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# Cultural Discourse Analysis: Communication Practices and Intercultural Encounters

Donal Carbaugh

*The field of intercultural communication has been criticized for failing to produce studies which focus on actual practices of communication, especially of intercultural encounters. Of particular interest have been cultural analyses of social interactions, as well as analyses of the intercultural dynamics that are involved in those interactions. This article addresses these concerns by presenting a framework for the cultural analysis of discourse that has been presented and used in previous literature (e.g., Carbaugh, 1988a, 1990, 2005; Carbaugh, Gibson, and Milburn, 1997). Indebted to the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972), and interpretive anthropology (Geertz, 1973), this particular analytic procedure is one implementation of the theory of communication codes (Carbaugh, 2005; Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias, 2005). As such, it takes communication to be not only its primary data but moreover, its primary theoretical concern. The framework responds to specific research questions, addresses particular kinds of intellectual problems, includes five investigative modes, and uses a special set of concepts. In this essay, each of the modes is discussed as analytically distinct, yet as complementary to the others, including theoretical, descriptive, interpretive, comparative, and critical analyses. Special attention is given to the interpretive mode and to intercultural interactions as a site for the application and development of cultural discourse analysis.*

**Keywords:** ■■■

Studies of intercultural communication have sought recently to bring together two important kinds of insights, the cultural shaping of communication practices

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including its nonverbal features (e.g., Milburn, 2000; Scollo, 2004; Wilkins, 2005), competence (Witteborn, 2003), and the interactional dynamics that occur among culturally shaped communication practices (e.g., Bailey, 2000). This essay is an explication of one particular approach for creating these insights, cultural discourse analysis (CuDA).<sup>1</sup>

Cultural discourse analysis raises the general question: how is communication shaped as a cultural practice? Specific questions may focus upon acts, events, and styles of communication that people use when conducting their everyday lives, including their practical rhetorical arts (Carbaugh & Wolf, 1999; Townsend, 2004, 2006). Whatever the particular phenomena of concern, the inquiry explores what people in particular places make of communication when practiced in their own way, when understood through their own terms, through their own explanations. How is communication conducted, conceived and evaluated in this place among these people? Investigations designed to respond to these questions help us understand the local shapes and forms communication takes such as a Chinese version of “pure talk” (Garrett, 1993), loathing the “sucker” role in Israel (Bloch, 2003), a Puerto Rican view of time (Milburn, 2000, 2002), or suppressing an East Asian identity in specific interactional contexts (Hastings, 2000). Investigations also can tackle the complexities of intercultural interactions between racial, ethnic, and national styles of engagement (e.g., Carbaugh, 1990, 2005).

A second, related question asks: what system of symbolic meanings or what cultural commentary is imminent in practices of communication? When people are engaged in communication, what significance and meaning does it have for them? When addressed, analyses delve into the deep meanings that are active in communication practices, and how these are part of a practical way of living. Inquiry proceeds in order to hear the rich symbolic texture, the presumed view of the symbolic world that is presumed in order to communicate in this way.

These general research questions, about the cultural nature and the meanings of communication, are based upon the view that communication both presumes and constitutes social realities; and further, that as people communicate, so they engage in a meta-cultural commentary, that is, they (and we) say things explicitly and implicitly about who they are, how they are related to each other, how they feel, what they are doing, and how they are situated in the nature of things. These latter concerns about identity, relationships, emotions, actions, and dwelling, respectively, are central concepts in cultural discourse analysis, and are elaborated below.

### **A Brief Summary of Cultural Discourse**

Cultural discourse analysis is a particular way of investigating communication ethnographically. It is indebted to the Hymesian program of work (Hymes, 1972; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986), while standing at the juncture of the theories of cultural communication (Philipsen, 1987, 2002) and communication codes (see Philipsen, 1997; Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005). The program of work

focuses inquiries on communication as a practice and culture as emergent in practices; special attention is given to interpreting the deeply meaningful commentary that is intelligible to participants as part of their ongoing social life.

75 The concept, cultural discourse, has therefore been used systematically to organize ways of understanding how culture is an integral part, and a product of discourse systems. The concept has been focused from the beginning on the relationship between discourses of personhood and communication, with these discourses being understood, like intercultural interactions, to be multidimensional, polysemic,  
80 deeply situated, and complex functional accomplishments (Carbaugh, 1988a, esp. pp. 177–184). Focused on discursive dynamics, cultural discourse has been defined as a historically transmitted expressive system of communication practices, of acts, events, and styles, which are composed of specific symbols, symbolic forms, norms, and their meanings (see Carbaugh, Gibson & Milburn, 1997). How analysts can  
85 describe, and then subsequently interpret communication practices, that is, how analysts identify the cultural features of acts, events, and styles of communication, is the focus of what follows.

### Three Specific Research Questions or Problems

90 The general research questions introduced above focus cultural analyses of discourse on specific communication practices, as well as the significance and importance of those practices to people who use them. Analyses of a cultural discourse can proceed in any number of ways, and can respond to any number of specific research problems, focusing on one or some combination of the following. Three specific and typical research questions, in no particular order, are:

- 95 1. The question of functional accomplishment: What is getting done when people communicate in this way?<sup>2</sup>

As people use discourse they can of course accomplish any number of things. The focus here is on the pragmatic accomplishments from the view of the participant's conduct, their actions, and their sense of what they are doing.  
100 For example, as we use discourse, we can create a deep sense of who we are (see Benotti Mackenzie, 2005), thereby cultivating a sense of membership in a group (e.g., Milburn, 2000, 2002). We can engage in various types of wit and humor (see Garrett, 1993; Ojha, 2003; Scollo, 2007). We can contest other ways of doing things, thus creating a counter discourse, asserting one way as opposed to another or  
105 others (Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006). Cultural discourse analyses can be designed to explore what is getting done when people communicate, with these various accomplishments being linked to issues of identity, action, emotion, relationships, and dwelling in nature.

- 110 2. The question of structure: How is this communication practice put together? What are its main cultural ingredients, elements, or features?

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The focus here is on cultural structures, specific terms and phrases, which are deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible to participants (Carbaugh, 1988b). What words have the status of symbols, thereby capturing a deep sense of who we are, or who we are with (or against), or what we are doing, or how we are feeling, or where we are? How are these being used by people in their routine social life? For example, a popular American vocabulary uses words like “self” and “sharing feelings,” the former identifying persons, the latter a kind of communicative action. How do these terms structure social interaction, and what meanings do they have for participants? A particular kind of term, terms for talk and communication generally, has been especially productive as a focus for cultural explorations (see e.g., Baxter, 1993; Poutiainen, 2005, Scollo Sawyer, 2004). Every system of cultural discourse has parts of it which identify people, actions, emotions, and so on. When are terms as these used, and what deep meanings are being created with them?

3. The question of cultural sequencing, or form (in the Burkean sense): What act sequence constitutes this communication practice? Or, in turn, of what larger sequence is this act a part?

The theory of cultural communication (Philipsen, 1987) has proposed the forms of ritual, myth, and social drama as generic cultural forms of communication. These have been tremendously heuristic in subsequent studies (e.g., Carbaugh, 1996; Fitch, 1998; Katriel, 2004). Other forms less generic but significant have also been examined such as agonistic discourses and vacillating forms of identity talk (Carbaugh, 1996). Recently, Scollo (2007) has presented a fine grained and detailed explication of the communicative form through which people retrieve texts from the media in their routine social interactions. The idea behind each is that social interaction is creatively composed through sequential forms, or interactional sequences, which have cultural integrity, from greetings to joking sessions, to good-byes. What is that sequence? What are the acts that constitute it? The cultural nature of this sequencing process is of special interest to cultural discourse analysts (see e.g., Carbaugh, 2005; Hastings, 2001).

Specific questions as these may be posed about any communication practice. When treated as a part of a cultural discourse, we may ask, then, about its interactional accomplishments, its structural features, and its sequential organization. Each can give the analyst a specific sense of the cultural functions, structures, and forms which discourse takes when conceived, evaluated, and used by people in particular places.

### Five Basic Modes of Inquiry

A mode of inquiry is a particular stance an analyst takes in order to accomplish an integral part of a research project. The theoretical, descriptive, interpretive, comparative, and critical modes of inquiry are discussed below. Each has its own grammar and logic; each enables the analyst to make specific kinds of claims that

are important ingredients in cultural research (such as conceptualizing the phenomena of interest, describing instances of it, interpreting the meaningfulness of those phenomena to participants, examining the phenomena in comparative perspective, and evaluating the phenomena, respectively); each accomplishes specific tasks the others do not. Of these, the first three—the theoretical, the descriptive, and the interpretive—are necessary for a cultural discourse analysis, while the last two are possible, if not always necessary. All modes can lead back to reflections upon the theoretical mode, asking whether it has been adequate for the purposes at hand.<sup>3</sup>

The modes are discussed, below, in an order which reflects a weak linear design in cultural discourse analysis, implying that theorizing a phenomenon occurs before describing it, and the like. However, the investigative process is also a cyclical one. Moving through one mode such as the descriptive can lead back to deeper reflections about others (e.g., a more robust theory). Taken together, then, the five modes, when implemented as parts of a research project, can create a powerful approach to the study of communication.

### *The Theoretical Mode*

The theoretical mode responds to the question: what is the perspective of, and conceptual problem being addressed by, this study (see Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992). The task is to explicate the basic theoretical orientation taken to the study, and the specific conceptual framework guiding the inquiry. Hymes' framework (1972) and/or speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997) provide typical guiding orientations for CuDA. In addition to the general orientation, specific frameworks may help focus inquiry on particular phenomena such as intercultural synchrony (Wilkins, 2007), structuring norms, indigenous frames (Carbaugh, 1990), environmental discourse (Morgan, 2003, 2007), organizational dynamics (Milburn, in press), and interpersonal relationships (Fitch, 1998; Poutiainen, 2005). The general task for the analyst is refining the sense of how one hears culture in discourse—as in a speech community or code—and how one understands, conceptually, the basic communication phenomena of concern. Engaging in these tasks equips the analyst with an abstract and theoretical understanding of communication and its phenomena, typically prior to field work. Put differently, the task here is to formulate an “etic” understanding in Pike's sense. This framework is used, then, heuristically, to guide subsequent descriptive and interpretive analyses. (This article demonstrates the theoretical mode, in writing, as it explicates CuDA as a conceptual framework for communication studies.)

### *The Descriptive Mode*

The descriptive mode responds to the question, what actually happened as a practice of communication? Can the analyst present and investigate actual instances of the phenomenon of concern? After entering a field site, the analyst explores specific communication acts, events, or styles which can be, and subsequently are, recorded. Here, the analyst is taking great care to ground the study in actual strips of real-world

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phenomena, empirically available, creating a descriptive corpus of multiple instances for study. Preferred data are typically video and audio recordings of actual everyday life or words and images which are not manipulated by the analyst. The former are  
195 typically transcribed, through some formal transcription system, so the analyst can establish what exactly is of concern to the study. For example, the following transcript was created as part of a study of intercultural encounters among Finnish (i.e., Kirsti) and US American participants (i.e., Mary):

1. Mary: Hi Kirsti!!! How are you?
- 200 2. Kirsti: Thank you, good.
3. Mary: Are you enjoying your stay?
4. Kirsti: Yes, very much.
5. Mary: It's a beautiful (!) day outside isn't it?
6. Kirsti: Yes.
- 205 7. They talk for a while longer, then say "Good bye."

Transcripts as this one help establish for the analyst and for readers what exactly is being studied as a communication practice. Recording instances of a phenomenon on paper (or increasingly on disc) helps make known to others the basic materials of concern to a study. Without this "toe-hold" in social reality, it is sometimes difficult  
210 to assess what discourse, or discursive feature, is indeed being studied.

*The Interpretive Mode*

The interpretive mode responds to the question: what is the significance and importance of that phenomenon to participants? Or, in other words, what meanings are active in this communication practice? The task here is to provide an interpretive  
215 account of the practice, identifying the premises of belief and value that are active when one does such a thing. What needs to be presumed, or understood, in order for this kind of communication practice to be intelligible here? For example, in the above sequence between Kirsti and Mary, what meaning does enacting this sequence have, and what—if any—future obligations are being formed by participating in it?  
220 We find that this varies in different cultural discourses (Carbaugh, 2005). Or, similarly, why are there moments of silence in some social interactions, and what meanings do these hold? We know that the uses and interpretations of silence vary across cultural contexts such that Blackfeet, Finnish, and popular American renderings are indeed distinct (Acheson, 2007; Braithwaite, 1997; Carbaugh, 2005;  
225 Covarrubias, 2002). We will elaborate on the interpretive mode, below.

*The Comparative Mode*

The comparative mode asks: how is this communication practice like and unlike similar others in other cultural discourses, or in other speech communities? The task of a comparative analysis carries in two directions. On the one hand, by placing two  
230 communication practices side by side, the analyst can identify what is similar in them, for example that greetings are exchanged through forms of mutual recognition,

but that these are conducted very differently. For example, in the example above, recognition occurs through the use of a first name by Mary but not Kirsti; Mary mentions an obvious topic such as the weather but Kirsti does not; Kirsti presumes a degree of relational importance in the exchange that Mary does not, and so on. Comparative analyses, especially of intercultural interactions, help explore specific phenomena such as accounts (Toyosaki, 2003), what is similar across communication practices like these in different societies, and helps establish what is culturally distinctive in each.

### *The Critical Mode*

The critical mode responds to the question: does this practice advantage some more than others? What is the relative worth of this practice among participants? The task is to evaluate the practice from some ethical juncture, making explicit what that juncture is, and what standard of judgment is being used. I have written extensively about the critical mode as it has been used in various ethnographic studies (Carbaugh, 1989/1990) and have illustrated it in various research reports (Carbaugh, 2005; Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006).

It is important to emphasize the place of critical inquiry within CuDA. There is the commitment in cultural discourse analysis to describe and interpret a communication practice from the view of participants, prior to its critical appraisal.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the analyst establishes a deep understanding of the phenomenon of concern, from the view of those engaged in it, prior to evaluating it. Put differently, the analyst engages deeply in descriptive and interpretive analyses as a way of gaining perspective on the importance, salience, or relevance of critical cultural inquiry.

The investigative procedure of raising these questions and using these five modes of inquiry to respond to them creates a systematic way in which to conduct cultural discourse analyses. Suggested are these six ingredients in cultural research: 1) careful attention to the research questions and problems of concern; 2) reflection upon how the analyst understands discourse and discursive phenomena theoretically; 3) focused descriptive explorations of phenomena of concern; 4) interpretations of the meaningfulness of those phenomena to participants; 5) comparative assessments of such phenomena across discourses or communities; and, if warranted, 6) a critical appraisal. Each mode accomplishes important parts of the analysis, with the procedure generally providing for a holistic stance for understanding cultural discourse.

### **An Elaboration of the Interpretive Mode**

How does an analyst conduct an interpretive inquiry of cultural discourse? The discussion, here, following the analytic procedure above, presumes that the analyst has theorized the phenomenon of interest, and created a descriptive record of it. The descriptive record is being analyzed, or has been analyzed in order to identify a communication practice, and/or cultural theme. After doing at least some of



this work, the analyst can examine that record and ask, what is the significance and importance of this to participants? What meanings does this practice hold for participants? Note that this is an analyst's question, NOT necessarily an interview question. There is a difference between analyzing meanings-in-practice, as part of ongoing social interaction, and analyzing participants' reports about that practice. Each involves different orders of data, the former being an *enactment* of the practice, the latter *a report about* it. While these can complement each other, they can also diverge. A participant can deny some interpretations of a practice, even though those interpretations are robust in social interaction. If this is the case, that is, a discursive practice has competing meanings, some amplified while others muted, the analyst wants to know this! The range of active meanings in and about the practice is thus the target of the interpretive analysis.

It is important to emphasize the interpretive task before the analyst: while engaging in a communication practice, an analyst seeks to understand what range of meanings is active in that practice, when it is getting done. The analyst sets out to interpret this practice, what is being presumed by participants for it to be what it is, that is, to understand the meta-cultural commentary imminent in it. What all does this practice have to say?

In order to respond to these questions, and to develop this point, I want to elaborate two general concerns. One is a framework for analyzing the semantic content of cultural discourses. The other is a vocabulary used for formulating those contents.

#### *The Semantic Content of Cultural Discourses: Hubs and Radiants of Meaning*

Cultural discourse analysis treats meaning as an ongoing commentary that is immanent in actual communication practices. In other words, as people communicate with each other, they are saying things literally about the specific subject being discussed, but they are also saying things culturally, about who they are, how they are related, what they are doing together, how they feel about what is going in, and about the nature of things. These cultural meanings—about personhood, relationships, action, emotion, and dwelling, respectively—are formulated in cultural discourse analyses as “radiants of cultural meaning” or “hubs of cultural meaning” which are active in communication practice. We know from the ethnographic literature about communication that these radiants and hubs are actively a part of communication practices (e.g., Witteborn, 2007). It is the rendering of these interactional radiants or semantic hubs, the explication of this ongoing meta-cultural commentary, which is the task of interpretive analysis.

The radiants discussed below provide a way of structuring the interpretive analysis. The objective is to render an enriched reading of the meanings in a way that does not simply replicate and parrot what has been said already by participants, but creates a productive portrait of the meaningfulness of the practice to participants. In my experience, the interpretive account is successful if participants say something like: “That’s right, that’s how we do things, but I hadn’t thought of it quite like that

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before” (Carbaugh, 1988, p. xiv). Interpretive analysis is then both replicative  
of participants’ meanings, that is, it does not violate their sense of themselves, and  
it is also partially creative, for it puts their practice in a somewhat different  
semantic light.

Cultural radiants of meaning have been explicated in various prior works  
mentioned throughout this report. The ideas, then, are not declared here in the  
abstract, but derive from a body of descriptive and interpretive work.<sup>5</sup> For sake of  
this discussion, I will briefly discuss each of the five radiants of meaning. Each  
suggests a question to ask about the meaning of a discursive practice to participants.  
Each hub implicates the others, even if all are not always highly salient.

1. *Meanings about being, personhood and identity*

Who am I or who are we? As people engage in communication practices they  
say something about who each person is. An analyst can ask of the practice,  
what does it presume, or create, as messages about identity? Messages about  
identity can be understood at a *cultural level concerning personhood*, that is, what  
beliefs are presumed in order to be a person here? Messages about identity can also  
be understood as *social identities*, that is, what positions—such as professor and  
student, husband and wife, mother and daughter—are established for people as they  
engage in communication in this way? Messages about identity can also be  
understood at a *personal level* as the unique qualities of participants come into  
focus (Carbaugh, 1996). As the analyst interprets meanings at these levels, much may  
be learned about what is getting said in the discourse of concern. For example, in the  
descriptive data above, Kirsti is saying something at a deep cultural level about  
Finnish personhood, and about the social identity of being a friend, just as Mary is  
saying something about being “American” and its version of being a friend. In such  
moments, we say something both to ourselves and others about who we are.  
Messages about identity can be explicitly coded into communication through identity  
terms, pronouns, terms of address, or membership categorization devices (see Hester  
& Eglin, 1997); these messages can also be powerfully coded implicitly. It is the  
cultural analyst’s task to know these messages and how they are active in  
communication practice.

2. *Meanings about relating, relationships*

How are we being related? As people engage in communication practices, they are  
being related one to another. In some, the relationship is presumed prior to the  
practice; in others, the practice is the activity in which relations are forged. An analyst  
can ask of a communication practice how it works to relate people, one to others, or  
others to one. Kristine Fitch (1998) has written about “interpersonal ideologies” as  
constructed in speech acts and events, including what these make culturally available  
to participants. The task of the analyst here, as Fitch emphasizes, is to explore how  
relationships are presumed and engaged in communication practices. Messages about  
relating can be explicitly coded into communication through relationship terms,  
personal idioms, and uses of relative address terms, but these messages can also be  
conveyed implicitly and powerfully. How this radiant of meaning-making works is  
part of the cultural analyst’s interpretive task.

### 3. *Meanings about acting, action and practice*

What do people take themselves to be doing? What type of action is this that we are doing? As people engage in communication practices, they act as if they are doing one sort of thing, rather than other sorts of things. The type(s) of thing getting done can be interpreted by the cultural analyst in order to enrich one's sense of the meaningfulness of that practice. Messages about action are often coded explicitly into communication through terms that identify the kinds of communication or activity that are relevant to the participants. For example, participants might say they are "being honest" or "sharing feelings" or "reflecting thoughtfully" (Carbaugh, 2005). They might also contest what they are and should be doing, as in whether they should "talk things through" or "put it in writing" (Baxter, 1993). There is a special framework for analyzing such practices and the terms used to discuss them (see, e.g., Carbaugh, 2005). In any event, as people communicate so they also engage in a meta-commentary, explicitly or explicitly, about the kind of activity they are doing. The cultural analyst's task is coming to recognize messages about these activities as they are explicitly and implicitly coded into communication.

### 4. *Meanings about feeling, emotion and affect*

Being socialized into life is to know what affect is appropriate, to what degree, on what occasions (Carbaugh, 1990b, 2007; Scruton, 1979). How do people feel about what is going on? As people engage in communication practices, they are involved in an affective performance. What is the feeling of this practice, what is its tone, or, how is it keyed? As the analyst explores the feeling of the practice, whether painstaking or exhilarating, its affective dimension can become known. How feeling is structured and conveyed is thus crucial to understanding the meaning of discourses. Messages about feeling can be conveyed explicitly through emotion terms and vocabulary; yet it is also, often, conveyed more implicitly through nonverbal comportment. How affect is conveyed, and what it is saying through communication can be a site of important meanings for the cultural analyst.

### 5. *Meanings about dwelling, place and environment*

Where are these people located, and what is their sense of their places? How, if at all, are they identifying their landscape, relating to their environment, and establishing their place within it? As people engage in communication, they spin a cultural discourse that is located somewhere, and thus locates them there in a particular set of ways. How this is done conveys messages about place and dwelling. Messages about dwelling are tellingly and explicitly anchored in the use of place names (Basso, 1996), in locational formulations, and in direction-giving. Cultural discourses have been studied which locate contested notions of "the same place," as well as different versions of history attached to each (Carbaugh, 1996; Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006). Cultural analysts benefit from knowing what communication practices are saying about where people are, how they are related to those places, and what should be done when inhabiting them.

Interpretations of discourse, of communication practice, can be formulated by attending to these potential radiants of meaning, and coming to know their immanence in practice. An analyst can ask about a practice, what does this say

about identity, about relating, about acting, about feeling, about dwelling. Some meanings may be more salient than others, some more amplified as others are muted. All are of interest as the analyst constructs an interpretive account of the cultural meanings in the discursive practice. The above hubs can help structure this analysis, as it helps us identify radiants of meanings in cultural discourses.

### *Concepts for Formulating Interpretive Accounts*

What can one say about each hub or radiant of meaning, through what vocabulary? Several concepts have proven useful in the analysis of cultural discourses, especially in making claims about its meanings. A few of those are discussed here, as each helps establish not only what is culturally distinctive in communication practices, but what is culturally diverse as well.

An analyst can treat a word or phrase as a *symbol*, a *cultural* or *key term*. This draws attention to a word as a cultural concept that is dense with local meaning, used routinely, prominently, or is potent in its meaning. For example, in studies of Israeli popular communication, “dugri” is used to describe a kind of direct, frank speech that has particularly dense meanings for the Sabra Jew (Katriel, 2004). All cultural discourses contain terms that are deeply symbolic and it is the cultural analyst’s task to identify which, if any, are being used. The above radiants suggest examining discursive practices for such terms, deep cultural terms which say something about identity, relations, feelings, acting, or dwelling, respectively.

Cultural terms can be combined into a statement which captures participants’ definitions, concepts, premises, beliefs or values. These statements are called *cultural propositions*. For example, in studies of popular American communication, a speech event of a “talk show” can be summarized through the following beliefs, formulated here as cultural propositions: 1) The person is “an individual” who has “rights” and a “self”; 2) the “self” is “unique” and should strive to be expressively aware, independent, and open; 3) the “self” struggles against “society” and its harmful, oppressive institutions (Carbaugh, 1988a; 2005). Elsewhere, for example in some Japanese scenes, the basic proposition starts differently: The person is tied inextricably in “relationship with others,” or among some Hindi speakers, is “divisible into parts” (e.g., Makato, 2007; Toyosaki, 2004). Cultural propositions arrange key or cultural terms, the quoted terms here, into statements which are interpretations of local, taken-for-granted knowledge about personhood, relations, actions, feelings, and dwelling. Cultural propositions typically ground the analysis very close to the participants’ views and thus help keep the interpretive account close to the cultural ground, so to speak.

*Cultural premises* are analysts’ formulations about participants’ beliefs about the significance and importance of what is going on, both as a condition for that practice of communication, and as expressed in that very practice (Carbaugh, 2005, p. 5). Participants’ beliefs can be about what exists (as in cultural proposition 1 in the preceding paragraph), or about what is proper or valued (as in proposition 2 above). While both propositions and premises can be formulated to capture

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beliefs or values, cultural premises are typically more abstract formulations about specific terms and practices, with these being immanent across expressive practices. Cultural premises capture and explicate taken-for-granted knowledge which usually does not need to be stated by participants since it is believed to be part of common sense. Formulating premises explicitly thus puts the taken-for-granted into a domain of “discursive scrutability,” freeing it for analysts’ and participants’ reflections.

At times interpretive analyses yield meanings which vary along specific dimensions as when identity terms reveal meanings of close-distant, equal-unequal, powerful-powerless. These dimensions have been called *semantic dimensions*, which identify continua of meanings with two sets of values. Note these are dimensions of “more or less,” not dichotomies of an “either-or” quality. For example, Katriel and Philipsen (1981) identified two clusters of terms summarized as “communication” and “chit-chat.” These two clusters could be interpreted along three dimensions of meanings, close-distant, flexible-rigid, and supportive-neutral. The interpretive analysis then drew attention to cultural terms and dimensions of meanings with the former term “communication,” being rendered as a relatively valued practice, for it is close, supportive, and flexible, while the latter, “chit-chat,” was rendered as less valuable for it is understood to be relatively distant, rigid, and neutral. In this way, semantic dimensions identify two-valued sets that are used by participants to conceive of, and to evaluate their sense of personhood, relationships, actions, feeling, and dwelling (see Seitel, 1974).

A final concept discussed here is the concept of *norm*. Communication norms are statements about conduct which are granted some degree of legitimacy by participants in a speech event or community (see Carbaugh, 1990; Philipsen, 1992). Norms are an analyst’s formulation of a moral message that may be stated by participants themselves, but can also be implicit in the structuring of discourse. Given this practice, and the way people are doing it, the analyst asks: what is it presumably that should/not be done? Norms can be productively formulated about this through a four-part form: 1) in context C (specify the setting, scene, participants, topics of concern); 2) if one wants to do some task (e.g., be a particular kind of person, establish a kind of relationship, act in a specific way, exhibit feeling in one way rather than others, dwell appropriately); 3) one ought/not (it is prescribed, preferred, permissible, or prohibited); 4) to do X (a specific action). Formulating norms in this way helps capture participants’ meanings about proper, value-laden action (Hastings, 2000). So formulated, communication norms can also, through the framework being discussed generally here, establish particular, common ingredients of norms, and thus help us identify how they vary cross-cultural study.

This set of concepts provides a vocabulary for conducting interpretive analyses of cultural discourses. In the process, certain radiants of meaning may be explicated as symbolic terms, cultural propositions, cultural premises, semantic dimensions, and/or norms. Each says something about the meaningfulness of a practice to participants; each can also complement the others in constructing an interpretive account of the discursive practice. All of course are not necessary in any one account.

Interpretive analysis is something of a science, in that it can be structured in a systematic and rigorous way; yet it is also something of an art. One must have a feel for what is most productive for attention given the particulars of the case, at this particular moment in time, for purposes of discussion with some audience.

### *Producing and Assessing Cultural Discourse Analyses*

The above framework provides a way of designing cultural research of discourses. It suggests a wide range of questions, proposes modes of inquiry for responding to those questions, provides a specific interpretive stance for discourse analysis, with a special set of concepts. When designing a study, then, the analyst can adopt or create a specific theoretical, descriptive, and interpretive approach to it that serves its purposes.

CuDA studies, therefore, exhibit commitments to the following: theorizing communication generally, explicitly, and as a basis for further investigations; describing in detail the communication practices being explored; and interpreting the meaningfulness of those practices to participants. In the special case of intercultural encounters, the studies assume a kind of double burden, as what needs described, and interpreted, from the vantage of each discourse, can have its own unique cultural features. Attending to these, and their interaction, places special demands on such study and thus makes an explicit framework for their analysis indispensable. Hopefully, the framework discussed here provides one such way for at least some of our future studies.

### Notes

- [1] The acronym, CuDA is used to identify Cultural Discourse Analysis as distinct from Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 2007).
- [2] The concept, function, here is used in the pragmatic tradition of John Dewey, capturing what is done in conjoint action; it is not being used in the functionalist sense of Talcott Parsons' sociology.
- [3] This point introduces the cyclical quality of this research design, as well as the analyst's critical reflection on the perspective taken to the inquiry. These points are discussed in much more detail elsewhere (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992).
- [4] Of course, there is the special case where participants themselves are critiquing the practices through which they communicate (see Carbaugh, 1989/1990).
- [5] The emphasis in this report is on the CuDA framework. The fieldwork literature cited throughout provides ample illustration of actual workings of this in the ethnographic literature. Specific pieces can be consulted for detailed demonstrations of these analyses.

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