the progressivity inherent in interaction—the way in which what people

say sets up what should come next to advance the action—moves the conversation forward so that the students can complete their business:

Example 1   S: aHhaaii.

R: Hi.

S: I want to talk to you I need

Example 2   R: Hhaai.

S: Uh can I:: (.) copy this here

Example 3   R: Hi.

S: Hi. I have a question.

In each of these examples, a greeting is followed by an opening of interactional business by including a speech act which quickly identifies that the student has something which the receptionist can potentially help including, respectively, a request for documents, a request to make copies, and a question about a class change. Although the interactions are intercultural, the institutional setting and the progressivity of interaction provide a common ground so that what you see is a similarity rather than difference.

Linguistic choices are a quickly identifiable cultural indexical. Linguistic choices refer to differences in words people use. Different words can mean the same thing, such as *sidewalk* in U.S. English and *pavement* in British English. The same words or phrases can also mean different things, such as *knocked up* which means "knocked at the door" or "went to visit" in British English and "got pregnant" in U.S. English. The words people use and the way they are pronounced can indicate someone's speech community such as the various words for a flavored fizzy beverage (*soda, soda pop, pop, cola*). Apparently, even U.S. English Twitter posts show regional variation. Californians write *koo* or *coo* for "cool." New Yorkers write *suttin* for "something." Southerners write *y'all* for "all of you" (Yates, 2011).

Person Referencing

Person referencing refers to different terms for referencing and addressing people, including forms of address, honorifics, and membership categorization devices. **Forms of address**, or ways of calling and referring to people, can also be culturally distinct. The difference between *mom* and *mum* in U.S. and British English is not a difference of accent. Instead, they are two different words that refer to the same relationship. **Honorifics** are another way of calling people. Honorifics are titles or other terms which reference status. For example, you might say Dave or Professor Brown in English or use an informal *tú* or a formal *usted* for *you* in Spanish. Forms of address such as nicknames, too, can be culturally specific, such as calling someone *sweetie* in U.S. English, *mi amor* (my love) in Columbian Spanish, *love* or *ducks* in British English, or *zolotce* (treasure) in Russian.

People's actual names also have cultural implications (Carbaugh, 1996). Names common in one speech community may be less common or nonexistent in another. As such and not

surprisingly, names index culture. Someone called Jane is more likely to speak English than Portuguese, and versions of Jane such as *Jana* and *Juana* will often be expected to be attributable to Russian and Spanish speakers, respectively. The way in which names index culture is so strong, in fact, that people who intend to live outside their home speech community will often change their name to one more common in their new community. In many East Asian communities where English is taught as a second language, teachers provide students with "English" names, so that someone named Xie (pronounced Zee) might also be called Steve (Hsu, 2009). In the past in the United States, people often "Americanized" their last names, shortening them (Bobanova to Boban) or altering them more dramatically (Cyman to Seaman, Przystawski to Preston, etc.). The famous martial artist and actor Jet Li was born Li Lianjie.

How people select names when they marry can also index culture. In some communities it is traditional for a wife to take the husband's last name, whereas in others the last names are combined (Carbaugh, 1996). Though the former is still dominant in U.S. American culture, other options are becoming viable. Furthermore, the assumption behind who-takes-whose-name is likely to become less obvious over time as same-sex marriages becomes more commonplace including legalization in New York and Washington in recent years.

REFLECT 5.3: Given that person referencing indexes culture, how might it be used to insult or offend someone? How would you handle a situation in which someone uses a person reference that makes you feel uncomfortable?

Membership Categorization Devices

Another cultural communication practice strongly linked to person referencing is the membership categorization device. Membership categorization devices are ways of referencing people that put them into assumed categories (Sacks, 1992). For example, referring to someone as so-and-so's brother categorizes that person on the basis of family relationships. Membership categorization can also label people by assumed cultural categories. Race, ethnicity, and nationality are common colloquial and legal categories based on purported features such as skin color, customs, language, birthplace, and citizenship. Regions and nations are common ways of culturally categorizing members of speech communities.

Membership categorization devices indicate what sort of differences people have decided should matter and, as such, membership categorization devices are social constructions. Eye color is not a common basis of categorizing people into groups, while hair color is slightly more salient. For example, there is a proliferation of stereotypes in U.S. American culture about blondes but not people with hazel eyes. Skin color, accent, and language are differences that have come to "stand out" to people, though these too are variable. In a diverse city like San Francisco, encountering someone with an accent may not, by itself be as remarkable as it would be elsewhere.

Not all culturally marked differences are explicitly attributed as reasons for an interactional event. Some distinctions are marked in language without any explanation, possibly

without any awareness on the part of the speaker. Markedness is another, more implicit way of doing membership categorization. **Markedness** refers to ways in which people add to what they are saying in order to demonstrate that something is atypical. Referring to a male nurse, for example, adds the word *male* to *nurse* and displays the assumption that men are not usually nurses. This "marks" the nurse off as being unusual without the speaker ever having to say anything like "and you don't often see male nurses!" Simply by marking nurse with male, the speaker categorizes certain occupations based on gender expectations within the culture. The category of nurse in this case assumes that the membership will consist of females.

Mentioning any cultural category does some form of marking work and indicates implicitly what is taken-for-granted in the speaker's expectations about people, actions, and identities. For example, telling a story about a student's achievements and adding that she was blind indicates a cultural expectation about what categories of student are expected to excel. You would be unlikely to refer to someone's daughter as Chinese if you considered the daughter's parents Chinese. Similarly, saying *adopted daughter* indicates that most people in a *daughter* category are assumed to be biologically related (Suter, 2008).

Membership categorization indicates a stance toward the cultural category being referenced. A **stance** displays what is assumed to be a speaker's opinion, belief, or attitude (Ochs, 1993). "Unusualness" is just one stance which can demonstrate taken-for-granted assumptions. Speakers can also indicate interpersonal ideologies, social norms, and moralities. Naming a person's cultural category in a story about a disreputable act can explicitly provide a cultural category as a reason for the act, as well as link that category of person with the "bad" category of act. In this example, a reference to the category *Mexican* comes across as negative.

1   Christa: We could sell them at a yard sale (1.8) at the flea market you know Mexicans

2   Love that ki oh.

3   (3.0)

4   Valerie: No comment.

In this instance, Valerie and Christa have been discussing making paper maché globes in elementary school, and Christa jokingly suggests they could make paper maché globes before launching into her suggestion that they make the globes, and then attempt to sell them. By marking out Mexicans as being the sort of people who would buy a paper maché globe at a flea market, Christa implies a negative stereotype of Mexicans as either cheap or not being fashionable because flea markets are places where people can purchase cheaply out of date items. Valerie's reaction of "no comment" implies that Christa's comment is negative and worthy of some disapproval, perhaps because Valerie's boyfriend is from Mexico.

> **Take a Side Trip:**
>
> If you would like to read more about related issues, visit Appendix B: Local Culture Explored Through Discourse Analysis.

LIVING CULTURE

Let's Have the Men Clean Up

The following is a transcript of a Thanksgiving dinner. At any time there are two or three women in the dining room in which the video camera is placed. In an adjoining room, out of view of the camera, several men and one woman are watching football.

1		(3.0)
2	Laura:	ALRIGHT ((Laura's left hand motions to get Brenda's attention
3		simultaneously turning her head toward Brenda then Caren))
4		(1.0)
5	Laura:	°Let's see what the men's reaction will be°
6	Laura:	((Looks forward to living room)) Okay let's let- let's
7		have ((Leans forward)) the men clean up
8	Laura:	[((Leans back))
9		[(1.3) [
10	Brenda:	[((Looks up briefly towards living room, then to
11		Laura, then leaves the room with two handfuls of crumpled
12		napkins and other garbage from the table))
13	Laura:	It's the Y chromosome they don't hear it ((Shakes head))=
14	Laura:	((Leans forward)) =Who wants cheesecake?=
15	Laura:	=See ((leans back, looks at Caren, and gestures with right hand
16		palm up to Caren as if to say "I told you so"))
17	Caren:	((laughs))
18	Tom:	Right here you didn't ( )
19	Laura:	[((Laughs))
20	Caren	[((Laughs))
21	Laura:	It is the Y chromosome ((Nods head))=
22	Laura:	= ((Turns head to camera behind her)) I hope this test is
23		recorded=
24	Laura:	[((Turns head forward))
25	Caren:	[((Puts her feet on the chair in front of her))
26	Laura:	[(0.7)

LIVING CULTURE

27	Laura:	So <u>years</u> from now in a <u>biology class</u> they will <u>see</u>:
28		the difference
29		between the y chromosomes=
30	Laura:	= ((Leans forward)) Who wants to clean u:p. ((Leans
31		back))
32	Laura:	((Shakes head and makes palm up gesture similar to lines
33		15-16))
34	Brenda:	((Returns to dining room and continues cleaning table))
35		(2.5)
36	( ):	Laura* ask ( ) [not helping
37	(Caren):	Honey? [°Could you help me.°
38	Laura:	((Leans forward)) Alright the men are cleaning up
39	Laura:	[((Looks at Caren and makes palm-up gesture similar to
40		previous))
41	Brenda:	[((Looks up quickly toward living room))
42	(Fran):	(They) can't hear the games [too loud.
43	Laura:	[( ) Gets a beatin
44	Brenda:	((Quickly lifts head to look at living room))
45		(2.5)
46	Laura:	((Leans forward)) WHO WANTS CHEESECAKE?
47	Brenda:	((Quickly lifts head to look at living room))
48		(1.0)
49	Brenda:	[((Laughs as she walks out of the room with crumpled
50		napkins))
51	Laura:	[((Laughs, looks at Caren and makes same gesture from
52		15-16))
53	Caren:	[((Laughs, looks at Laura, lifts left hand palm down to Laura))
54	(Tom):	I do right here I say it every time you guys say it.
55	(Laura):	(theory)
56	Laura:	((Laura gets up)) All I know is the same theory is th- through
57		the Stone Age °is the same°

(Continued)

LIVING CULTURE

(Continued)

58		(0.7)
59	Caren:	OKAY you guys ((Claps her hands)) help clean up please
60		(2.0) ((Caren rocks the chair in front of her with her feet))
61	Laura:	((Looks to living room, then Caren))
62	Laura:	Kay ((gestures with both hands palms up and elbows bent then
63		starts cleaning))
64		(2.0)
65	Laura:	((Turns to living room)) ANYBODY WANT SOME ANDES
66		MINT
67	(Tom):	No thanks.
68	Laura:	((Looks at Caren, smiles and shakes head, and gestures
69		with both
70		hands palms up and elbows bent))
71	Caren:	((Laughs))
72		(4.0)
73	Caren:	((Gets up and clears her plate and Laura's from the table))

Consider:

1. What are the people in this interaction doing? What are some cultural ways of speaking used in this conversation?

2. What membership categorization device(s) is invoked in the conversation? How?

3. How is Laura, with the collaboration of others in the interaction, constructing gender norms through communication? For example, consider Laura's use of the phrase "the men" rather than "those watching football," which would also include the woman in that room.

4. Based on evidence from the transcript, who is cleaning? How does this compare to the gender assignment discussed in the conversation? Why is this comparison interesting?

CULTURE AND CONFLICT

Inter/cultural conflict is often invoked in conversation as a problem of communication error or misunderstanding. Even research studies of intercultural conflict across the communication field have tended to analyze conflict as the result of misunderstanding due to cultural difference (Jacquemet, 1999). This section focuses on intercultural conflict, though much of what is said about conflict between speech communities may be said of conflict within them. After all, assuming sharedness and homogeneity within speech communities is problematic because studies also note conflicts and controversies among people who are seemingly of the same cultural background (Boromisza-Habashi, 2010).

The origins of discourse analytic cultural research from such areas as ethnography of speaking and interactional sociolinguistics were deeply concerned with intercultural misunderstandings. Negative attributions made by speakers of cultural others were attributed to misidentifications of the meanings associated with different ways of speaking. For example, features of speech such as style and intonation were blamed for conflicts between British English and West Indian communities in England. The intonation pattern in the accent of West Indian English was perceived as rude from the perspective of the British English speakers, who expected a different intonation pattern, which for them sounded more polite. Similarly, when West Indian and British English research participants were asked to judge examples of one another's speech, each had a negative interpretation of the speakers' identities (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982). Although West Indian evaluators had a positive interpretation of West Indian speakers as saying what they mean, they viewed British English speakers as being indirect and condescending. British English evaluators expressed a similar negative bias toward West Indian speakers referring to their behavior as somewhat rude, although they viewed the behavior of fellow British English speakers as calm and accurate.

Explanations of intercultural conflict as miscommunication assume that if speakers knew the different meanings of the speech codes in different speech communities, fewer conflicts would occur. This has long been an assumption of many perspectives on gender difference as well, presuming that if men and women learned what the ways of speaking mean for each other, and not just from their own perspectives, they would get along better (see Tannen, 1982). These perspectives, although not necessarily inaccurate all the time, have been challenged by critical scholars. Another explanation for gender conflict, for instance, is that men and women's assumptions about each other's roles and abilities lead them to interpret one another's communication negatively. Thus, rather than conflict arising out of misunderstanding, conflict arises out of a struggle over a person's place in society. In the example of a husband at the dinner table asking his wife "do you have any ketchup, Vera?" Cameron (1998) explains that the husband's utterance is an indirect way of asking Vera to get the ketchup and that Vera understands and complies with this "request" because, traditionally, women are assumed to know more about the ins-and-outs of the kitchen than men. If Vera were to ask her husband for ketchup in the same way, he would not necessarily hear the question, which sounds information seeking, as a request. In the potential ensuing conflict, Vera might be blamed for not having been direct enough in asking for the ketchup when in actuality it is not her indirectness that was the problem, but her gender role.

Although intercultural conflict can occur due to misunderstanding, intercultural conflict also occurs because conversational participants choose to interpret one another negatively as a way of negotiating social status and enacting group boundaries. When interactions do not go as expected, there are multiple ways of deciding reasons for why this occurred. By attributing conflict to culture, participants construct cultural difference as problematic.

Bailey (2000a) provides an example of intercultural conflict in the context of immigrant Korean retailers and African American customers in Los Angeles. Amidst the backdrop of local concerns about these two groups in light of riots and shootings, Bailey analyzes how everyday interactions in convenience stores construct and reenact conflict by performing cultural difference. He first looks at the potential differences in Korean and African American communication behaviors. He articulates that Koreans value quietness and restraint and view service encounters as simple transactions, while African Americans value enthusiasm and friendliness and view service encounters as social occasions. He then interviews members of each group and finds that each person describes the others' communications as lacking in respect.

Rather than stopping there and attributing the conflict to misunderstanding, Bailey (2000a) analyzes video of actual interactions between the groups and finds that their communication exhibits divergence. Consistently, neither the Korean cashier nor the African American customer adjusts their communication style to accommodate the other's:

1	Cashier:	Two fifty ((rings up purchase and bags beer)) ((4.5))
2	Customer:	I just moved in the area. I talked to you the other day. You
3		[remember me]?
4	Cashier:	[Oh yesterday] last night.
5	Customer:	Yeah.
6	Cashier:	[(O:h yeah.)] ((Cashier smiles and nods.))
7	Customer:	[Goddamn, shit.] [Then you don't.]
8	Owner:	[New neighbor, huh?]
		((Customer turns halfway to the side toward the owner.))
9	Customer:	Then you don't know me.
10	Cashier:	[(I know you.)] ((gets change at register.))
11	Customer:	[I want you to know] me so when I walk in here you'll know me. I smoke
12		Winstons. Your son knows me.

As shown in this example, the African American's communication becomes more interpersonal and assertive, while the Korean's communication remains business focused. The Korean cashier gives no recognition of the African American customer, who pursues recognition (Line 2) and displays anger (Line 7) when the cashier's recognition is minimally given

and perhaps not provided to the customer's expectation. The fact that the customer continues to accuse the cashier of not knowing him despite the cashier saying he does know the customer indicates that saying so is not enough. In this example, the conflict is not merely a misunderstanding. Bailey (2000a) points out that these groups have been interacting long enough to know each other's speech codes. Instead, this example demonstrates an emphasis on cultural differences and a persistence in judging those differences negatively.

Conflict markers are the communication practices employed during conflict and when talking about conflict that indicate serious interactional troubles. Conflict markers can include metadiscursive terms (e.g., descriptions such as *fight, quarrel, argument*), expletives and slurs, speech acts (e.g., threats), aggressive emotional displays (e.g., puffing up, physically indicating violence, going red in the face, shouting), and divergence (e.g., communicating in increasingly differentiated ways). In inter/cultural interactions, conflict markers may be culturally marked as well, involving explicit orientations to culture (e.g., using racial slurs) or implicit cultural communication practices (e.g., raising one's voice).

In the coffee shop example, for instance, there appears to be little or no evidence of a conflict. In fact, the possibility of a simple misunderstanding seems a reasonable explanation. The conversation could be indicative of a conflict with the inclusion of conflict markers in the transcript.

1	Customer:	I'll have a la-tay.
2	Cashier:	What?
3	Customer:	La-tay?
4		(1.5)
5	Cashier:	Cafay oh lait?
6	Customer:	LA-TAY
7	Cashier:	Oh, a lah-tay ((looking down)).

In this version of the transcript, you can see there is a long pause in Line 4. Though not necessarily indicative of conflict, long pauses in conversation can indicate minor troubles because, as was mentioned in an earlier section, most speaker exchanges in English-speaking contexts are rapid. The shout (Line 6) could be a conflict marker and the withdrawal of gaze (Line 7) could be intended as dismissive. Alone, however, these features are not enough to label this as *intercultural* conflict.

There is, however, a suggestive divergence present. The difference between *la-tay* and *lah-tay* seems easily surmountable because it is a small pronunciation difference. Yet, you'll notice that the cashier does not supply many guesses to what the customer is saying. Additionally, the customer makes no attempt to explain, pronounce differently, or otherwise assist the cashier with understanding the order. Instead, the customer merely repeats the word. It is also notable that after the interaction, nothing more is said. Neither person comments on the interaction and the transaction is not accompanied by the usual *thank you* or *you're welcome* phrases that are common to U.S. service encounters.

Although people are quick, at times, to assume that cultural differences are at the root of a conflict, as you can see there is still little evidence in this conversation to make such a claim. However, repeated enactment of this type of conflict would provide more substantive evidence for this type of claim. Imagine that the cashier is U.S. born of Indian parents and speaks

U.S. English; the customer is a White British English speaker. The coffee shop is in the United States and this sort of interaction regularly occurs between Indian American cashiers and British English customers. What if, in interviews with various cashiers and customers, each discussed the other as disrespectful? Then it would be a parallel to the case of Korean immigrant retailers and African American customers analyzed by Bailey (2000a). If that were the case, then this small conversation would quite likely demonstrate intercultural conflict. Despite this hypothetical possibility, this instance is the only one that exists.

Intercultural awareness is an important step in living in a diverse society, but it is not the only salve for the destructive potential of intercultural conflict. If awareness and education were all that were required, culturally diverse regions would be more harmonious. Instead, it often seems, the more different speech communities in contact with one another, the more marked the conflict. Communication is always a delicate interactional dance with another person. Because there are multiple goals in discourse, conversational choices are fraught with potential missteps. Interactional dilemmas refer to conversational choices, which, by serving one aim, directly compete with an equally desirable ideal (Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001). In intercultural communication, interactional dilemmas are especially apparent. Being culturally sensitive may solve some of the problems of ignorance, but assuming cultural differences can be equally problematic.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Conversation is the most common way of communicating culture. In the countless interactions you have in a day—stopping for coffee, texting your friend, e-mailing a professor, arguing with your roommate about the dishes—you communicate your participation in cultural communities. Just the sound of your voice and the way you say a single word can tell people a lot about your speech community. When you interact with your own speech communities, you tend not to notice the cultural elements of what you are doing. In contrast, speech community differences seem to stand out in intercultural interaction.

Intercultural communication and its challenges are common. And yet, they remain some of the most difficult interactions you might have. Being able to "hear" through a different accent or understand an unusual word choice is a skill requiring some exposure and training. Communication skills training alone cannot prepare communicators for all of the difficulties they might face from moment to moment when communicating interculturally. People must be willing to confront and examine their own taken-for-granted assumptions about what is normal even in the most basic of situations.

CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY ONLINE

Visit: http://nixon.archives.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/trial/transcripts.php

Watergate Trial Conversations at the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum website. Learn about U.S. American history and international affairs through these transcripts and audio files. Apply the concepts from the chapter to these primary sources of inter/cultural communication.

❝ SAY WHAT?

Say What? provides excerpts from overheard real-life conversations in which people have communicated stereotypes. As you read these conversations, reflect on the following questions.

- Have you been in conversations like this before?
- Is there any one of these conversations that stick out to you more than the others?
- What do you think of this conversation?
- How did the stereotype help or hinder the conversation?
- Was there another way the stereotyper could have communicated to convey the same point?
- How do you feel when you hear this conversation or the specific stereotype?
- Do any of these conversations bother you more than others? Why or why not?
- Do any concepts, issues, or theories discussed in the chapter help explain why?

- **Say What?** When Tom told me his major was engineering, I responded by saying, "So you spend a lot of time doing work?" He told me that he has a lot of studying to do every night, and I asked if he had a lot of time to go out on weekends. He responded by saying that he always found time to have fun even though he had a full workload. Through this brief interaction, I expressed my preconceived notions about engineers and Tom responded in such a way that told me he knew that I was under the impression of a stereotype and that he had encountered this before.

- **Say What?** At Christmas dinner, a family member, continuing an otherwise innocuous conversation topic, said, "Yeah, well those immigrants don't even know how to speak English." My girlfriend's grandmother, who after 30 years of living in America still spoke broken English, agreed. I noted the irony but chose not to comment.

- **Say What?** The other day in one of my classes, I was having a conversation with my friend Joanne. She began to tell me how she thought I was a "snotty sorority girl" and perceived me as a bitch when we first met. I was very taken back by this and got noticeably offended. I could tell Joanne felt bad when she saw my reaction because she immediately tried to redeem herself. She went on saying that her opinion completely changed once she had met me and realized that she was putting me into a category of the typical sorority girl.

- **Say What?** At lunch one day, our lunch group was talking about some music award show. At one point, one of my colleagues was trying to pinpoint the name of a rapper. My supervisor turns to us and says, "Lisa must know who he is; she's all into that ghetto stuff." Prior to that, my supervisor never once asked what kind of music I listened to. He assumed because I'm Puerto Rican that I know everything about the urban/hip-hop world. I stayed quiet for a second, then started laughing and said, "What makes you think I know everything about hip-hop?" To this he responded hesitantly, "I don't know, just thought you would." I then told them I didn't know the answer and we all went on with our lunch.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When was the last time you felt you had to give an explanation for something? Using the chapter content, explain why you were accountable in the situation? Did you feel the other person accepted your reasons?

2. What speech codes exist in your community? Who uses them and in what situations? According to the chapter, why might an outsider have trouble interpreting these?

3. What examples does the chapter provide of conversational style? What aspects of your conversational style indicate your cultural membership?

4. What situations do you think you would be more direct in? What about less direct? How does style of speaking relate to chapter concepts?

5. What are speech acts according to the chapter? What speech acts are present in your community?

6. If you think of a recent story you've heard from a friend or family member, what do you remember about it? What community values could it have been portraying? How do stories communicate culture according to the chapter?

7. Have you ever been in situations when you had a hard time getting a turn to talk? How, if at all, does the chapter help to explain why this happened? If you were in a conversation where others were having that difficulty, how could you get them participating without making it obvious?

8. How would you react if someone called you (or referred to you by) an unexpected name or term? Why do you think you would have that reaction? What are some of the dangers of membership categorization? Incorporate chapter concepts in your answer.

9. Have you ever had a conversation that felt "derailed" or awkward? Has it ever occurred in an intercultural encounter? Why did you think the conversation went that way at the time? Can you think of other potential explanations now that you have read this chapter?

10. Have you ever been in, witnessed, or heard a story about an intercultural conflict? What happened? What concepts from the chapter played a role, if at all?

KEY TERMS

accent   96

accountable   90

breach   91

code switching   97

conflict marker   109

conversational style   97

cultural enactment   94

cultural participation   94

cultural perspective   94

culture-specific speech act   98

dialogic   94

form of address   101

honorific   101

indexicality   90

interactional dilemma   110

interpersonal ideology   91

language selection   97

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orienting to culture   95

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