

## Chapter 1

### SPEAKING IN ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT

“We don’t want no yahoos around here.” These were the first words I heard as I stepped across the threshold of one of the many taverns in Teamsterville, a working-class, multiethnic neighborhood in Chicago. As I approached, I heard the sounds of convivial neighborhood speech, men talking and laughing as they drank together. But when I, a stranger, crossed the doorway, the warning to “yahoos” punctuated the talk, and then voices hushed, and all ears and eyes followed my every step to the bar. Eventually, talk resumed, but not the lively roar it had been before I appeared; for like other Teamsterville taverns, this was not merely a public place open to anyone, but an enclave in which some but not other personae were welcome, and I was an intruder. There was no sign outside the tavern, because “everybody” knew who belonged there and those who needed a sign to welcome them were not among that circle of insiders. I entered this back region of Teamsterville life because I was studying the community’s places for speaking, prominent among which were corner taverns.

That this particular scene was the chief place where these men talked; that they talked boisterously when I was not there and stopped talking when I entered; that eventually one man came to my bar stool and asked me “where are you from and what’s your nationality?”; that upon hearing my answer, he told me that he was Sicilian and that Sicilians cut the throats of men who invaded their territory and “messed with their women”; that throughout Teamsterville there were corners, corner bars, porches, and streets where socially segregated groups talked about ethnicity and locality, and what it meant to be a man or a woman. All of these and many other things eventually became known to me as elements in a pattern of spoken life in Teamsterville. To know these patterns, and to

know the life they constituted for those who lived it, was the goal of my inquiry. And to learn about speaking in Teamsterville, in its cultural particularity, was a tactic, a means among other means, to reach the larger end of learning firsthand whether and how it is that speaking is a radically cultural mode of communicative activity.

When I first entered Teamsterville, the community appeared to me as merely a series of unconnected streets, buildings, people, and activities. By the time I left it over three years later, it was, for me, not just a setting, but a scene, a place suffused with activity, with meaning, with significance, not only for me, but more importantly for those who had grown up there and those who lived there permanently. As a student of communication, what eventually struck me most about Teamsterville and my experiences in it was that one way to think about this community was as a speech community, a universe of discourse with a finely organized, distinctive pattern of meaning and action.

After spending several months in Teamsterville, I began to notice there a practice, a habitual way of speaking, reinforced by the expressions of Teamstervillers. It was difficult to detect and not much easier to describe, but it was salient enough that it was hard to ignore, both practically and theoretically. That practice consists of infusing a concern with place into every conversation. In Teamsterville, to my surprise, if one's interlocutor did not know one's "nationality" it would be asked at the beginning of the conversation, and it seemed that every reference to a person included a reference to that person's ethnicity. The same is true for residence: references to where the person lived, or was from, permeated everyday speech. In addition, where persons stand in relation to each other according to a social code of power and position—a person's place in the social hierarchy—was mentioned directly or indirectly in virtually every conversation in which I participated.

Teamsterville concerns for social and physical placement were, in their pervasiveness and importance, alien to my way of thinking and speaking. It took some time for me to notice that there was something there to notice—a pattern of emphasis and salience of the cultural category place, expressed in many symbols of social and physical space. To the extent that I was learning what potentially significant aspects of the world the Teamstervillers thought and spoke about, and that I was learning the local vocabulary and expressions for symbolizing those aspects of experience, to that extent I was learning about a culturally distinctive system of symbols and meanings.

Much of my learning about the importance of place in Teamsterville culture was, one might say, academic. It was an interesting subject for mental exploration, a phenomenon of some curiosity to one who was

interested in cultural differences across peoples. But another kind of learning was more personal.

In my work in Teamsterville I was responsible for supervising the after-school activities of several groups of neighborhood young people who participated in the program of a neighborhood youth center. By training and preference it was my practice to discipline young people who had violated the center's rules by talking with them, trying to understand their feelings, to discuss the cause of the problem, and to talk out ways of improving conduct in the future. Soon, word of my methods was broadcast around the neighborhood and my reputation as a man who used words to influence youths was secured. Much to my surprise, and eventually frustration, this practice of mine led to the conclusion, by the neighborhood boys, that I was a homosexual (in their eyes a man who uses speech to influence boys is not really a proper "man" and must be a "queer," in that a "queer" is not a proper "man").

Here I faced a neighborhood belief about speech behavior, that a man who uses speech to discipline boys is not a real man and therefore must be a homosexual. The application of this belief to my conduct led to a situation in which it was, for some time, nearly impossible for me to perform effectively my duties in the youth center. Only after some months of reflection, and the use of a revised strategy of self-presentation, was I able to work effectively (as a man) among these boys.

When I left Teamsterville, after nearly three years of field research, it was with a new sensibility that I heard the speaking of "mainstream" Americans. That new hearing led me to do fieldwork among middle-class, college educated Americans living in southern California and the Pacific northwest regions of the U.S.A. These people, whom I call by Horace Miner's term "the Nacirema" (Miner 1956; read Nacirema backwards), speak the English language, as do the Teamstervillers, but their ways of speaking it, and of living, differ. Among the features of Nacirema communicative conduct contrasting with that of the Teamstervillers' is the great effort the former make to facilitate the expression of unique feelings and thoughts. The Nacirema emphasize that each person is unique and Nacirema speech practices not only reflect that belief but indeed serve to make it true.

In California, my student Mary Jo Rudd and I observed, and listened intently to tape recordings of, Nacirema conversations at family "dinner time." This is a speech event in which participants insisted relentlessly that all family members be allowed a turn at talk, indeed be encouraged to talk—because each person "has something to contribute." We found that the people we observed believed strongly that one's place in the family, defined by a role such as "father," should not be a basis for

interrupting or curtailing the speech of others, because each person's contribution is believed to be uniquely valuable. For these Nacirema, speech is a way to express one's psychological uniqueness, to acknowledge the uniqueness of others, and to bridge the gap between one's own and another's uniqueness. It is a means by which family members, for example, can manifest their equality and demonstrate that they pay little heed to differences in status—practices and beliefs that would puzzle and offend a proper Teamsterviller.

In Seattle, my student Tamar Katriel and I listened to many Nacirema tell their life stories—stories in which great moral weight was placed upon interpersonal “relationships” in which each party was not only free, but also felt a sense of pressure, to express and celebrate their uniqueness, and to explore and understand the other's distinctive individuality. The sense of boundary sharply dividing occasions and personae, so prominent among Teamstervillers, was either not expressed or, where it threatened to be present, was aggressively opposed.

Although it might appear that the Nacirema, with their penchant for individualism, do not have a common culture, we learned that among these individualistic, seemingly relativistic, people, there is a discernible, common culture, one that underpins its communicative conduct. For the Nacirema, such folk concepts as “self,” “relationship,” “work,” “openness,” “growth,” and “communication” provide a systematic vocabulary of perception and motive. To understand Nacirema speech, as its speakers and hearers understand it, to understand the motives they use in organizing and interpreting their social experiences, to know what it means to be a Nacirema—these all require that one have knowledge of the culture-specific meanings of these Nacirema symbols. The phrase “what we need is communication,” expresses a key theme for the Nacirema. It is a saying whose explication articulates one foundation of a way of talking about, and living, one's life, a way that has produced culturally distinctive rituals and myths in which “communication” is a central concept.

It is hard to immerse oneself in an alien cultural world, as Teamsterville was to me, and be unchanged by it. For me the contact with Teamsterville life brought into sharp relief several aspects of Nacirema culture which, at one time, I had taken for granted. That such terms as “communication,” “self,” and “relationship,” and the ideas to which they refer, are cultural constructions and not universally given experiences, was easier to grasp after struggling to learn a culture such as Teamsterville's. To hear a Nacirema's statement that “each of us is an individual,” as a deeply cultured, even quaint, statement, is made easier after having spent three years listening to Teamstervillers talk about persons as “Italians,” “Poles,” “Lithuanians,” and so forth—as persons whose being is

defined more by their social than by their psychological characteristics. To hear, as a deeply cultured statement, the Nacirema's insistence that each child should express himself because of the child's potentially "unique contribution" to a family conversation is facilitated by listening for three years to Teamstervillers insisting that a child should be seen and not heard.

### THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING

The written reports of Teamsterville and of Nacirema spoken life, placed side by side and compared and contrasted, reveal a picture, or a hearing, of speaking as a deeply cultured process. The implication of this view is that to understand speaking in a particular speech community, one must come to understand how it is culturally shaped and constituted. Ethnography is the process of coming to the understanding of such shapings and is the reporting of such understandings. An ethnographer of speaking is a naturalist, who watches, listens, and records communicative conduct in its natural setting. The ethnographer describes what is to be found in a given speech community as well as what regular patterns can be observed there. For example, the ethnographer might document all observable instances of speech behavior in a community, noting not only that speech occurred or not, but also where, by, and with whom, in what language(s) and dialect(s), in which verbal forms, about which topics, as part of what interaction sequences, and with what observable consequences.

From many observations of the speech behavior of a people, the ethnographer generates two classes of statements. One is a statement of what is there to be observed in the speech community—for instance, that there is a recurrent event in which a particular kind of speech activity occurs, that two languages are spoken, that there is a repertoire of riddles, and so forth, and, of course, what the event, activity, languages, and riddles are. A second statement is a statement about patterns of amount, of frequency, or of qualitative association and significance. A qualitative pattern specifies the conditions under which something occurs and what its meanings are to those who produce it. These statements of existence and pattern are initially derived from field observations and then are tested by further observations. The discovery of patterns is preliminary to interpretation and explanation, and for these tasks the ethnographer formulates a theory of a people's ways of speaking. Such a theory consists of statements about the culture, the local system of symbols and meanings, perceptual and value premises, and ground rules.

Culture, as it is used here, refers to a *socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules* (the

definition is adapted from Geertz 1973, p. 89). That a culture is socially constructed and historically transmitted implies that it could have existed before any given set of interlocutors and, potentially, endures beyond them in time. It implies furthermore that it is neither biologically endowed nor the invention of any particular individual, but is something socially constructed. Like all socially constructed inheritances, individuals can, to some degree at least, do what they will with them, but individuals do not choose the cultures to which they are initially exposed and they cannot easily change them in one generation. Although individuals can alienate themselves from a culture's terms and two interlocutors can, between themselves, negotiate the force a culture's meanings and rules have for them, and although individuals and interlocutors can construct meanings not given in any known culture, these meanings and rules are not cultural. A culture transcends any individual or any individual's social network, such that two people who meet for the first time can partake of a common culture and use it in making sense with each other. Likewise two people might never meet and yet partake of a common culture, a culture that is available to all who hear its terms spoken in public life.

Every common culture of which interlocutors might partake, and which they might use in speaking together, includes, among its parts, a part devoted to the symbols and meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to speech and, more broadly, to social communication. A symbol is defined as a "vehicle for a conception" and symbols are "tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs." The "conceptions" are the "meanings, notions, definitions, and so forth, which symbols express" (Geertz 1973, p. 91). Premises express beliefs of existence (what is) and of value (what is good and bad). A rule is a prescription, for how to act, under specified circumstances, which has (some degree of) force in a particular social group. A cultural code of speaking, then, consists of a socially constructed and historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings pertaining to communication—for instance, the symbols "Lithuanian" or "communication" and their attendant definitions; beliefs about spoken actions (that a man who uses speech to discipline boys is not a real man); and rules for using speech (that a father should not interrupt his daughter at the dinner table).

The ethnographer of speaking observes (audits?) the flow of social life in order to discover there, and to represent, in writing, the portion of a culture that is devoted to communicative practices. What a culture symbolizes (that subset of experience it marks off for conceptualization and naming), what it symbolizes with (the symbolic forms with which mean-

ings can be expressed), what beliefs and values it posits, and the array of prescribed and proscribed actions it specifies, constitute a system *sui generis*. Because they are distinctive, the ethnographer must discover such particularities in each speech community. But this does not mean that the ethnographer has no heuristic tools to use in the study of particular speech communities. The hearing and representing that constitute ethnography are guided by the use of a descriptive framework, such as that proposed by Dell Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972), a system of categories for observation developed through systematic inquiry and analysis, and which is a general outline of the contexts and components of ways of speaking. Furthermore, the accumulation of many such studies, many different ethnographies of speaking, provides comparative knowledge that the ethnographer uses to help inquire into the distinctiveness of any particular case. The descriptive framework and the accumulated representations provide the materials that ethnographers, when they take the role of theorists, use to think about, to generalize about, the enduring, general characteristics of speaking as a universal feature of society.

The ethnography of speaking, then, consists of hearing and representing distinctive ways of speaking in particular speech communities. An ethnography of speaking is a report of a culture, as that culture thematizes communication and of the ways that culture is expressed in some historical situation. This conception of speaking, of culture, and of ethnography rests upon an assumptive foundation, to which I now turn. An exposition of this foundation should reveal why it is that ethnography, and the kind of comparative analysis that ethnography makes possible, is such an important methodology for the study of speaking as a mode of communicative conduct.

## AN ASSUMPTIVE FOUNDATION

### *Speaking is Structured*

Albert Einstein is reported to have written that "God may be subtle, but he isn't plain mean" (Wiener 1954, p. 183). With these words he expressed eloquently a basic tenet of scientific dogma, that although the world might appear to be random, there is, after all, order in it, and humans can discern that order, if with some difficulty. Ethnographers of speaking have produced a research literature that confirms and illustrates what was at one time only assumed: that everywhere speech is heard, there is structure in who speaks, to whom, in what language(s), through which channels, on what occasions, in what settings, for what purposes, in what sequences of action, and with what instrumentalities.

Whenever people speak, they organize their speech in ways not governed only by rules of grammar or by physical laws. That is, even though, in any communicative situation, it might be grammatically acceptable and physically possible to make any of two or more linguistic choices, such choices are not randomly produced. Recent sociolinguistic studies provide massive evidence that such choices as which language to use in a particular situation (for bi- or multi-lingual speakers), how to address an interlocutor, whether to delete or add sounds to words, whether to talk or remain silent, are strongly patterned (Hudson 1980). Conversation analysis studies demonstrate that speaking turns in conversation are precisely coordinated, hesitations and pauses are delicately organized, and interaction is finely synchronized (Moerman 1988). Studies of nonverbal signaling behavior in humans have recently afforded a picture of interaction as organized not only within but across modes of sign behavior (Wiemann and Harrison 1983). As Dell Hymes wrote, anticipating some of the many discoveries made about the structure of spoken life, "speaking, like language, is patterned, functions as a system, is describable by rules" (Hymes 1962, p. 131).

To say that speaking is structured is not to say it is absolutely determined. It is patterned, but in ways that its creators can circumvent, challenge, and revise. Its rules are violated, new rules and meanings are created, and therein play is brought into structure just as structure is brought into play. Furthermore, any given speech community is, to use Hymes's phrase, an "organization of diversity." The patterns of speaking in any community are fashioned from diverse, even discrepant, motives, practices, and preferences, but nonetheless there is, in any particular community, a knowable system in its language use. To acknowledge that the patterns are mutable and that they subsume diverse strands does not negate the fact that, nonetheless, there is a pattern.

One of the surest ways to experience the structure in speaking is to step from one society to another, to situate oneself amid the sounds and stratagems of an alien speech community, because such new hearings bring the essential structure of both communities into sharp relief. Such a stepping, such a situating of oneself, not only provides a way to hear one community's sounds as structured, it is also a first step in discovering that wherever there is a distinctive social community there is also a distinctive way of speaking.

### *Speaking is Distinctive*

"Speech," Edward Sapir wrote, "varies without assignable limit as we pass from social group to social group" (1921, p. 4). The sounds of any particular communal conversation may be drawn from a universal



repertoire of noises, but what the noises will be, mean, and accomplish, are matters of local provenance. The conditions and contingencies of spoken life give rise to particular vocabularies, moral rules for using speech, and habitual ways of speaking as an instrument of social action. Wherever there is a spoken life, there is a distinctive system of predica-bles, preferences, and practices for spoken conduct.

Until quite recently, "speaking" as a department of culture had been neglected in studies of speech and in studies of culture. It had been considered a given, something that is what it is, wherever it is found. Of course, it has long been known that languages differ and that ways of life differ; and cultural differences in speech behavior have long been noted in passing. But until the last twenty five years, Sapir's statement notwithstanding, speaking—the use in social interaction of language and other symbolic resources—was taken for granted as something that does not vary across cultures.

A striking way in which speaking was taken for granted was in the implicit assumption that speaking is, primarily or even exclusively, a means for transmitting information. That is not always or everywhere its primary or exclusive function. In Teamsterville, for example, much of speech behavior functions, not primarily to report or to describe, but to link—that is, to link interlocutors in a social relationship, to affirm and signify the interlocutors' sameness and unity. At the Nacirema dinner table, statements about one's experiences serve not only to inform listeners about those experiences but to give speakers an opportunity to express their uniqueness, to differentiate the speaker from the others. This suggests not only that something more than information transmission is being done with speech, but also a difference, across groups, in *what* gets done.

In Teamsterville a parent is expected to use physical punishment to discipline an errant child; among the Nacirema a parent is expected to use supportive speech as the first tactic in discipline—a difference in rules. The Nacirema concept of "communication" is, if not unknown, at least not prominent in Teamsterville speaking—a difference in meaning. What these peoples and others are doing, and what their speaking activities mean to them—these are culturally shaped and defined.

An implication of assuming that spoken life is distinctive is that communicative conduct can never be fully understood, predicted, or explained without knowing the distinctive culture in whose terms, and the distinctive social context in which, it is spoken. Speaking is always speaking somewhere, with some group of people, in some language, and it is always shaped by and a part of some social life. To understand speaking in any particular instance is, in part, to understand a distinctive way of

life. Making sense of a particular communal conversation, then, requires local knowledge, knowledge not only of speech sounds but of a local system of symbols and their meanings, of community mores, and of indigenous patterns of message-making and interpretation.

Based on recent research, it has become a truism to say that the communication technologies available to and used in a society have a profound effect on the character of its social life. Language and speech are universally present in all societies, but the availability of literacy, print, and telecommunications varies across time and place. The presence or absence of these different technologies of communication, it has been argued, is a fundamental factor in the character of any society. As Ruth Finnegan, who has reviewed much of this literature, has written recently:

Because communication is so fundamental we tend to take it for granted and not to reflect overmuch on the various forms it takes. But a closer analysis of communication patterns—and particularly the various technological channels through which communication can flow—suggests that it may have far greater influence over our social and economic life, even perhaps our mental make-up, than one might at first suppose (Finnegan 1988, p. 16).

One need not disagree with the claims that societies differ in their communication technologies and that these differences have important consequences, to make the complementary claim that how any one of these media is shaped and functions in lives and societies varies as well. The claim I am advancing is that *speech* is “so fundamental that we tend to take it for granted and not to reflect overmuch” on the various ways it is thematized and enacted in speech communities. Finnegan has written, “the universality and fundamental importance of language for human society may be overlooked. In fact verbal communication through humanly developed language is common to all societies and can be seen as the universal background against which all other forms of communication take place” (1988, p. 167). I would add that this “universal background” is itself highly particularized in terms of what any particular people has to say about it and in terms of what they do with it.

The idea that speaking varies across cultures, in the ways suggested above, was first put forth in an explicit way by Dell Hymes in his article “The Ethnography of Speaking” (1962). He made two assumptions. The first, which has been discussed above, is that speaking varies cross-culturally; that is, as a domain of human activity it is thematized distinctively across cultures, and in different societies there are different ways of speaking. This distinctive treatment includes whether speaking is in-

cluded in the cultural system and, if so, what symbols, meanings, premises, and rules there are pertaining to speaking in the culture. The second is that speaking is a key to, or a metaphor of, social life. And thus, given that speaking, as a socially and culturally structured practice, varies across speech communities, its analysis as a cultural system reveals, in particular cases, something about the distinctive society and culture of a people. For example, that the Teamstervillers believe speech, one of the media of communication, to be efficacious in signaling and ratifying solidarity, where there is some basis for a solidary bond, as well as for revealing and reinforcing perceptions of social difference, where there is some basis for recognizing such differences and that the Nacirema have an extensive vocabulary for, and system of beliefs pertaining to, "communication," suggest something about meaning and action in the contexts in which a code is used.

In every speech community there is a social pattern of language use—that is, some ordering in what is actually done in the speech activity of a community. And there is a cultural ideology—that is, a system of beliefs and prejudices about communication. These, taken together, reveal a culturally distinctive way of acting and a culturally distinctive way of experiencing social life. These articulating with each other, in the life of a person or group, constitute—that is, make up, bring about, or enact—a distinctive social reality.

### *Speaking is Social*

It is in moments of sociation that people speak: when they huddle together in intimate pairs or families, organize their labor for mutual gain, govern and submit to each other as citizens of a state, or unite as a tribe. Not every social moment is a speaking moment, but every speaking moment not only occurs in, but also contributes to, a particular moment of sociality. Speech is not merely a medium of or an accompaniment to social interaction but also shapes and constitutes social life. "Oral communication," wrote Father Walter Ong, "unites people in groups" (1982, p. 69). As, he continues, "the spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups" (p. 74). But oral communication unites people not merely into a group but into a particular humanity manifested in particular words and practices, and that particularity has an ideational and experiential substance that is distinctive and thus is a powerful resource for constructing personal and social meaning. It is a resource by which a *particular* humanity is established; a *particular* sense of sociality is a consequence of a *particular* social life.

To know, and to use appropriately, the meanings, rules, and speech habits of a local group signals and affirms that one is a member of it. To know the local parlance, but be unwilling to use it, or feel not permitted to use it, or to feel that using it would insinuate oneself somewhere that one does not belong, reveals a relationship, perceived or real, that places one at some distance from the group. To have once used the local parlance and then to eschew it because one is "beyond all that" places one in relation to the group, as a former member or as one temporarily distanced from the group. These patterns of use and nonuse have expressive import for the individual and the audiences to which they are revealed and addressed, because they are intricately woven into the texture of lives and societies. Knowledge of, and ability to participate in, a particular community's spoken life are not only resources for information transmission but are resources for communal identification, and communal being, as well. Speech is both an act of and a resource for "membering."

A culture and a social community are not exactly one and the same but it is hard to imagine either existing except in some integral relation to each other. A culture, as defined here, is a system of meanings, an organized complex of symbols, definitions, premises, and rules. To speak of Teamsterville culture is not to speak of a geographical or political unit but of a code. A community consists of a group of people who are bound together in some relation of shared sentiment and mutual responsibility. A neighborhood is not a code and a code is not a social group, but a neighborhood *as community* is bound together, in part, by its local code of meanings and mores, and a code has its intelligibility and its force in some particular communal association, be it neighborhood, network, or nation.

It is when code and community jointly meet that the full power of culture is most strongly experienced. It is in an actual social community that the full sense can be felt of a culture as set forms that precede utterance and action, that constrain and enable what can be said and done in speech. A culture devoid of a context has no practical force, a context devoid of a culture has nothing to transform it from a mere physical setting to a scene imbued with significance for those who play out their lives against it.

#### THE DISCURSIVE FORCE OF COMMON CULTURE

Not all of life is spoken life, to be sure. Juxtaposed with the forces of nature, tradition, class, and economics, and with the consequences of individual differences in beauty, intelligence, strength, and virtue, speech might appear to be of relatively little importance in the total scheme of

life. Certainly it has its limits as a department of the human experience. Once at a dinner party I listened to a man tell about how several professors of economics at the university at which I taught were notorious for their extreme political views, views systematically woven into their research and teaching, to the degree that the university's essentially conservative establishment found these professors to be quite troublesome. "Of course," he said, and then laughed, "that would never be a problem in your field." I never queried him as to the meaning of his remark. But I think he believed speech is of such little social, political, or economic significance that, of course, there is little about it that could be controversial—the stakes are too low to take the subject very seriously.

There are no simple answers to the question of whether speech is a trivial or a powerful thread in the social and biographical fabric. One claim is that there is a world of hard substance—the material facts of economics, power, biology, and the nearly as brutish facts of tradition and fashion—against which speech is mere accompaniment, vessel, or mirror of the important aspects of life. A contrasting claim is that personal identity, social reality, and social action are constituted in—created, negotiated, and transformed, as well as reflected in—the communicative conduct of which speaking is a part.

The ethnographic views, or hearings, represented in this book reveal that speech shapes and constitutes lives and societies in powerful ways. But the ethnographer is quick to add that although talk plays an important role in every life and society, how it does this varies considerably. The ethnographer is always concerned to inquire into how speech enters into a particular life and society, what its situated distinctiveness is. Thus, the ethnographer can affirm the importance of speech and of studying it, but will also insist that because its importance is expressed in distinctive ways across societies, much of what is important to know about speaking is situated, cultural knowledge.

One way to show how speech shapes life differently in different societies is to think of different ways of speaking as expressing culturally distinctive codes, or ideologies, of personhood, society, and communicative action. That is, every cultural way of speaking is a distinctive answer to the questions (1) What is a person? (2) What is society? and (3) How are persons and societies linked through communication? Teamsterville and Nacirema cultures are instructive illustrations. In Teamsterville, the person is fundamentally a persona, a bundle of social identities, such as "man," "Italian," "young," and a resident of 33rd Street. Society is existentially and morally prior to the person—it existed prior to the individuals who are part of it and it is more important than any individual. Communication is a process in which psychological similarities and

social differences are manifested so as to link individuals in relations of solidarity and hierarchy. This is an ideology of honor, in that persons are accorded value to the degree that they embody and promote societal values of hierarchy and community.

For the Nacirema, on the other hand, the person is a psychologically unique individual; society is built up from the acts of autonomous individuals and itself is of value only in the degree to which it enhances the individual. Unique persons link themselves to others by communicating their uniqueness to each other while simultaneously paying homage to their social equality. This is an ideology of dignity, in that in this code the individual is an object of ultimate value.

A code of speaking provides a system of rules and premises that is a rhetorical resource—that is, a resource that can be used in appealing to others to act. It also marks off a universe of meaning and supplies a system of interpretive resources with which interlocutors can make sense with each other. And in terms of answering questions of ultimate meaning, in terms of providing individuals and societies with ways to answer questions about why they exist and where they fit in a scheme of sense and meaning, a code of speaking provides the resources for creating a sense of coherence and form. Codes of speaking are, from this vantage point, rhetorical, interpretive, and identificative resources.

### THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

The various points of view presented in chapter 1 have not been proposed as uncontestable assertions so much as considerations that legitimate what is to follow. What follows is a series of case studies, two based on Teamsterville culture and two based on Nacirema culture, which explore how these cultures thematize speaking as a medium of human communication. The considerations—or assumptive basis—of chapter 1 suggest that by inquiring into distinctive cultures one might find there distinctive treatments—distinctive systems of symbols and meanings, premises, and rules—of this medium, and it is this possibility that is the object of exploration.

Before proceeding, a word should be said about the presentation of two cultures within one volume. A piece of advice given to authors of books is to fix in the mind a single image pertaining to the subject of the book and to allow that image to shape and inspire one's research and writing throughout the project. In writing this book I have tried to keep in mind an abstract image—that of interlocutors speaking with each other—and to keep foremost in mind the question of what happens when people talk. This has been difficult because as soon as I have imagined a

hypothetical image of persons speaking, particular images, drawn from memory and field records rather than from imagination, replace the constructed image in my mind's eyes and ears. The hypothetical image is much like a photographic negative or an outline drawing, but the particular images are colored with the sounds and tones of particular lives, occasions, and communities. Thus the image of speaking invariably gave way to images of "speaking," the quotation marks implicating an activity given a particular meaning in particular worlds of discourse.

The chapters that follow are about the cultural coloration given to speaking, rendering it in particular instances of its realization a fundamentally cultural activity. What happens when people speak, what their speaking consists of and what it means to them, are constructions made, I argue, in the terms and tropes—the colors—of particular cultures. I have begun in this chapter by introducing the research theme and the perspective that has produced, and informs, its development. There follows a series of four chapters in which case studies of "speaking" are presented. Chapters 2 and 3 present case studies of Teamsterville culture, 4 and 5 of Nacirema culture. These case studies are further interpreted in chapter 6, a chapter that comparatively analyzes the two cultures examined in the case studies, revealing two underlying codes—or social rhetorics—of personhood, society, and strategic action. Finally, drawing from the materials and interpretations presented in the previous chapters, a theoretical synthesis is made in chapter 7—a synthesis in which several ways in which speaking is "speaking" are formulated and illustrated. The integrating theme of the book is, then, that whenever people speak, they participate in an activity that is thoroughly cultural. And the implications of this are presented through a detailing of ways this fact impinges upon the process of social communication.