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Discursive Reflexivity in the Ethnography of Communication: Cultural Discourse Analysis

Donal Carbaugh[1], Elena V. Nuciforo[1], Elizabeth Molina-Markham[1], and Brion van Over[1]

Abstract

This article is a creative reconstruction of reflexivity as it operates for some practitioners of the ethnography of communication. Our central concern is conceptualized as "discursive reflexivity"; with that concept, we foreground communication both as primary data *and* as our primary theoretical concern. As a result, we treat reflexivity as a process of metacommunication, that is, as a reflexive process of using discourse at one level to discuss discourse on another. Following current and past research, we explore how dimensions of discursive reflexivity differently configure into five types of ethnographic practice, these being theoretical, descriptive, interpretive, comparative, and critical inquiry. Each is discussed as analytically distinct from the others, yet all coalesce experientially or, in other words, all coexist in one's experience as an ethnographer. Relationships are discussed between discursive reflexivity and self-reflexivity, including various modes of ethnographic reporting and future directions for inquiry.

Introduction

Over the years as I (DC) have lived and worked in Montana, Native American communication practices have largely subsumed my own. When teaching public speaking at the University of Montana, for example, during a round of speeches, a Blackfeet student stepped into—what was for him—a traditional way of communicating, relying on nonverbal movement and dance when I expected to hear words or speech. Only later, after considerable reflection, was I able to render the event as something more than ill-tempered resistance (an interpretation supplied by another Blackfeet colleague), ill-mannered conduct (an interpretation supplied by another student in the class), or incoherent action (an interpretation close to the teacher's initial sense of the non-speaking matter).

During similar occasions, I, a teacher now turned ethnographer, would find my own experience largely irrelevant to the culture surrounding me. When spending time with a specific Blackfeet teacher, this elder guided me down some traditional Blackfeet physical and cultural paths. Occasionally, during such experiences, I was subjected to exercises, perhaps in cultural pedagogy as the elder would pause, look outward into a place with reverence, perhaps smile a little bit, then move on. Again, without comment, he would stop

for a while, and in the wake of such action, I would too. The ethnographic student's first unreflective reaction in these moments, not knowing what was going on, was an internal chuckle, quizzically wondering about the propriety or prudence of the cultural teacher. In both the performance and the pause, as I attended to my own experience, I was blocking my ability to understand the depth of the culture before me—both in space and in time. On sustained reflection, however, there was much more to this than I initially knew; and it took me literally years at first even to notice that there was an intentional pause and longer to eventually render this form of "pausing-practice" as something deeply significant and important (Carbaugh, 2005).

Our following remarks explore a kind of reflexive ability which is designed to guide us through ethnographic moments like these. In so doing, we assume the importance of cultural diversity and communication—long cultivated among ethnographers of communication. We also find it important frequently to adopt an attitude of humility when being

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reflexive—focusing much more on others' views (of us) than our own (see Milburn, Wilkins, & Wilkins, 2001).[1] To begin, we ask how reflexivity can work toward the goals of learning cultural worlds—ours, among others'. And at the same time we ask, how can reflexivity contribute to our knowledge about communication? We take both the diversity of cultural experiences and the communication of that diversity as starting points for our remarks (Berry, 2009).

Discursive Reflexivity

The above field scenes demonstrate the need, we believe, for what we will call generally "discursive reflexivity." With the term *discursive* here, we draw attention to ways we render and reason through discourse; with the term *reflexive*, we draw attention to metacommunicative action, using a discourse or concepts to explore another discourse we are using and studying.[2] We take reflexivity of this general kind to be erected on *a basic and general principle*: our activity as ethnographers involves a discourse of ethnography as well as the discourses we seek to understand (our own included). Taken together, then, discursive reflexivity draws attention to various ways we use discourse to render and reason about the discursive practices we study. Our general objective in what follows is to explicate this process as active in ethnographic inquiry. Like Hervik (1994), and like Milburn et al. (2001) before us, we embrace the importance of self-reflexivity, as one type of reflexive move, but we think, in itself, it is insufficient for ethnographic inquiry. Our following remarks will make evident why.

Discursive reflexivity raises a fundamental question about the ways we use communication to recount, to give shape and meaning to experiences we decide to use for ethnographic purposes. Discursive reflexivity, at its base, draws attention to how communication is forming our sense of our experiences with people's communication practices in the field (including our own). The reflexive "moves" we will focus on are a fundamental aspect of our ethnographic art and of our science. Considering these "moves" provides a systematic way to communicate about our ethnographic efforts to understand the communication practices we are producing with and about others.

The terrain we discuss is not simple, but we think it is both rich and robust. As a result, we embrace a range of "moves" designed to achieve our various ethnographic ends.

We also want to emphasize, to begin, that we are focusing here on the field-based activities of doing ethnography. In other words, we are writing here about aspects of field methodology more than about final report writing, although both are organically related (see Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992). One needs to conduct research with great care, and precision—as we seek to discuss here—to speak ably, or to communicate in other ways, to various academic and nonacademic audiences about what we have

done. So, here, we emphasize the process of designing and conducting ethnographic research; less central in our remarks are the various discursive means through which we might report the findings of our ethnographies. For example, in addition to academic articles, we have constructed both written and oral reports for government agencies; we have given oral and nonverbal performances of our findings to academic and nonacademic audiences, in different languages; we have read ethnographic poetry; we have creatively designed ethnographic videos and other visual documents, and so on. Multiple ways of presenting our findings are indeed not only possible but productive. Yet what we emphasize here are various features of ethnographic reflexivity which, we argue, are necessary in the conduct of ethnography on the ground. In doing so, we hope to sketch an investigative process which should help create better insights as well as findings of high quality that will be of interest to many audiences. We argue that these features can be conceptualized, created, and used rigorously, and systematically, to cultivate in our ethnographic practices, a "discursive reflexivity."

Dimensions of Discursive Reflexivity

Discursive reflexivity occurs in multiple dimensions and in various types. The basic dimensions we will discuss are these: (1) a *reflexive moment* which involves using discourse to give shape and meaning to a moment as a communication practice, (2) a *source of reflection* which involves orienting to that moment through one principled stance and/or others, and (3) using that moment and source explicitly to achieve certain *ethnographic ends*. We emphasize to begin that dimensions, as we are discussing them, are aspects or qualities of a practice, not mutually exclusive practices. These, of course, coalesce in the experiential world of the ethnographer. Let us illustrate these dimensions in some more detail.

We could reflect again, for example, on the "public speaking" class when a student performs nonverbally rather than speaks, when one is in the presence of what we can recall, or recount, as a moment for ethnographic reflection. What we mean here is not that one is reflecting simply about the moment as it originally happened, but more specifically what we mean is one devotes attention to how the moment is to be recorded, literally and verbally, for this provides material subsequently that is rich for ethnographic reflection and analysis. A part of that reflection is discursive and involves asking and analyzing as follows: How does one characterize such a moment, through what discursive framework or form? Is it characterized according to theoretical components, an act, a genre, event, style, or from the participant's view a moment of confusion, resistance, cultural pedagogy, and so on? Through what form of discourse can and should this moment be recorded or expressed? Various possibilities

are present. To identify such moments is to make a move on them; our move is designed to respond to ethnographic questions about communication and to conduct analyses of them as cultural and communicational. To do so, above, we characterized the moment partly as a nonverbal communication practice. This uses our ethnographic discourse by conceiving of the moment as a communication action and describes the action done in a way that identifies a participants' preferred means of expression. In short, the moment is recorded through an ethnographic discourse, or explicit concepts, which highlights—as a theoretical matter—a local discursive practice in use.[3]

What, then, might be the source of the reflection? What frame of reference, cultural stance, or symbolic orientation is taken to render the moment intelligible? Here, at least in our opening segments, the ethnographer must confront, immediately, the possibility of multiple cultural and personal stances. We have found in several of our field studies that virtually every comment made about such moments can be culturally loaded, that is, each such comment can easily usher forth from a particular cultural stance. And of course there is danger, as we know from colonial experience, in employing one stance at the expense of (or which silences) others. In the moment we have been using, one source from which to consider the nonverbal act is a naive teacher's. As such, in a speech class one expects speech, and when seeing "only" nonverbal communication the teacher feels discomfort and experiences the nonverbal action as from an incorrigible student who presents a "speech" through a dance and not words, with the student's action being treated perhaps as an explicit action in defiance of authority. Cast differently, from a Blackfeet stance, we could through careful description and cultural interpretation eventually tell about the significance and importance of nonverbal forms of expression as appropriate acts of public communication, especially when presenting traditional Blackfeet culture to those presumably outside of it. The stances we supply—knowingly or not—are easily cultural ones, communal voices, so to speak. Our task is to reflect on the view one takes of the matter, for one has been taken knowingly or not, as a nonoptional condition of ethnographic inquiry. Discursive reflexivity here can help guard against a singular naive cultural reading—or report—of such communication moments, thereby simply reproducing one stance on the matter.

Through the system for reflexive analysis we are creating (and reporting) here, we introduce certain ethnographic goals which we take as essential. These include carefully recording and describing reflexive moments, giving them shape through discursive means, and rendering the meaningfulness of them from particular stances which are reflectively employed by the ethnographer. In the process, of course, we acknowledge the possibility of different cultural stances as well as the possibility of various interpretations about the

significance, importance, and relevance of these matters. Discovering this is part of the joy or interest in doing ethnography. Furthermore, we have mentioned one basic condition of what is being noticed, that is, as Geertz (1973) reminds us, that ethnographies involve our discourse about others' discourses, and as a result our interpretations of others' interpretations are inevitably incomplete, nonfinal reports on the matter. Nonetheless, we can dig deeply into what is going on, even if this does not exhaust the matter at hand, as when a verbally oriented ethnographer misses a gesture, a pause, and silence as significant communicative actions. When pauses of this type occur, along with other nonverbal forms of cultural communication, non-Native American teachers can easily record them as an absence of the verbal and evaluate such activity negatively. Moments as these, between non-Native American teachers and indigenous students, have been not only noticed but also analyzed ethnographically (Wieder & Pratt, 1990; see also Carbaugh, 2005). This is precisely why we must reflect on the ethnographic moments we carefully record for detailed analysis as well as consider the source(s) of our orientation to them. What is an ethnographer's responsibility in these matters, and what reflexive abilities can we cultivate toward better ends? The ends we work toward include theorizing, describing, interpreting, comparatively analyzing, and if necessary critically assessing communication practices. Each creates reflexive demands of its own, and we turn to each next.

Types of Discursive Reflexivity

In what follows, we will use the three dimensions above—the reflexive moment, the orientation to that moment, and practical ethnographic objectives—in particular ways to identify five types of reflexivity. We introduce each in the abstract, then demonstrate its role in a particular ethnography one of us is currently conducting. We note to begin that the process of doing ethnographic fieldwork as we practice it is cyclical and not linear (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992). While we present the types below in a loose linear form, reflexivity, as in ethnographic study generally, can enter through any one reflexive space and work its way to the others. Together, the reflexive methodology provides a distinctive way of doing communication research (see Carbaugh & Buzzanell, 2010; Philipsen, 2010).

Theoretical Reflexivity

A first type of discursive reflexivity is *theoretical reflexivity*. This treats a reflexive moment as a resource for how we are understanding communication itself; the source of this reflexive thinking is a basic orientation to communication which examines it, to a possible degree, as culturally distinctive, thus as cross-culturally variable. Examples of

the frameworks we use to conceptualize reflexive moments as such are Hymes' (1972) ethnographic theory of communication, Philipsen's (1987, 1992, 1997, 2002) theory of cultural communication codes, and cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2005, 2007). We have already demonstrated this type of reflexivity above by theorizing, or conceptualizing, the classroom as caught between an official "public speaking" course and a local form of "nonverbal communication." By conceptualizing the scene as one involving fundamentally different genres of communication, and by treating these forms to a degree as culturally distinctive, we have theorized the primary practices of concern ethnographically, as communicational concerns, and, in this case, as not only culturally distinctive but also culturally variable.

At one level, this reflexive way of theorizing contributes to our understanding of local communication practices as the play between dominant (speech-oriented) and local (nonspeech oriented) dynamics in the classroom. At a general level, such reflection can move toward not only a critique of injustice on a local level but also a critical assessment of prominent theories which may focus only on verbal (and human) communication. Theoretical reflexivity can thus create better analytical tools which demand accountability to the variety of local communication practices actually at work in our world by conceptualizing our understanding of communication in ways which honor local and general concerns (see Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992).

Descriptive Reflexivity

A second type of discursive reflexivity is *descriptive reflexivity*. This invites one to think about ways of documenting a reflexive moment and asking what source or stance is being used when recording that moment as such. How does one capture for others a pause, a silence, a listening to a crow, a speech, or, attendance in religious ritual? Such recounting is always to a degree partial and selective, and for these reasons, careful reflection on how practices as these are being recorded and from which view rendered is essential. We may miss a pause, a raised brow, a look askance, yet notice the words expressed, the wave of the arm, the position of the body. So we ask, What is entering into our descriptive account, exactly, as a moment of reflection? Why that moment? What is its importance beyond our personal stake in the matter? Various media of description are possibly available including video and audio recordings, various transcription systems, and the like. The ethnographic purposes here are to document for one's self, colleagues, audiences, or readers what indeed has actually happened, what communication practice has transpired in a way that is accessible for subsequent scrutiny by the ethnographer and by others. Attention to descriptive detail is essential because one's own paraphrasing of the

matter can easily, typically, skew the matter onto personal rather than cultural soil. Reflexive attention is paid further to the source of the description and whether the stance toward the practice is the experience of one or a practice of many. Reflexive description makes explicit actual moments of communication practice, from a stance that is renderable as shared and public rather than idiosyncratic and private. This works toward the ethnographic goal of descriptive documentation of actual moments being gathered for subsequent ethnographic analysis. The ethnographic description below is offered in an effort to set the stage for further elaboration of the discussion begun above.

I (BVO) recently had the grave misfortune of attending my mother's funeral. I was told by my grandmother that my responsibility at the service would be to "receive" those attending the service and their sympathies. Standing in the church, I found myself in a cramped aisle. On one side was an array of photo collaged poster-board chronicling different periods of my mother's life and, on the other, the railing of a pew separating the narrow path I occupied from the rows of bench seats behind me. So positioned, I received the condolences and warm words of a lifetime of friends, coworkers, and family. Conspicuously present in the verbal offerings of many who stood before me were words about words in "a time like this." One middle-aged woman who had worked with my mother in her position directing a national charity for many years approached me, first passing my wife on my left before continuing on to my grandmother standing to my right. As the queue of attendees moved forward, she advanced to a position squarely in front of me, extended her hand and began to speak; she gazed at me with softened eyes and said, "words just can't express how much your mother meant to us, she will be greatly missed." She was bent ever so slightly forward at the hips, cradling my hand gently in hers. I replied, "Thank you, yes, we're all going to miss her very much." She stayed there maintaining her soft gaze for a moment longer before gently retrieving her hand and sidestepping into my grandmother's view.

The moment described above surely contains a partial and subjective descriptive account of a moment I claim occurred. In the writing of it, I grappled with what elements I would select from the experience for inclusion in the account. Should I describe the dark burgundy wallpaper throughout the main hall of the church or the way the cavernous space amplified hushed conversations into a dull roar? Perhaps I should include the feel of the smooth grain of the wood railing I held onto behind me as I stood in the receiving line or the activity of the church staff trying unobtrusively to govern the flow of traffic and hand out booklets of the service proceedings? What elements are ultimately included in any ethnographic accounting of experience is, to be sure, only some of what might at any

given time have been noticed. How then ought we to account for what we have selected and what we have not? While such a discussion is ultimately beyond the scope of what we hope to do here, and has, in fact, been nicely discussed elsewhere (Fitch, 1994), I will make a few comments on the way a *descriptive reflexivity* can attend to the issues involved in such concerns.

To begin, we might note that the description above does at least two things. First, the description serves as a claim that some sequence of observable events occurred. In other words, that which has been represented above would have been visible to any culturally competent member who occupied the same space. In this way, ethnographic description first and foremost acts as a documentary claim about an event which did in fact occur; furthermore, in our case, the event is conceptualized as a communication practice. Second, it is important to note that the descriptive endeavor does not occur in a vacuum wherein the ethnographer simply walks around transferring all human experience to paper. It is precisely the ability to select for a description that distinguishes the ethnographer from the camcorder or audio recorder, and it is this which requires of us a *descriptive reflexivity*.

In the creation of this description, I practiced a reflexivity prompted by two related concerns. The first demands an awareness of an ethnographer's own personal and cultural investments and orientations in the practices in which they engage. For me, this takes the form of asking how my own relationship to the event, and the ways I may be culturally disposed to interpret such a thing, is involved in the description produced? Since descriptions that attempt to entirely bracket the subjective experience of those involved are potentially neither possible nor desirable, we must as a precondition of ethnographic description accept the ways in which we are inevitably woven into the production of ethnographic texts. However, this recognition does not preclude the possibility of a practiced reflexivity that exposes for consideration the ways in which our "noticings" may be deeply cultural, thereby allowing for a descriptive reorientation that captures more of what local participants find notable. Since part of the ethnographic work of being in the field is, in fact, noticing what to notice from the local perspective, the descriptive work of ethnography is a cyclical one that seeks to balance documenting that which can be publicly agreed to have occurred, with those things the ethnographer and local participants find notable.

This leads to a second concern of the practice of descriptive reflexivity, mainly an attentiveness to what is ultimately included in ethnographic description, and on what grounds.

In my case (BVO), the description above is prompted by a noticing of a certain verbal exchange in which I engaged. The exchange was noticed because it is an instance of a communication practice which I am studying, "the limits of communicability." The description above is thereby motivated by one of my own research questions which asks about the ways in which reports of inexpressible experience are verbally accomplished in moments of social interaction. The question is investigated in my own work using an approach we share, cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007), that finds its roots in the ethnography of communication tradition as well as speech codes theory. This tradition suggests that to account for the cultural underpinnings of communicative practice one should be attentive to the setting, participants, interactional ends, act sequences, emotional keying, communicative instruments, norms, and genres that are involved in the accomplishment of a moment of culturally situated communication (Hymes, 1972). The description above is then, in part, informed by a study of these Hymesian components of communication practices. Attention to the components is evident in a variety of places: the analysis explores participants of the event (myself, my grandmother, my wife, my mother's coworker), elements of the setting, possible outcomes (condolences offered), the sequence of communicative actions, evident emotions (softness, gentleness, support) as well as normative rules (it is proper and good to receive condolences in this way). The description is then informed both by the necessity of creating an observational record capable of supporting investigation and by the ethnographic moment's responsiveness to the guiding question about communication itself.

In the production of the description, I practice a *descriptive reflexivity* that prompts the concerns I grapple with above when deciding both what moments of experience to select for description and what elements of that experience to include in the descriptive account. The practice of *descriptive reflexivity* further prompts an awareness of the way the experience of the ethnographer is a documentary claim, responsive to, and informed by, a guiding question and theoretical approach. This self-awareness of the ethnographer both as investigator and generator of communicative practice then allows for a spiraling refinement of the mode of ethnographic inquiry that guides the descriptive process.

Interpretive Reflexivity

A third type of discursive reflexivity is *interpretive reflexivity*. This type of reflexive analysis is focused on a communication practice and asks of it, what are its meanings and significance to participants here? Note that the moment of reflexive attention is a communication practice (as already theorized and described) and the orientation of the ethnographic interpretation is the participants' in that moment. Honored here is the participants' meaning system as active in the moment described. The goal is to analyze the range of meanings participants hear as active in that moment, so to capture some of the sense and significance it holds for them at that time. When

ethnographers are in scenes of their habitual communication, the reflexive moment and stance can be familiar, if a bit difficult to make explicit; when in a scene foreign to an ethnographer, the moment and stance must be discovered and explored. In both cases, as in multicultural scenes, we find it invaluable as ethnographers to proceed with humility as if we know less, rather than more, about the communication practice being explored and its meanings. Reflexive interpretation then works systematically toward understanding the meaningfulness of the communication practice to participants, entering our thoughts along with others', yet always yielding to the participants in scenes and the meanings they hear as active, from their view, in that moment. This type of reflexivity requires patience, humility, and a willingness to deal with considerable uncertainty, especially in the early phases of this reflexive analysis. Whereas the objective here and above is to reflect on how one describes communication practice, the goal is also to discover and interpret the meaningfulness of a communication practice to those who so do it. We now turn to a description of such practice.

On a warm day in early fall, I (EMM) joined a group of worshipers at an "unprogrammed Quaker meeting." The following description is based on my field report, a descriptive field account, written immediately after the experience of this religious discourse.

During this meeting, I sat on the back wooden bench immediately to the left of the door. Approximately forty to fifty people attended "meeting" that day, and as they entered they shook hands with the designated "greeter" at the door, softly saying hi and smiling, and then they quietly went to a bench and sat down, often closing their eyes, resting their hands on their laps, and placing their feet squarely on the floor in front of them. The benches on which we sat in the square room were arranged in rows so that they all faced the center. There was silence except for the sound of the cicadas outside and the occasional noise of someone coughing or clearing his or her throat. Sunlight created patterns on the carpeted floor, shining through the windows, which run horizontally across the upper part of three walls and make up the complete upper half of the wall farthest from the door. Some of the windows were open, and there was a slight cool breeze. We sat in silence for approximately fifty minutes before the children, who had been participating in other activities during that time, came in with their teacher and found seats among the adults or on the floor in the empty space in the center. Approximately four minutes after the children entered, a man sitting directly across from me on the back bench against the far wall stood. He spoke slowly, saying that, when we sit here and feel "touched" or "covered," some of us say, "Ah Lord" or "Welcome, Spirit." The man noted that some of us say "Jesus Christ," some say "Lord," and some say "Living Seed." He then added, "You don't care." He ended by saying "We thank you One for coming among us so often."

The specific communication practice that I would like to focus on reflexively here is what "unprogrammed," liberal Quakers, or members of the Religious Society of Friends, call a "gathered" or "covered" meeting for worship. The description above represents part of an event identified as such by participants, which continued for approximately six more minutes after the message recorded above with more silence and one more spoken message. As discussed in our earlier section on descriptive reflexivity, this descriptive account of a moment is also guided by elements of Hymes' SPEAKING framework (Hymes, 1972). This particular communication event was selected for analysis in part because research on silence has a long history in the ethnography of communication (e.g., Basso, 1970; Bauman, 1970, 1983; Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, 2005; Carbaugh, Berry, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2006; Covarrubias, 2008; Philips, 1976, 1983; Wilkins, 2005), and this history opens up the possibility of cross-cultural comparison. In drawing on this history, the researcher avoids simply identifying an object of analysis that strikes her as different and unusual from her own cultural perspective (Fitch, 1994). This event was also chosen as significant based on research on communication practices among Friends, which included reading texts written by and about Quakers and discussing communication practices with Friends. In these texts and conversations, the "gathered" meeting for worship was frequently emphasized by Quakers as a meaningful event.

Reflexive interpretation asks of this type of meeting, what is its significance to participants? Reflexivity is operational here as an ethnographer focuses on Quakers' discursive moments as well as their discourses about them. In doing this reflexive analysis, I (EMM) draw on the notion of "radiants of cultural meaning" or the idea that, as people communicate, they intentionally or unintentionally say things culturally "about who they are, how they are related, what they are doing together, how they feel about what is going on, and about the nature of things" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 124). The challenge here for the ethnographer, coming from a culture and a religious tradition that to a great extent privileges the verbal, is to understand the meaningfulness to the participants of the silence of Quaker worship. What is going on in this room as these people sit in silence with their eyes closed and only occasionally stand to speak? What are the premises of personhood, sociality, and communication that run through this practice? How is it that a relationship with God can be formed when there is no leader to guide and instruct the others verbally? How does everyone know what is going on and experience a sense of being "covered" together if there are no words spoken?

I suggest that the particular moment above gives us insight into how Friends understand communication among people and between people and God as well as how they understand the way in which people relate to one another.[4] We see here, through the descriptive moment inscribed

above, that the main expressive and semantic "hub" of action in the gathering is not speaking but listening and waiting as a group. Fifty-four minutes pass before a verbal message is shared. The verbal message shared ends with "We thank you One for coming among us so often," and this expresses the Quaker belief that a spirit has come among the group and that friends have welcomed that spirit. The belief also frames the nonverbal part of the gathering as deeply communicative, as a "welcoming" which creates a spiritual feeling of being "touched" as well as a social occasion of being "covered" while sitting together in silence. Thus, a Quaker "meeting" becomes "touched" or "covered" when "the One" is "among us."

Note that here, in the prior sentence, I have formulated a *cultural proposition* to begin interpreting the meanings of this discourse to participants. This involves carefully combining participants' cultural terms together into a statement that embodies participants' definitions, concepts, beliefs, or values, capturing in the participants' own words their sense of the communication event as such (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 177). Interpreting a communication practice in this way provides a step toward the formulation of deeper *premises* about the communication of this speech community. A *premise* is a statement explicitly formulated by an ethnographer for interpretive purposes using his or her own terms that captures and explicates participants' beliefs about the significance of what is occurring (Carbaugh, 2007, pp. 177-178). For example, in the above, we are told that the naming of the spirit that the group has welcomed is relatively unimportant, as is evidenced by the variety of vocabulary used to identify it; what is important, presumably, is that this spirit, however named, has come among the group now, as it has many times before. A central taken-for-granted *premise* is active here about silence as a communicative action: Through silence a group can together recognize and welcome the spirit. Communication is, therefore, accomplished through silence, and connections not only between people but also moreover between people and the spirit are being forged nonverbally. Listening as a group in silence is the privileged form for communication, the privileged way of interacting with others here. As one friend said during another group discussion, in reference to signs outside of churches that read *God is still speaking*, "If I put it out in front of [this meeting], I'd add, *Yes, and we need to be quiet if we're going to hear something.*" These moments of communication, descriptive accounts of them, and the meanings they creatively express presume the propositions and premises formulated here.

This example is only a brief overview of the way in which interpretive reflexivity comes into play in an ethnographer's analysis of communication practices. It illustrates the way in which an ethnographer records discursive moments as part of a descriptive record, then renders those moments, from the participants' view, to interpret the cultural meanings of those moments—some of which might, at first, seem empty or unimportant but may in fact have deep cultural significance for the participants. It may be helpful, as in the case above, to discover and carefully analyze specific names for these significant communication events, through theoretical reflexivity, conceptualizing them as "terms for talk" (Carbaugh, 1989), hearing then how nonverbal and verbal communication is framed by participants as "gathered" or "covered." In the process, careful attention is paid to layers of discourses, the moment in the meeting-house, the participants' discourse about that moment, the ethnographer's discourse as a way of recording that moment, and further as a way of interpreting participants' meanings as active in it. This latter part of the process invites the ethnographer to explore reflexively various radiants of the participants' meaning system and to formulate these through propositions and premises about personhood, relationships, action, feeling, and environment (Carbaugh, 2007). Premises about how one communicates with God and relates to others in the silence of a "gathered" meeting represent a part of the discursive system that is active when Friends wait and listen together. An ethnographer's analysis of these premises is informed by reflexive attention, then, to discursive moments, descriptive accounts of those, including explicit analysis of the meaning system at work, seeking as much as possible to honor and privilege the system active among the participants with whom he or she works.

Comparative Reflexivity

A fourth type of discursive, reflexive analysis is *comparative reflexivity*. This type of reflexivity runs across many ethnographic studies as we examine communication practices in cross-cultural perspective. In other words, as active between Quakers and non-Quaker ethnographers, or between non-Native and Native Americans in a classroom, theoretical and descriptive analyses can and must involve comparative reflexivity. The moment of reflexivity here is treated from at least two cultural orientations to describe what that moment indeed is (how it is differently rendered and reasoned), to theorize its status, to interpret its meaningfulness, and, eventually, if warranted, to critically assess it. In this sense, comparative reflexivity is a most complicated kind of reflexivity as it brings into an ethnographic study different views of what a communicative moment is, including its meanings. The objective in such study is to analyze both what is culturally distinctive about a communication practice and how it may be similar to, and different from, other communication practices. Comparative reflexivity can set the stage for entire studies as when one scene is set with two cultural orientations, for example, knowledge in one relies on verbal, often print, media, whereas another relies on nonverbal as well as oral media. Comparative reflexivity thus brings cultural diversity into view by

theorizing, describing, and interpreting moments of communication in cross-cultural perspective and, for these reasons, is a multidimensional ethnographic enterprise.

One exercise in comparative reflexivity is to focus on one communication practice, say apologies, from one cultural view of that communication practice. This, then, is followed by the ethnographer's aspiration to identify how that type of communication practice is done elsewhere in another speech community. Effort is given to describe, interpret, and reflect on the means and meanings of this practice as compared between communities. Such an exercise in comparative reflexivity can help to revise interpretive accounts and expand theoretical knowledge pertaining to certain communication practices.

Another exercise in comparative reflexivity can focus on moments of cultural asynchrony. Such moments are times when communication between participants results in misunderstanding because of the difference in the participants' meanings attached to one means of communication (cf. Levine, Park, & Kim, 2007). Carbaugh (1990) describes intercultural studies, and particularly ethnography of communication, as a way to inquire about sources of cultural asynchrony "by examining actual instances of intercultural contacts" (p. 152). So, to understand the sources of cultural asynchrony, an ethnographer would need to describe the actual communication practice as it happened and then interpret it trying to understand the meaning of the interaction event for its participants. Comparative reflexivity here is focused on the communication practice of cultural asynchrony itself. The ethnographer, inspired by problematic communication, explores other communication practices—not necessarily intercultural but those among members of the speech communities that were involved in the moment of cultural asynchrony in question. Such comparative analysis can not only lead to understanding cultural meanings that were clashing in a problematic intercultural communication instance but also make a significant theoretical contribution to the understanding of communication in such moments.

The instance involving EVN and presented here (by EVN) is of the second kind of comparative reflexivity—when an intercultural communication event involves asynchrony between norms for talking about death. The event takes place at the Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude, Russia, in an English class at the School of Foreign Languages. There are 13 students and a young American professor who is new to this class and to Russia. This is his first class with this group of students. The professor asks the class to participate in an activity, thinking this was a good way to get acquainted with the students by saying, "Could you, please, take a piece of paper and write an obituary about yourself—what a great person you had been before you died, what good qualities you had. Just describe yourself in the best way you can. This will give me a good

opportunity to get to know you better and maybe you will learn something more about yourself and your friends when you read out loud your obituaries." The students were confused and seemed to be very unwilling to do the task. It is clearly seen in the classroom that they are uncomfortable about doing this task for some reason. Thinking that they didn't understand the assignment, the professor comes up to the blackboard and writes down the word "obituary" and explains its meaning. Assuming that the students might be embarrassed to write good things about themselves the teacher encourages them to do it, saying "it doesn't have to be a lot, just a few sentences for me to know you better." Let's look at some key words that the American professor is using in making the assignment. He mentioned "an obituary about yourself," "what a great person you had been before you died," "good qualities you had." The professor is using language here that focuses the assignment on the student's "self" or "person" and thus is asking them to write in the first person about themselves, their achievements and positive qualities in the context of an obituary. The communicative form of the "obituary" is introduced as a verbal form for the students to use in writing about themselves. The stated objective of this assignment is to help the professor "get to know the students better." The professor offered this as a description and purpose of the assignment. The students, however, hesitated in performing the task, so the professor addressed the hesitation by defining the word, obituary, and by minimizing the expectations of the assignment, to write "just a few sentences." A *norm for interaction* being assumed by the professor in this context might be formulated: If students understand an assignment as self-reporting about their good qualities, they should be able to follow the directions for the assignment and do what is required of them.

After this, some students take pieces of paper and seem to start writing something. However, most of them start whispering (in Russian) to each other: "I am not going to do this!" "Let's tell him that we don't want to do this!" "I am not going to write this about myself! What kind of a task is it?!" Somebody says, "Come on, this is just a superstition, just write something without mentioning your name!" Seeing that something is wrong, the teacher asks what the matter is, and the students, after hesitation, say that they do not want to do this task, they will not write this about themselves. Feeling a bit confused, the professor suggests another activity.

Let us now explore the Russian students' reaction and what the assignment meant for them. First of all, it is very important from the Russian view that in their discussion of the activity, the students did not use any of the words that the professor used in describing the assignment. They kept saying, rather than "obituary," the word "this" or "it" as an indirect way of referring to the assignment. In these cases, the word "this" refers to reporting in the first person about yourself and to writing words about oneself as an obituary.

The word is also used to refer to the feeling of not wanting to do the assignment as one student said, "this is just a superstition," "this" referring here to feelings of not wanting to mention the topic, death. It is important to emphasize that the terms *obituary*, *died*, *qualities you had* (in the past tense) are not being used by the Russians in this context. Such words have a very different cultural meaning within a Russian discourse than in a popular American one. Even if these cultural symbols are used hypothetically (and I would even say, *especially* if they are used hypothetically), they have in Russia a certain constitutive power—they imply that, as soon as such terms about "this" matter are verbalized in reference to living people, what they mean may actually happen.[5]

When analyzing this cross-cultural conflict, it is interesting to analyze the *components* of the *speech event*. I emphasize here that the *participants* are, as introduced above, using different cultural stances in this communication event. As a result, I emphasize an asynchrony in the communication between a user of American culture, where it is permissible to speak about a living person's virtues in the form of a hypothetical obituary (and where superstitions are not supposed to stand in the way of performing academic activities) and members who use a Russian expressive order where the notion of "death" and prohibitions connected to it are so deep in the discursive consciousness that they penetrate the whole process of communication. The conflict could be observed in the *ends* of the event. That is, the professor had a certain goal: to create a communicative situation for the students to talk about themselves and in the process for the professor to get to know the students. The outcome of the exercise was quite the opposite—the students refused to perform the task, creating not closeness to, but a difference from the teacher.

We, the authors, note the struggle while the students were trying to make a choice—to obey the teacher and do the task or to refuse to do the task because of its inappropriateness. Even though in the Russian culture the teacher is to be respected and all the tasks given by a professor are supposed to be done, the Russian belief about proper conduct generally was so strong it superseded this premise about the teacher and took over as students decided they could not do the task. The explanation of this is that the academic interaction between students and professors requires respect for professors and all assigned tasks (appropriate Russian ones); yet, teachers from Russian culture would typically not ask students to write about themselves in laudatory terms, and if so, would not position them as being dead or do anything that is outside the following cultural premise: topics surrounding "this" should at all costs be avoided. So, the students decided that the task itself did not fit the more general cultural premise, and, because of this, they felt they could act in accord with the premise and thus had the right to refuse to do the task. This struggle to make a choice and

the final decision when students almost unanimously refused to do the assignment shows the high intensity of norms regarding talking about one's virtues in the first person and talking about death in Russian culture.

This instance of intercultural communication presents an exemplary case of one type of discursive reflexivity, a comparative reflexivity employed by an ethnographer of communication who was inspired by a misunderstanding in communication. Comparative analysis based on the ethnography of communication involves using discourse to characterize such a complex, asynchronous discursive moment, to carefully interpret that moment from different points of view, and thus to enhance our understanding of the diverse ways communication is conceived and conducted.

Critical Reflexivity

A final type of reflexivity we mention here is *critical reflexivity*. Critical reflexivity takes as its moment a communication practice which has been already carefully described and interpreted—and evaluates that practice by using explicit ethical criteria or a standardized ethic. For example, how do members of a class evaluate their "education"; what standard of evaluation is being used? The source and standard of the judgment that is deemed "education" can be carefully analyzed by an ethnographer. Furthermore, the standards for the judgment can be made explicit and can be used explicitly. This can be done from various orientations including that of the teacher, the students, the school system, a related religious system, a universal declaration, or some other. In ethnographic studies, these can be juxtaposed to enrich our understanding about the ethical orders at play, for example, in a classroom. The critical reflection done ethnographically holds promise as a way of honoring, then evaluating the expressive systems of the variety of participants who use, or socially contact, such practices. In the process of this critical inquiry, several dimensions and types of criticism are possible—natural criticism, academic criticism, cultural criticism—which have been presented in conceptual and empirical detail elsewhere (Carbaugh, 1990). A detailed critical ethnographic account of non-Native American and Native American dynamics in the classroom are particularly telling of the need for this type of discursive reflexivity, especially after careful descriptive, interpretive, and comparative study (Carbaugh, 2005).

Summary and Discussion

Our explication of ethnographic practice has been conceptualized under the general construct of discursive reflexivity. We have formulated a *basic principle*, that discursive reflexivity is fundamentally an exercised metacommunicative ability of using discourse on one level to make sense of its use on another. We have analyzed this discursive reflexivity

as involving *three dimensions*, as focused on a particular moment, as enacted from a particular stance, and as achieving specific ethnographic objectives. We have explicated how these three dimensions recombine into *five* distinct but nonexclusive *types*, which we summarize here as follows:

1. *Theoretical reflexivity:* a discourse which uses ethnographic concepts to render a discursive moment as a communication practice;
2. *Descriptive reflexivity:* a discourse which instantiates or records a prior, actual discursive moment;
3. *Interpretive reflexivity:* a discourse which renders intelligible or mutually meaningful from the participants' view(s) a descriptive account of a prior discursive moment;
4. *Comparative reflexivity:* a discourse which places a previous discursive moment(s) into different cultural stances through theoretical, descriptive, and/or interpretive accounts;
5. *Critical reflexivity:* a discourse which evaluates a discursive moment and reflexive practices from an explicit ethical stance(s).

We note about our summary that any feature of the process itself, or the process as a whole, is itself a potential subject for reflexive attention. So, for example, as an analyst uses a concept to render a discursive moment, so might the discursive moment be used to reflect on the concept in use. Or similarly, as one uses discourse to interpret a descriptive account, so might the descriptive account be used to reflect on the discourse of interpretation and further to reflect on the descriptive discourse of the moment itself. Our point is simply that the process moves in both and multiple directions. Because of this, it is important to carefully monitor the process as clearly as possible, so to better understand the ways ethnographies such as these use discourse to characterize discourse; the objective being to better exercise our knowledge about the moments of reflection, the stance for the reflection, and the objectives in doing this. We do so as a way of advancing our ethnographic attention to cultural diversity as well as developing local and general communication theory. We have demonstrated how this can be done by creating, then implementing, a five-phased system for understanding reflexivity in ethnographic research.

An ethnographer's self-reflexivity in communication research involves awareness of the fact that a researcher him- or herself typically uses, unreflectively, a certain cultural stance for conduct. A researcher's cultural stance does not only mean that he or she belongs to a certain sociocultural background personally but also refers to his or her theoretical approach that has been developed in certain sociocultural circumstances (see Kim & Ebesu Hubbard, 2007). These affiliations and approaches equip an ethnographer with various means and meanings of communication for creating and reporting knowledge. Self-awareness of a researcher's own cultural stance can, and must, be a source of self-reflexivity. In ethnography of communication, researchers treat self-reflexivity as part of the discursive process explicated above. In this sense, self- and auto-reflections are treated as any other data entered into one's record as a reflexive moment(s) which is theorized about, interpreted, comparatively analyzed, and critically assessed. So, to understand means and meanings of discursive self-reflexivity (or a researcher's cultural stance), an ethnographer of communication would try to lay it out among others (describing it) using existing conceptual frameworks that would help him or her notice and document explicitly important discursive means. The next step would be to explain the cultural meaning of the described discursive means. Then, the researcher could comparatively understand how his or her cultural stance helps or hinders understanding of the cultural practice that is the subject of research. Like Hervik (1994), we seek to move well beyond what he calls a "reductionist interpretation" of reflexivity. This, our approach to discursive self-reflexivity, means that any narrative (including an ethnographer's self-reflexivity about what he or she sees) is embedded in a complex reflexive process and should be treated as such, not assumed as something neutral, common, or worthy of scholarly reporting on its own.

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Notes

1. We note here that our works explore reflexively our own ways, as we explore others' ways, as a basic condition for doing ethnography (e.g., Boromisza-Habashi, 2007; Carbaugh & Poutiainen, 2000; Poutiainen & Gerlander, 2009; Fitch, 1994).
2. We note the important link here between our works on "terms for talk" and the basic principle of metacommunication espoused by Robert Craig (1999) in his review of communication theories. Our program of research is creating a refined theory and a growing body of ethnographic literature based on this principle (see, for example, Baxter, 1993; Bloch, 2003; Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi, & Ge, 2006; Katriel, 2004; Wilkins, 2005, 2009).
3. Readers will note that our process is not simply self-reflexive or a recording of personal reflections, paraphrases, reactions,

and the like about the moment but an effort to focus exactly on the communication.

4. My analysis here is informed by notes from attending meeting for worship regularly for approximately 6 months, being involved in other meeting activities, such as after-meeting adult education sessions, and interviewing members of the meeting.

5. We note in formulating this last sentence that the preferred Russian English form is, when we (or one) mention "this," we might be making "this" happen; while a preferred form in American English about the Russian practice might be direct, writing about death invites death on the author. Furthermore, Russian and Russian English would properly write of good, virtuous things as predicated to a collective rather than to an individual.

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